

Capital Style



Digitally savvy trendsetters find cool D.C.-area spots to showcase their latest fashion finds.

By Jennifer Barger

NEAR THE U.S. CAPITOL, a well-dressed woman in a bright pencil skirt and tuxedo jacket smiles as a single photographer snaps images, using the iconic dome as a stage set of sorts. Some lesser-known congresswoman trying to polish her media presence? More likely she's a local fashion blogger or Instagrammer, utilizing the city's dazzling architecture, urban sidewalks or funky murals as her (or his) outdoor studio. They're members of an increasingly chic local tribe that doesn't always get the fashion cred it deserves.

ALISON GARY

"The concept of the K Street woman in a frumpy navy suit and white sneakers is so dated," says Alison Gary of Wardrobe Oxygen (wardrobeoxygen.com), who has been doling out what you might call edgy everywoman style and life advice

since 2005. "Many people here do have conservative jobs with dress codes, but I see so many of them have fun with color, pattern and mixing high and low."

On her blog and Instagram feed (@wardrobe_oxygen, 10.9k followers), Gary shows off looks that exemplify how chic the capital can be. There she is rocking a bright floral sundress in the gleaming marble surrounds of Union Station or trotting out her signature black leather jacket for concerts at Shaw's 9:30 Club. Popular with the hip mom crowd, Gary has done promotional partnerships with national brands like Cabi and Gwynnie Bee, but she also loves hitting local fashion sources like Lynn Louisa and Betsy Fisher.

DIEGO GONZALEZ-ZUNIGA

The dapper force behind diegodowntown.com, Diego Gonzalez-Zuniga also

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sees a male population here that isn't all stuffy suits and dull loafers. "People are quick to say, 'You live in D.C., you must love ties,' but that couldn't be further from the truth," says the blogger and branding pro (@diegodowntown). "I call myself a street-style prep: I'll mix my classic brands with something urban like a sneaker, a jogger or a cool jacket."

This sidewalk (and Internet) fashion show is powered in part by a decade-long economic boom that's brought young residents, a buzzing creative class and increasingly upscale retail to D.C. "There's a big art and culture community here, and a lot of people's fashion is based on that," says Gonzalez-Zuniga.

You'll spot him shopping and shooting photos at locally powered style sources like Steadfast Supply (D.C.-made jewelry, clothing and bags) and Redeem (Cali-meets-London sportswear with a Washington twist).

"And I love this local men's boutique, Whiskey Ginger, on U Street," he says. "The owner travels all over the world for brands and styles that are really different, from suits in cool colors to really cool tank tops."

ELISABETH PENDERGRASS

"There are a lot more shopping areas and places to people watch that have sprung up in the past few years," says Elisabeth Pendergrass, aka E. of districtofchic.com and @districtofchic, a blog and Instagram handle chronicling the Audrey Hepburnesque marketing pro's outfits, dinner outings and generally sophisticated life.

"There are so many cool places to be (and shop), from CityCenterDC to Union Market." Pendergrass often shows off her classic-meets-contemporary outfits (think a striped T-shirt dress with a corset belt and cherry red mules) in those hip zones that draw both locals and travelers.

She's particularly keen on luxe retail complex CityCenterDC's Palmer Alley, selfie-worthy thanks to its seasonal decorations (cherry blossom-pink lanterns in spring, white twinkly lights during the holidays). You'll also find Pendergrass shooting in spots like the redbrick sidewalks of Old Town Alexandria or the minimalist marble expanses of the Kennedy Center.

MONLING LEE

Many of these online influencers seek the unusual and unexpected in both what they put on their bodies and where they pose for snaps. "I look for places that are less historic-looking than those in federal D.C., spots that are utilitarian, less decorated or just colorful," says Monling Lee, the uber-popular (74.4k Instagram followers @monlinglee) force behind colorindex.us, a visual blog.

Lee, an architect, features shots of herself in color-blocked outfits artfully posed on Miami-bright backdrops you'll be surprised are in Washington.

Think a row of candy-hued Capitol Hill townhouses setting off Lee in green pants, a yellow jacket and red bag or the geometric murals at Shaw's Atlantic Plumbing complex highlighting a pink ruffled top. Lee's cool-yet-happy shots have earned her commercial collaborations with brands like J. Crew and Coach.

Like other online, in-town fashion forces, Lee represents a blend of savvy, stylish and smart, and she's helping redefine and refine how D.C. dresses.

"I find so much inspiration from the D.C. blogger scene," says local stylist and personal shopper Rosana Vollmerhausen of D.C. Style Factory. "I love that they turn what people expect of Washington on its head. There's a mix of fantasy, art and accessible, everyday style. They're killing it!"



ON THE TOWN

(From top) Monling Lee in D.C.'s happenin' Shaw neighborhood; Diego Gonzalez-Zuniga on a D.C. rooftop; Elisabeth Pendergrass on an Alexandria, Va. sidewalk; (Opposite) Alison Gary in Hyattsville, Md., just northeast of D.C.

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