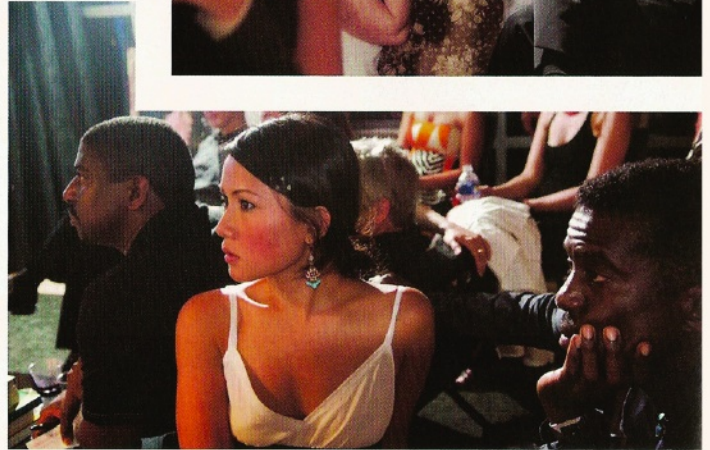




BY TIFFANY JOW
PHOTOGRAPHY BY MARK GONG

THE RADAR HOME

A PACKED HOUSE: Philippa P.B. Hughes's downtown DC expanse plays host to cadres of intellectuals and artists during her swish salons.



THE ART OF CONVERSATION *The soiree of the moment is the salon and hip, young benefactor Philippa P.B. Hughes presides*

The hottest spot in the city isn't always behind etched glass doors or velvet ropes. These days, it could be in a living room near you. It's no secret that salons, the private gatherings of creatives, intellectuals, and movers and shakers, have been around for centuries. Naturally, the District has translated the marvel into something of its own in a movement unofficially led by art collector Philippa P.B. Hughes. The thirty-something, former lawyer regularly opens her luxe downtown loft to an eclectic network, creating a phenomenon that puts going out to shame.

It started innocently enough, Hughes and friend and Dissident Display gallery co-owner Adrian Loving were rolling around the idea of documenting their conversations about art. Soon after, she began hosting intimate affairs where Shawn Westfall of DC Improv led an impromptu acting course and emerging playwright Gwydion Suilebhan taught a writing workshop. "Philippa's gatherings pulsate with an energy unlike you have at typical parties," Suilebhan says. "There's just this power, a sense that you're where it's all happening."

The eclectic invites of Hughes's salons aim for a cross pollination of cosmopolites including artists, collectors, actors, nightlife impresarios and fashionistas. While the guest list may be the catalyst, it's actually the environs that make the foundation for the event. There's no if—these walls talk, or at least inspire conversations aplenty. Textile tryptichs and towering canvases frame the parlor where the gathered gather. At every fete, someone muses on the dead fish painting aptly named *Thirteen Fish and*

Two Mice by Adam Spennett, which delights Hughes who hung it there for that very purpose. An intimate kitchen nook is dominated by Donghia chairs and a black blown glass fixture where couplings tend to migrate with cocktails in hand. And as no assemblage of intellectuals would be complete without a few heady Barcelona chairs that bring Bauhausian tête-à-têtes to mind, the collector and benefactor houses two in her cavernous space.

This night, Hughes beckons her audience (who are now sprawled about the living room, nibbling on fare whipped up by her personal chef) to view pieces of art projected onto a makeshift movie screen. A scruffy blonde who'd driven down from Canada shows a suspenseful film; a girl wearing a brown men's necktie talks up her pen-and-ink drawings and growing up in a Midwestern truck stop; and a dark man in a straw fedora speaks about his work on aluminum canvases, upon which he imposes pre-1920s criminal mug shots.

"The art of bringing people together in a meaningful way is being lost," Hughes says. "I want to keep that alive by introducing those who don't normally socialize with each other—that's the first ingredient to a good salon." The founder of the local arts organization The Pink Line Project is keen on the relationships forged within her ultra chic, bi-level home. The collaborations that have already sprung from these salons attest to a burgeoning legacy. "Philippa's got a fly little spot, and she's utilized her resources to initiate an important discussion there," Loving says. "This is no Tupperware party." Indeed. ■