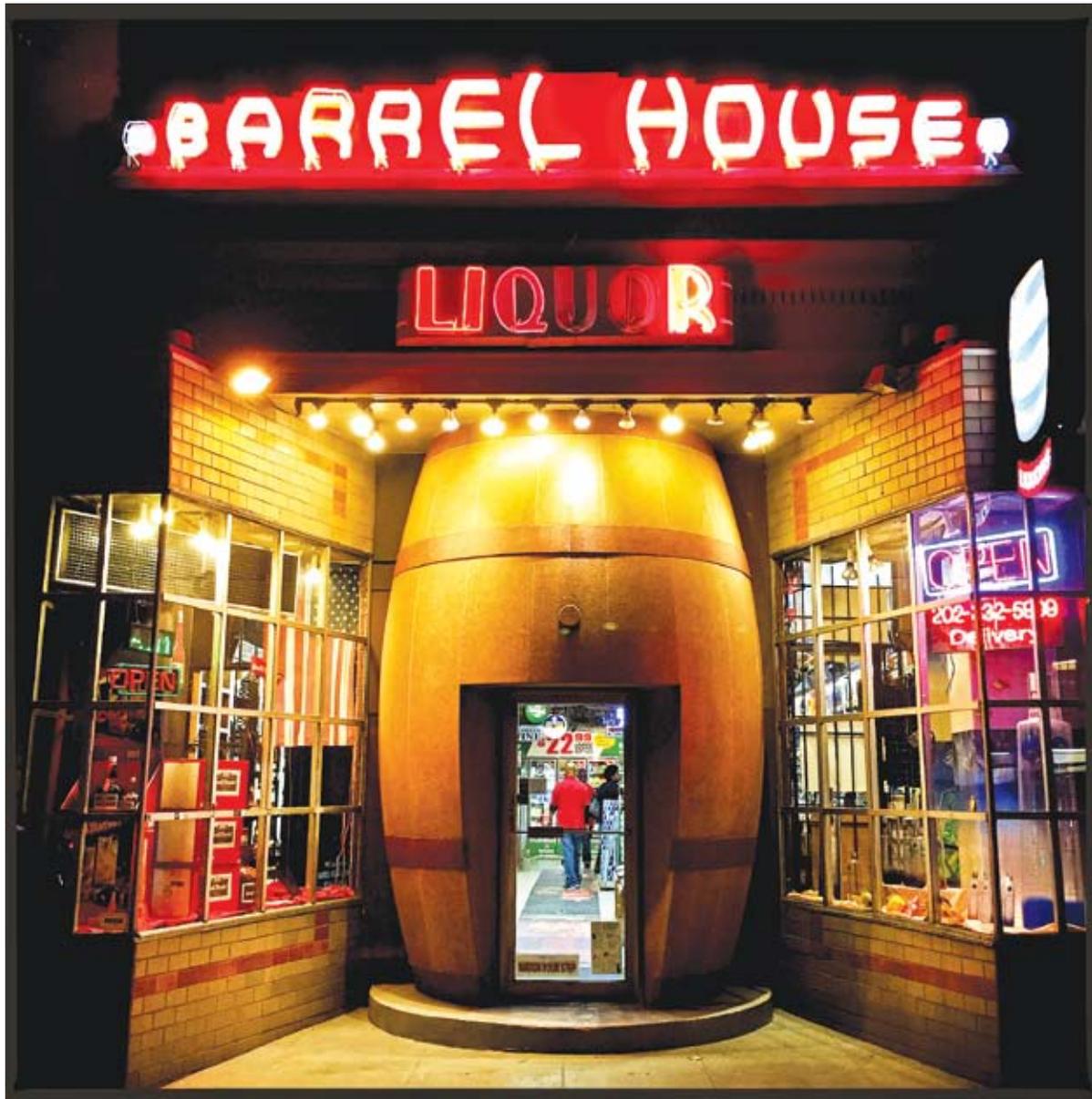


## YOUNG & HUNGRY

# Fate and Barrel

Logan Circle's kitschy liquor store façade could become a historic landmark.



Save Historic Concrete Barrel?

By Tatiana Cirisano

Walking through Logan Circle, it's hard to miss Barrel House Liquor, a wine and spirits shop near the corner of 14th Street and Rhode Island Avenue NW. An enormous concrete barrel roughly 8 feet wide and 12 feet high sits at the center of the storefront, large enough to encompass its entire door.

Constructed in 1945, the barrel has become an icon in the neighborhood. So much so that when the property's current tenant, Mesfun Ghebrelul, announced plans this month to move the shop next door, a team of locals stepped in to ensure that the barrel would be preserved.

"Friends and neighbors from truly across the city uniformly felt the same, that it was something that we wanted to keep, that it added something really special to the neighborhood," says Pepin Tuma, a commissioner for Logan Circle's Advisory Neighborhood Commission. "It was exactly the kind of building that we'd want to preserve."

That's why Tuma, a 17-year patron of Barrel House Liquor, is leading an effort to grant the 70-year-old barrel historic landmark status in D.C. He says it exemplifies roadside architecture, a circa-1930s trend where buildings were constructed in novelty shapes to attract customers driving on the street.

But Barrel House's history doesn't end with the barrel itself. The property's current landlord, Eric Meyers, says the building played a significant role in the rise of Logan Circle's historic status as "automobile row."

It begins with a businessman named Leslie E.F. Prince, who in 1925 demolished the existing property at 1341 14th St. NW and constructed the building known today as Barrel House Liquor. There, he built an auto showroom, a project that is estimated to have cost \$12,000, Meyers says, equivalent to roughly \$160,000 today. The building would go on to house a number of auto companies including Clark Motor Company, Fred L. Morgan Used Cars, and Jack Pry Used Cars, according to Meyers' records.

So how did the Barrel House property go from selling four-wheeled vehicles to Four Loko?

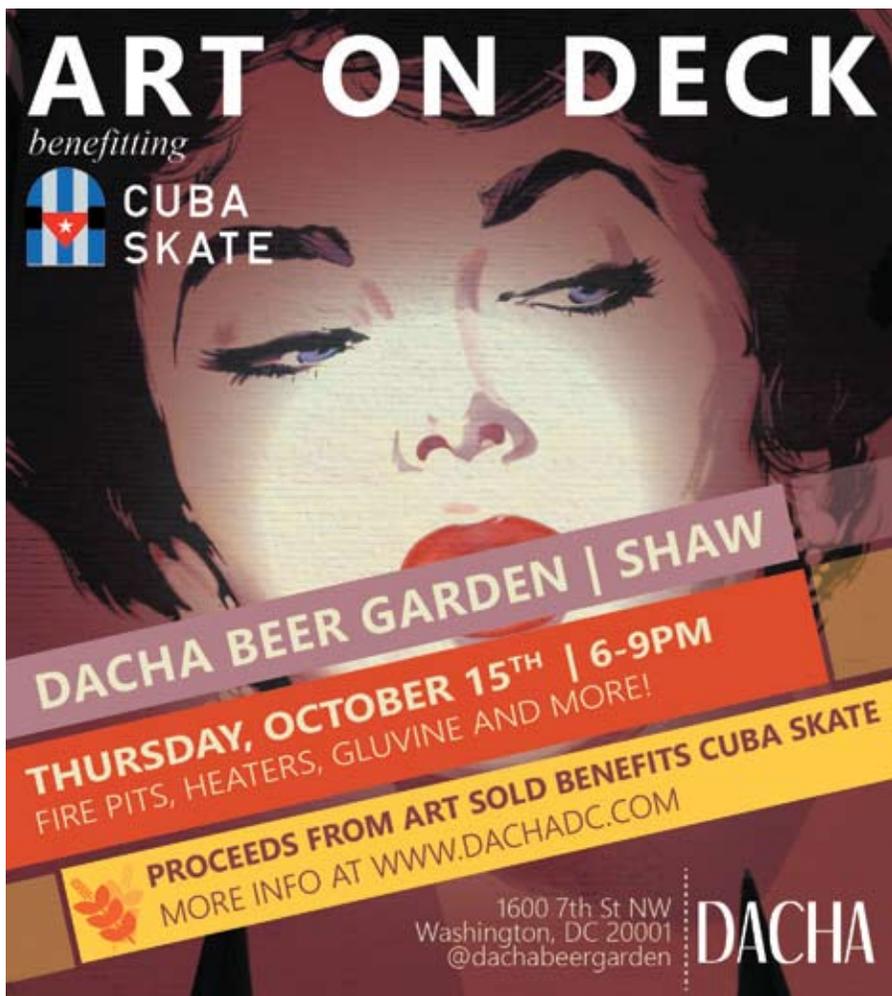
The shift began in the '40s. As residents migrated out of urban centers into the suburbs, automobile companies followed suit, leaving the property vacant. In 1945, Sam

# ART ON DECK

benefitting



CUBA SKATE



DACHA BEER GARDEN | SHAW

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 15<sup>TH</sup> | 6-9PM

FIRE PITS, HEATERS, GLUVINE AND MORE!

PROCEEDS FROM ART SOLD BENEFITS CUBA SKATE

MORE INFO AT [WWW.DACHADC.COM](http://WWW.DACHADC.COM)

1600 7th St NW  
Washington, DC 20001  
@dachabeergarden

DACHA

# DCFEED (cont.)

and **Dorothy Weinstein** purchased the building, where they relocated their business—**Sammy's Barrel House**—from next door. Shortly after, the couple added the barrel and the building's distinctive neon sign, Meyers says.

"I've been lovingly keeping all this information forever," Meyers says about the building's history. "It's a great story, isn't it?"

Tuma says the barrel could also gain historic status as an example of the work of its architect—an identity in dispute. While Tuma speculates that it may have been crafted by an architect named **John J. Earley**, Meyers says the barrel was constructed by **Arthur Starr**, who would go on to design the Woodward & Lothrop building in Friendship Heights.

While the aggregate concrete barrel resembles Earley's work, a historic evaluation prepared by D.C.-based research firm Traceries in February found that "there is no evidence to suggest that Earley was involved in the design or construction of the barrel."

Meyers shares Tuma's goal to grant the barrel historic status. Even though the aging property is ripe for development, Meyers says he "couldn't bear" to rip it down.

"That little business put food on my table when I needed it 44 years ago, and there's a lot in my heart about that building," he says. "Even though intellectually, the thing would be to demolish it, I can't imagine ever demolishing the barrel."

Meyers says the business has been witness to change in the neighborhood's more recent history, too. Roughly a year before he purchased the property in 1971, Meyers says, the business struggled against violence across 14th Street. A 1970 article in the *Washington Evening Star* includes a photo of police standing guard as the liquor store is boarded up to protect against robbery. Another clipping from the *Washington Post* during D.C.'s 1968 riots blares the headline, "2 Bandits Flee with \$8,619," stolen from the Barrel House cashier.

When Ghebreleul, who goes by M.G., took ownership of the longstanding business in 1995, he says the street was known for sex workers, gangs, and drug dealing. Now, he says young professionals make up the majority of his customers.

"I could write a book about what's going on around here," he says. "I had incidents sometimes, people would come, put me at gunpoint ... My clientele is totally different now."

M.G. plans to move his business to a smaller space next door at 1339 14th St. NW (previously Salon Blu) at the end of October, a change he credits to ris-

ing rental costs at the store's current location. Meyers says he's "doing the best [he] can" to keep M.G. as a tenant, though **Charles Reed**, the owner of the next door property, says M.G. has signed a lease on 1339.

Currently, Tuma is meeting with historic preservationists and architects to understand the applicability of landmark status for the Barrel House façade. The D.C. Historic Preservation Review Board "didn't shoot the idea down," he says.

The eight-block area surrounding Logan Circle was added to the National Register of Historic Places in 1972; the 14th Street corridor in 1994. Designated historic landmarks in the area include the National City Christian Church at 14th Street and Thomas Circle NW, the property at 1811 14th St. NW (currently Black Cat) which held Creel Brothers Motors in 1917, and the building at 1501 14th St. NW (currently Studio Theatre) that housed Peerless Motor Company in 1919.

But Tuma's efforts took heat at a recent ANC meeting, where at-large representative **Helen Kramer** voiced concerns that if the Barrel House façade is granted historic status, the building's only use in the future would be to sell liquor. Adding to the issue is the fact that M.G. is planning to move his business next door.

"If Barrel House is designated as a historic landmark, are we going to have two liquor stores side-by-side?" Kramer says at the meeting. "I don't think it's desirable." Kramer also speculated that the building may be too far "outside the period of significance" of 14th Street to be accepted by the Historic Preservation Board.

But **Kim Williams**, the national register coordinator for the Office of Historic Preservation, says the board usually gives "the benefit of the doubt" to buildings under consideration, adding that Barrel House is a "rarity." The real obstacle, she says, is overcoming the office's backlog of applications.

"If the building's not threatened in any way," she says, "it could be months and months and months before a hearing is held on the case."

Still, Tuma is optimistic, mentioning that the historic preservationists he's spoken to agree that there is a "very good rationale" for protecting the building. Meyers has similar thoughts, adding that before the effort began, he thought the building already had the historic designation.

"I can't imagine it wouldn't be [granted historic status]," he says. "Nobody should roll out that barrel." **CP**

*Eatery tips? Food pursuits? Send suggestions to [jsidman@washingtontcitypaper.com](mailto:jsidman@washingtontcitypaper.com).*



## BEACON BAR & GRILL

Rated top Ten  
Brunches By  
OpenTable.com  
Subscribers

17th & Rhode Island Ave.  
NW  
202-872-1126  
[BBGWDC.com](http://BBGWDC.com)



**Sushi Pop-Up Event**  
October 15, 2015  
Guest Chef Rudis —  
Innovative, Made To Order Sushi &  
Other Asian Fusion Options Unique  
Drinks Celebrate The Close Of The  
Season. 5PM – closing!

Live DJ  
**JOHN JAZZ**  
Thursdays: INTERNATIONAL  
Fridays: OPEN FORMAT

**Wednesday Nights**  
Featuring  
Stewart Lewis  
"Stunning guitar work  
and soaring Voice"  
Performing Songwriter



**Champagne Brunch Weekends**

**Saturdays: \$27.95**  
Three Courses A-La-Carte

**Sundays: \$37.95**  
Buffet Champagne Brunch  
"No Other Brunch Stacks Up To Ours"  
Rated Top Ten Brunches By  
OpenTable.com Subscribers

**Chef's Nightly \$24.95 Special**  
"Three Courses"

**Live Piano Entertainment**  
Every Thurs, Fri. & Sat.