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## ANN-FRANCES LAMBERT

has a rare blood pumping through her veins. It was something she inherited from her father, "Benny" Lambert, who was elected to the Virginia House of Delegates in the 1970s. Almost immediately after that election, he and the small Black Legislative Caucus began undoing the grave injustices against Blacks in Virginia that has dominated the Commonwealth's history from the time the state was just a colony. As Richmond's Third District Councilor, Ann-Frances Lambert is firmly committed to continuing her father's legacy for justice in a city that has a long history of embracing white supremacy. *continued on page 10*

## BEFORE THE BENCH



**Todd DuVal, Esq.**  
McDonald, Sutton & Duval

Each month, Todd DuVal, who has been practicing law for almost 30 years, will answer legal questions you may have so you can make the best decision about your representation in court.

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PO Box 9225  
Richmond, VA 23227  
804 218 5265  
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*editor/publisher*

**CHARLES G. MCGUIGAN**

*art director*

**DOUG DOBEY** *at Dobby Design*

*web designer*

**CATHERINE MCGUIGAN**

*contributing writers*

**DALE M BRUMFIELD  
MARY ELFNER  
ALANE CAMERON FORD  
ORION HUGHES  
JACK R JOHNSON  
ANDREW CHURCHER  
CHAD HENSLEY  
ANNE JONES  
CATHERINE MCGUIGAN  
CHARLES BR MCGUIGAN  
FAYERUZ REGAN  
FRAN WITHROW**

*contributing photographer*

**REBECCA D'ANGELO**

*account executive*

**AREINA-GAIL HENSLEY**

*editorial: charlesmcguigan@gmail.com*

*advertising: areinaghensley@gmail.com*

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## MUSIC

# Bellevue Porchella: ACT II, May 15

by CHARLES MCGUIGAN

## FROM THE MOMENT

it ended, people were calling for an encore.

Bellevue Porchella, which sprang to life last October, was the brainchild of Brooke Ullman. On May 15, with May 22 as a rain date, Bellevue Porchella returns. What's more, this day of music will repeat again in the early fall, becoming a semiannual event in the Northside.

Brooke Ullman got the idea one night last spring as she passed a home on MacArthur Avenue. "And The Bellevue Bon Temps were out there on their fiddles, playing on their side porch," Brooke told me. "I actually recorded it and did a little video of it and posted it, and I tagged the Bellevue Civic Association on Facebook and said, 'This is so great.'"

In July, Brooke watched from her front yard as a family with three kids strolled along the sidewalk across the street. They briefly stopped in front of the home of Haze and Dacey, two local musicians who were playing on their front stoop.

"Wouldn't it be cool if we had an outdoor walk-around little music thing," she said to the musicians a little later.

They both nodded. "Yeah, it'd be great," said Dacey.

"That is where the germ originated," Brooke told me.

To put it mildly, Bellevue Porchella was a roaring success. In mid-October last year, on a weather-perfect Saturday, more than a thousand people strolled through the neighborhood sampling the musical offerings of seventeen bands scattered through the community. It was like a mini-Richmond Folk Festival, which was cancelled last October for the first time in sixteen years due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

"I think it went over really well," Brooke says. "We were fortunate to have the full support of the Bellevue Civic Association (BCA). Since last year's Porchella, we've had a lot of people who would stop us while we were out on dog walks asking when the next one was going to be. It will be back this May. We are asking for musicians and host houses. And we plan another one in October. So twice a year now."



Brooke Ullman, the progenitor of Bellevue Porchella.

"I was thrilled with the way it happened with such a small group of people behind it," says Rob McAdams, director of Partners in the Arts, which, among other things, trains teachers on how to integrate the arts into their curricula. Rob also has a son who plays with The Neons, a local band that's been together since its members were in elementary school.

As a sort of band-parent roadie, Rob McAdams has a keen understanding of logistics where live music is concerned. Ever mindful of the pandemic, he was instrumental in creating the time allotment, and the number of sets each of the seventeen bands would play.

"So how can we have this happen without clusters and packs of crowds in one place?" Rob remembers thinking last year when Porchella was still in the planning stages. "Shorter sets. The idea of doing thirty-minute sets that you repeat made it so that people could be in one place for a time, and then go see another band at a different location. And it gave the performers the opportunity to show their best stuff."

"Our guiding principles last year were: Let's do something safe, let's do something that supports bands and supports people seeing each other," Rob recalls

At this year's May event, Brooke hopes to see merchants on Bellevue and MacArthur Avenues involved in the day's activities. "The suggestion and the thinking is, could we have the restaurants possibly come up with small menu items that are easy grab-and-go items so that people can take them

with them and eat at a performance?" says Brooke. "We're also suggesting that the retail stores perhaps offer a coupon or a discount, or they offer some sort of demonstration of their services inside."

There's also been discussion about creating a sort of bucket brigade. "Like what they do at the Folk Festival," Brooke says. "Money would go toward the bands and the Bellevue Civic Association, but we haven't formalized anything around that."

Rob McAdams mentions a musician who addressed the audience on Fauquier Avenue between sets last October. "He was talking to the crowd and said he hadn't played at all since COVID started," says Rob. "And then he said, 'This feels exactly right. The right amount of people on the right amount of space.'"

Looking to future Bellevue Porchellas, Rob McAdams poses a question. "What do we want it to be?" he asks. "Do we want it to be a neighborhood thing and keep the numbers down, or, as COVID goes away, do we want the spring event to be more of a neighborhood event, and in the fall open it up a little bit more?"

To find out more about this spring's Porchella, or if you want to be a house host or perform this year, Brooke Ullman suggests you periodically check the BCA's Facebook page. "There's no stand-alone website where you can find out all the information about this event," she says. "But we will be posting something on the BCA Facebook page." **NJ**

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## GARDENS

# Bellevue Garden Walk Returns April 25



Above: An edible garden.

Bottom: Columbine at a past Bellevue Garden Walk.

**T**HE BELLEVUE GARDEN Walk may well be the most intimate of garden tours in the region, and each year (except for the one just past) it has consistently illustrated the beauty, the individuality and the creative drive of Bellevue homeowners reflected in their mini-estates.

What's more you can get a close look at your neighbor's garden without being charged with trespassing, which in Virginia can fetch a \$2500 fine and up to twelve months in jail.

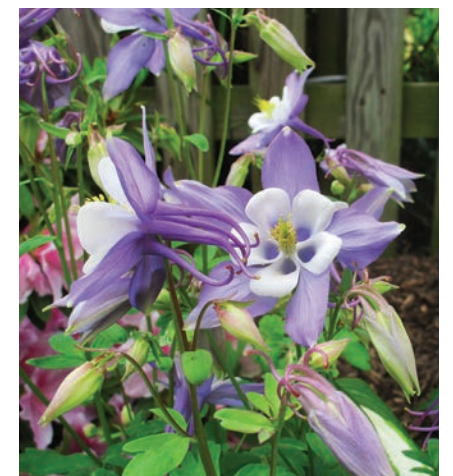
Scheduled this year from 1 till 5 pm on April 25, the Garden Walk includes about fifteen homes in Bellevue. Homeowners on the garden tour will open their yards, and many of them will offer refreshments. In conjunction with their gardens, some homeowners will be displaying their own artwork, or that of local artists. There will even be live music in some of the gardens.

This annual free event, which began about thirty years ago, is a great way of getting ideas for your own garden. Here's what the homeowner at 1505 Bellevue Avenue wrote about their garden: "We feel that if you plant something, it should end up on your plate or in a vase. Combining beauty and function, our yard features a cutting garden, fruit trees, a maple-shaded hammock and a handsome pergola for our concord grapes. Enjoy

cold lemonade in the lounge area, featuring mixed media art. Flea market paintings have been garnished with deconstructed costume jewelry from the matriarchs of our family."

And over on Fauquier, these participants of this year's Garden Walk wrote: "We started transforming our yard into an urban farmette in 2020 when the pandemic gave us more time at home to tackle the mess of weeds and shrubs inherited when we bought the home in 2019. Using bio-intensive practices, we try to grow as many fruits, herbs, and vegetables as possible to support our family. A small flock of chickens help maintain the grass and turn over garden soil when needed." 

For more information check out the Bellevue Civic Association's Facebook page.



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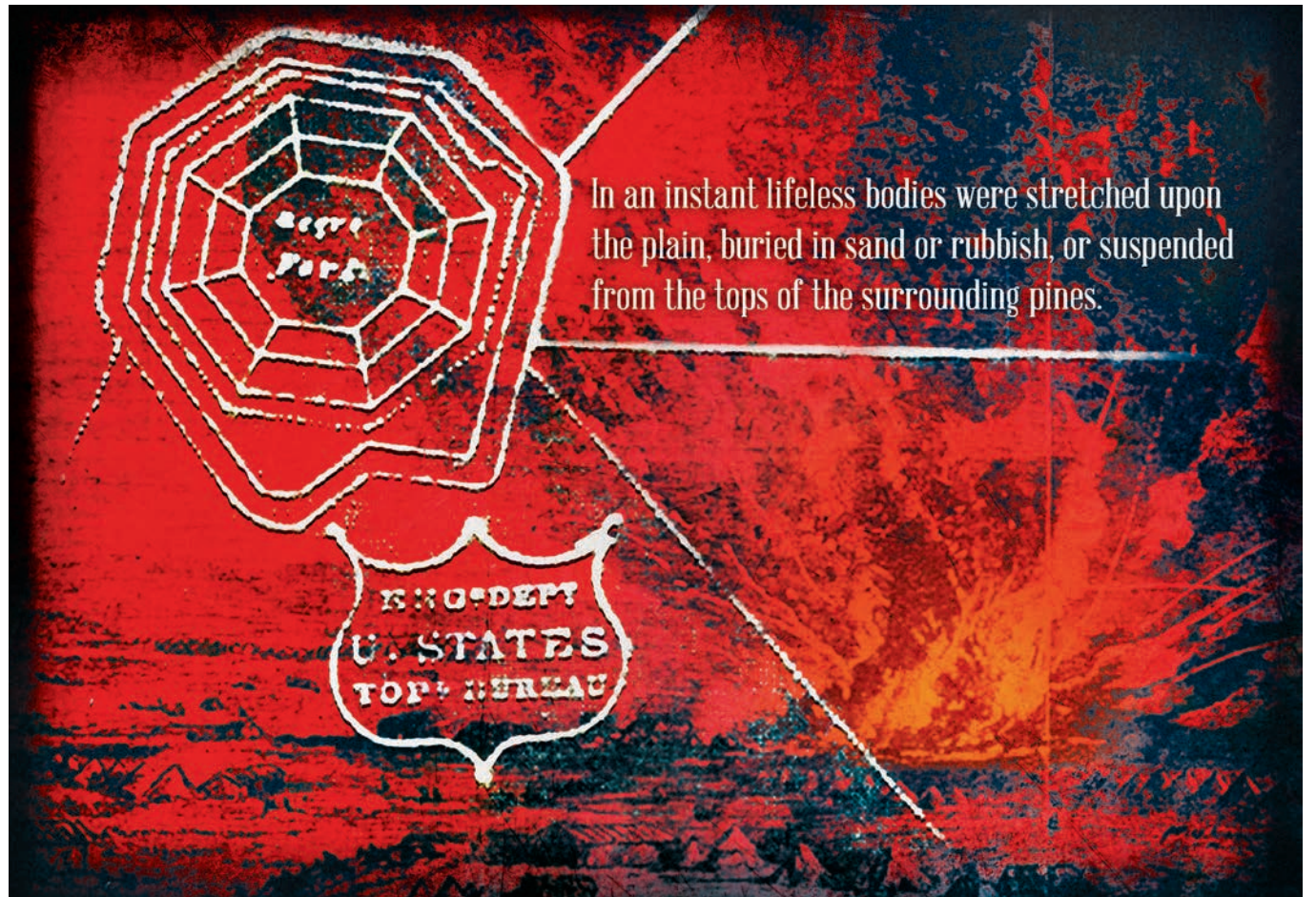
# Negro Fort

by JACK R. JOHNSON

**T**WO HUNDRED YEARS ago, the largest community of freed slaves in North America was not found in the northern cities of Philadelphia or New York, as one might imagine. Rather, the largest population of freed slaves, was found in the deep South of the Florida panhandle, in an abandoned Fort along the Apalachicola River. Dubbed ‘Negro Fort,’ this place was initially set up by the British and then handed over to freed American slaves and Native American Indians. It became the starting point of Andrew Jackson’s bloody Seminole war, and one of the largest massacres of freed slaves on the American continent.

Negro Fort had served as a refuge for freed men and women, as well as those fleeing slavery in the South. The British had handed over the Fort intact with all its weapons and ordnance to the Corps of Colonial Marines—Black troops who chose to remain. Surrounding it was a sizeable community of runaway slaves, indigenous people (some of whom were forced out of the Mississippi Territory and Georgia), and the occasional white trader. The existence of a Negro Fort, as the U.S. Army called it, was anathema to Georgia plantation owners. Since it was a known safe destination for runaway slaves from as far away as Virginia and Tennessee, Georgian plantation owners feared Negro Fort as a threat to the institution of slavery. Hundreds of freed men and women migrated to the fort and settled there or close by. Once word began circulating about the autonomous free Black community, Georgian plantation owners sent letters to the U.S. government demanding that action be taken. Colonel Robert Patterson urged the fort’s elimination, stating “The service rendered by the destruction of the fort, and the band of negroes who held it is one of great and manifest importance to the United States and particularly those States bordering on the Creek nation, as it had become the rendezvous for runaway slaves.”

The problem, of course, was that Negro Fort was not a part of the United States. At the time, it was in Spanish controlled Florida. Andrew Jackson decided to build Fort Scott above this territory at the junction of the Flint and Chattahoochee rivers, where they



joined to form the Apalachicola. To receive materials and supplies, boats going to Fort Scott needed to traverse the Apalachicola River—then Spanish territory—passing right next to Negro Fort on the way. During one of the deliveries, two gunboats stopped along the river directly beside Negro Fort. Not surprisingly, they were met with an attack by the infantry at the fort. Almost all of the Americans were killed. Whether this was arranged by Jackson to provide a handy excuse to attack Negro Fort can’t be proven, but the circumstance of the attack proved timely.

Under the pretense of “national defense,” Andrew Jackson ordered the destruction of the Fort. It was a short, but dreadful battle. After only a couple minutes of engagement, a heated cannonball (a ‘hot shot’) entered the fort’s magazine, where ammunitions were kept, and caused an explosion that destroyed the entire post. The explosion killed 270 men, women, and children. No casualties for the Americans were noted. The explosion was heard more than 100 miles away in Pensacola. Afterwards, the U.S. troops and the Creeks charged and captured the surviving defenders. Garçon, the black commander of the Fort, and a Choc-

taw chief, among the few who survived, were handed over to the Creeks, who shot Garçon and scalped the chief under orders from Andrew Jackson.

General Gaines later reported that:

“The explosion was awful and the scene horrible beyond description. You cannot conceive, nor I describe the horrors of the scene. In an instant lifeless bodies were stretched upon the plain, buried in sand or rubbish, or suspended from the tops of the surrounding pines. Here lay an innocent babe, there a helpless mother; on the one side a sturdy warrior, on the other a bleeding squaw. Piles of bodies, large heaps of sand, broken glass, accoutrements, etc., covered the site of the fort... Our first care, on arriving at the scene of the destruction, was to rescue and relieve the unfortunate beings who survived the explosion.”

Many of the survivors at the fort were taken prisoner and placed back into slavery under the claim that the Georgia plantation owners had owned their ancestors.

As Matthew J. Clavin noted in *The Battle of Negro Fort: The Rise and Fall*

*of a Fugitive Slave Community*, this was the first and only time in its history in which the United States destroyed a community of escaped slaves in another country. By eliminating this refuge for fugitive slaves, the United States government closed an escape valve that Blacks had utilized for generations, it also destroyed a powerful symbol of Black freedom that “subverted the foundations of an expanding American slave society.”

The destruction of Negro Fort also led to the first Seminole War.

Chief Neamathla, a leader of the Red Stick Creeks at Fowltown, was so angered by the death of some of his people at Negro Fort that he issued a warning to General Gaines that if any of his forces crossed the Flint River into Spanish Florida, they would be attacked and defeated. Unfortunately, the threat provoked the general to send 250 men to arrest the chief and have him flogged. A battle arose in his defense and it became the opening skirmish of the First Seminole War.

Both in human and monetary terms, the Seminole Wars were the longest and most expensive of the Indian Wars in United States history. **NJ**



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# ANN-FRANCES LAMBERT

## POLITICAL DESTINY

**SOMETIMES A PLACE CAN TELL A STORY, AND NOT JUST OF WHERE IT IS ON A MAP,** and the streets and buildings that make it up, and the memories of the women and men who called the place home. Certain places tell stories of an unspeakable hatred that will not be washed away. Apostle Town murmurs its tale in its very name, and it will not be silenced, not even sixty-five years after it was hacked away from its sister, severed by a chasm of asphalt and concrete as if the earth itself had been ripped apart. Saint James, Saint John, Saint Peter, Saint Paul—these streets that gave “this” town its name—still cry out with a news that is always new.



**BACK IN THE 1950S,** a racist General Assembly of Virginia, run by the notorious “Byrd machine”, decided, against the will of the people, to cleave Jackson Ward in half with a canyon along which flowed the Richmond-Petersburg Turnpike, which would later become Interstate-95. For the residents of that community it was devastating. Jackson Ward—“Black Wall Street”, the “Harlem of the South”—is Richmond’s oldest Black neighborhood. It was not the wholesale bloody massacre of Black Americans that occurred in Wilmington, North Carolina; Rosewood, Florida; Tulsa, Oklahoma; and scores of other Black communities throughout the 20th century. But it was undeniably a sort of cultural genocide that left in its wake a once-thriving neighborhood broken in two. By the time that hideous valley of interstate highway was completed, more than a thousand homes had been razed, more than thirty blocks ended in cul-de-sacs, and a great swath of Jackson Ward had been scooped out of existence by an army of earthmovers. “They had two referendums on the ballot and the people voted it down,” says Third District Councilor Ann-Frances Lambert. “Harry Byrd, Sr. said let’s override it. Forget what the people say, we’re going to put this highway through the South’s most profound economic Black community.”

We’re sitting on my front porch at a comfortable social distance of fifteen feet. Ann periodically lifts up her dog, cradling him in her lap. His name is Chico, a Maltese/Shih Tzu mix. Ann is energetic and anxious to get on with the business of fixing what’s broken in the River City.

“So you’ve got North Jackson Ward where there’s only one entryway and it’s isolated, and then you have the other side of Jackson Ward that’s all historic and they’re putting all this money into it,” Ann continues. “But the North Jackson Ward area is still being neglected after all these years. Harry Byrd, Sr. was one of the biggest racists in Virginia history. So not only should we take the Lee monument down, we need to take Harry Byrd’s damned statue down at Capitol Square.”

North Jackson Ward, home of Gilpin Court, holds a special place in the heart of Ann-Frances Lambert, for this is where her father, Benjamin Lambert, a political giant who served in the Virginia General Assembly for more than three decades, always kept his offices.

“I would say, ‘Daddy why is your office down here?’” Ann remembers. “And he would say, ‘Our people are here, and I’m not going anywhere.’ And I always was afraid for him, but then at the end of the day I knew everybody knew my dad. They weren’t

by **CHARLES MCGUIGAN**



*Ann-Frances with her father shortly after he was elected to his first term as a Delegate.*

going to mess with him; they were going to protect him. He was on First Street right across from Greater Mt. Mariah Baptist Church.”

From the time she was old enough to walk, Ann learned about politics from her father, a statesman who worked both sides of the aisle throughout his political career. “My dad has groomed me since I was a baby to run for office,” she says.

Ann Lambert is a Northsider from birth, and is passionate about representing the District.

“It’s amazing to be the representative of Northside,” Ann tells me. “I grew up over in Battery Park. We lived on Graham Road, and in 1985 my family moved over to Ginter Park.” She lived with her four brothers and father, Benjamin, who was an optometrist, and mother, Carolyn, who was a nurse.

The family were long-time parishioners at St. Paul Catholic Church on Chamberlayne Avenue, and Ann would attend nearby All Saints Catholic School, which was just blocks away from their home on Noble Avenue.

But even before that, her schooling began at another Northside institution. “I started my education at Virginia Union in their nursery school, in the early childhood education program. I always say that I started off as a Panther.”

Directly across the street from the Lambert family home on Noble, there lived a man who went down in history as one of America’s greatest freedom fighters—Oliver White Hill, the man who,

with Thurgood Marshall and other attorneys, argued one of the most important Supreme Court cases in history, *Brown versus Board of Education*. Invoking the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment these lawyers successfully proved that Black students’ rights had been violated. This landmark decision paved the way for integration and bent the arc of the moral universe toward justice.

“We were one of the first black families to move over to the Ginter Park area,” Ann says. “Sometimes if I ever got locked out of the house after school at All Saints, I would go across the street to the Hill’s house and sit and wait until my mom came home. So Mrs. Hill would give me some cookies and juice; they were just such sweet folks. It wasn’t till I was older that I thought, ‘Oh my God, I live across the street from a Civil Rights icon.’”

There were other Black leaders who lived nearby, including former City Councilor and Virginia Delegate Viola Baskerville, and former Virginia Governor Doug Wilder. “So we had quite a few historical figures in Ginter Park,” says Ann.

During eighth grade, Ann got her first taste of politics. “I was a page at the General Assembly,” she says. “That’s when my political career started.”

After graduating from St. Getrude High School, Ann entered Howard University in Washington, D.C. where she majored in communications with a minor in education.

When her freshman year came to an end, Ann returned to Richmond for the summer to work as an intern for then-Secretary of Health and Human Resources Kay Coles James. “Kay worked under Governor George Allen,” Ann says. “So that gave me the Republican experience. I got a lot of experience doing that.”

Over the subsequent summers while attending Howard, Ann would work as an intern for both the TV show *America’s Most Wanted*, and C-SPAN. She would also work on Capitol Hill for Congressman Bobby Scott. “The amount of policy and legislative experience I got there was phenomenal,” says Ann.

Her last year in college was particularly difficult. Along with the grueling demands of several classes, there were three family deaths in rapid succession. “That was my hardest year ever,” she says. “And I thought, ‘If I can get through this, Lord, I can do anything.’ So I was burnt out by the time I graduated.”

When she returned to Richmond, she went to work for BLAB-TV. She also worked in the television studios at the General Assembly. “I wanted to get experience in all aspects of television, and that’s what I did,” says Ann. “I did the camera work, I did some audio work. I did a little bit of everything.” She even had the opportunity to film her father when he delivered the State of the Commonwealth address. “The beauty of it all was I was able to work with my father in that capacity,” she says.

Ann was the first community liaison hired by the city of Richmond, a position she held from 2000 till 2003, before taking a job with the city’s recently created intergovernmental relations program. “It was just Kelly Harris and myself,” she says. “We handled the legislative agenda for the entire city.”

She later returned to DC, worked on the Committee of Education and Labor under President George W. Bush, purchased a house in Forest Heights, Maryland, until the housing market collapsed. “I lost my house up there, and everybody was losing their jobs,” Ann says.

So she decided to become a personal assistant to celebrities. “I feel like I’m a celebrity anyway,” says Ann. “So I got a gig working in New York for a celebrity hairstylist who did the hair of fashion model Naomi Campbell.”

And then she packed her bags and struck out for a career in California. “I got a one way ticket to LA and worked on as a PA (personal assistant) for the talent on a show called *My Black Is Beautiful PA*, which was a sort of Black version of *The View*,” Ann explains. “I was working with Tasha Smith, Alesha Renee, Leela James and Kim Coles.” She would later work as PA for Omar Epps and other celebrities. “I was rubbing shoulders with the best of them and I couldn’t complain,” she says. While in LA she launched a business she still operates today—*Dronescape Films*, which specializes in aerial photography and film via drone.

“I was taking photos of the high end homes in the Hollywood Hills and flying all through there with



*Ann-Frances with her mother and father, Carolyn and Benjamin Lambert.  
Ann-Frances Lambert sworn in as Richmond's Third District Concilor.*

my drones," she says. "And when the wildfires struck the Malibu area I went up there and took my drones to record the damage."

After ten years on the West Coast, Ann-Frances Lambert felt the tug of her native Richmond urging her to return home.

Last February, Ann made the decision to run for the Third District seat on City Council. At a funeral the month before, she ran into Congressman Bobby Scott and told him of her plans.

"Well let me know if there's anything I can do for you," he told her. "But I'll tell you one thing, get your signatures on Super Tuesday. That'll be the best time to get them."

Ann reflects on what the Congressman had told her. "It's a good thing I listened to him," she says. "Because then COVID happened, and other folks running for office started complaining that they couldn't get the signatures. With COVID happening you really couldn't get signatures because

everybody was afraid of interacting."

She was able to get her signatures in short order, and then hit the ground running, waging the kind of campaign the shrewdest of politicians use. Think of President Barack Obama and all of his campaigns.

Shortly after Ann filed she called an old friend who was running for office in Northern Virginia, and asked her advice.

"Ann," this friend said. "I always learned it's about the ground game. It's all about knocking on those doors. So every day you look at your opponent's weaknesses and strengths, you go after them that way."

Ann quickly assembled her ground troops and they moved systematically across the District from one end to the other.

"We put door hangers on every house in the District and from there I started knocking on doors," Ann says. "I started getting endorsements, but I just

kept knocking." As a long, tiring day came to a close, Ann would announce to her ground team that she needed to knock on at least five more doors before the sun set. Which she did.

"When Porchella was here," says Ann. "I was out there. You saw your soon-to-be councilwoman. People are gonna know who I am, damn it. You're not gonna say I lost because I wasn't out there knocking on doors and talking to people on the streets."

On Election Day, she was at the polling stations in her District for the moment they opened their doors at six in the morning. On more than one occasion that day, voters who would see her arriving at a precinct would say: "I met her; she came to my house."

"All my effort paid off," Ann says with an infectious smile.

She remembers lessons learned from her father. "My dad was really integral in working across the aisle, and that's key," Ann says. "My dad taught me that early on. You can't discriminate, you can't hate everybody because you got to work with folks. Whether they're Republican or Democrat. He was able to get money for Richmond in more ways than one."

Ann remembers all too well the racism that has been prevalent in Richmond for many years. "Richmond's always been Black or white," she says. "Growing up here, you would see the divide. Every time Blacks would do something that was fun for them, it would always be shut down. Like Byrd Park used to be a place where folks would go on Sundays and just hang around. That got shut down. There were too many blacks, and the whites over in Byrd Park were too scared."

Things have changed somewhat. "When I see white folks walking dogs down Brookland Park Boulevard that's when you know things have changed, especially in Battery Park," says Ann. But a lot more things need to change.

Ann's legislative agenda is progressive. She wants equity for all citizens of the city, affordable housing, and she wants to combat systemic racism on every front. One of the keys to it all is revamping much of what ails the Richmond Public Schools.

"We have a thirty percent poverty rate in our city, which is a disgrace," she says. "All of our schools are filled with Black children, but we're not do-

ing anything about addressing the fact that we're firing black teachers. These students need someone they can emulate, not some white kids from New York coming down who are being taught a script on how to talk to Black kids. So as I said before, if you don't understand the history here in Richmond, what the hell are you doing because you're not helping at all by just separating and neglecting."

Among other things, Ann would like to see the entire John Marshall High School campus revamped and repurposed. "We could change the whole complex to where it's kind of like the Collegiate Schools and the amazing campus they have," she says.

Ann envisions something comparable to the Bidewell Training Center in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, a success story fifty years old now that offers training at no charge in everything from culinary art to horticulture technology.

"We have a seventy percent graduation rate in Richmond Public Schools," Ann says. "What about the other thirty percent? And what about those students that aren't going to college? What are we doing to prepare them to become better citizens? We need to build a pipeline to the trades from our Tech Center. Give them a trade while they're still in high school. Get them hours so that by the time they graduate they've got certification to become journeymen. There are projects all over this city where they could get the apprenticeship skills and so forth to really make a difference and better their lives."

The gnawing reality of homelessness resonates with Ann-Frances.

"Back in the fifth grade at All Saints, I had a teacher named Miss Ice and she was one of those teachers who always did community service with us," Ann recalls. "I kind of got my community service bug from her."

She and her classmates would perform Corporeal Works of Mercy. "We used to go sing to the old folks at the Virginia Home," say Ann. "We would feed the homeless down at The Daily Planet."

And then one weekend, Miss Ice made herself homeless just so she could experience it firsthand and pass along her knowledge to her charges. "None of us in that class will ever forget her description of eating a hamburger she pulled out of a dumpster," Ann says.

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She considers that lack of affordable housing in the city and the burgeoning homeless population.

"How do we ensure there is affordable housing?" she asks. "We have to change the policies to reflect that. What about these delinquent properties we have here? Let's think outside the box and build modular homes to really help those who are on the street."

And then Ann mentions people who are on "survival mode", those who might literally freeze to death. "I'm thinking about the Norrell Annex and a lot of these old buildings where nothing is going on, buildings the city owns," she says. "Even the Arthur Ashe Center, they've got showers back there. Why can't we use that as a facility for people to stay, get a hot meal, take a shower, wash their clothes?"

When Ann speaks of Richmond, particularly the Northside, she fairly waxes rhapsodic. "I know the city, I know these streets," she says. "I've ridden my bike on these streets, I've made mud pies on these streets. Northside, all day, every day, even when I was in California, folks would say, 'Where you from?' And the answer was always, 'Richmond, Northside.'"

As the interview winds down, Ann considers why she ran for public office in the first place. "It gets back to Apostle Town over there in North Jackson Ward," she says. "That's one of the main reason I ran. Those Black folks who owned homes had their homes stolen from them by the Byrd machine. This is where Blacks had their own businesses and homes and it was stolen from them. Gilpin Court is eighty years of poor policy. And it has to be changed. So when folks talk about what we're going to do with the schools, I want to know, what are we going to do with the Black people that were disenfranchised?"

"My dad was a great statesman," says Ann-Frances Lambert. "I'm his daughter and I've got to be the same way, with a little twist. I saw how my dad made a difference in people's lives and we basically shared him with the city and he's not here anymore. He's not here to give me advice. We have a lot of work to do, but it's going to be a great four years, and I have aspirations. My boyfriend keeps saying, 'You could be the next president.' Let's pump our brakes on that one, but maybe a Congressional seat at some point." 



# DOT'S



## BACK INN

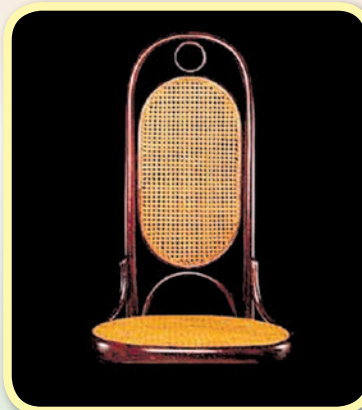
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# Searching for The Gold Bug

by **FRAN WITHROW**

**M**ISS BENSON'S Beetle came to me at just the right time. I was ripe and ready for a story that was bursting with heart, and this charming novel by Rachel Joyce, author of "The Unlikely Pilgrimage of Harold Fry," fit the bill perfectly.

Miss Benson is a serious, lonely, no-nonsense teacher living in London just after World War II. She has no family and teaching is not her calling. One day she snaps, does something totally out of character, and finds herself without a job. This leads her to realize that her life's true vocation, on hold since childhood, is to find the elusive Golden Beetle of New Caledonia. Does it really exist? And is she capable of locating it?

Straitlaced Miss Benson decides she needs an assistant for this important endeavor, and the woman she ends up with, Enid Pretty, is one of the most delightfully flamboyant and eccentric characters I've ever run across. Together these two polar opposites set off for distant lands, ill-equipped in almost every way and bogged down by circumstances they never expected to encounter.

Reading about their trek is entertaining enough, but Joyce adds several layers of rich intrigue to the main story. What is Enid Pretty's dark secret? Is she really who she says she is? Why is Miss Benson so aloof, and what caused her to give up her dream to find the Golden Beetle when she was younger? Who is the man who is following them, and what will happen when they finally meet up with him? (Because you know they will.)

Joyce paints every character with color and sympathy, and though I guessed the ending long before I got to the last page, I discovered I didn't care. The writing is so engaging, with a side order of humor, that I found myself smiling all the way through. A deep empathy for all those who may be different, or hurting, or alone, undergirds



the story. Even the man who follows Miss Benson is worthy of compassion.

The ending split my heart open, and I hugged the book to my chest. Is this story even about the beetle at all? Or is it about being open to the magic of the world and all the wonders within? Perhaps it is about learning to love, and how one simple act can open the door to a lifetime of joy.

Joyce's first book, "The Unlikely Pilgrimage of Harold Fry," was good, but I loved "Miss Benson's Beetle" more. This is a sweet tale of how a friendship blossoms among two unlikely companions, and how it takes only one loyal person to change a life. I learned a lot about beetles as well, which is not a bad thing.

Joyce's description of how a photograph inspired this novel is superb reading. Do not skip this section in the back of the book. It is almost as if the universe was telling her to write this story.

I'm so glad she listened. **NJ**

**Miss Benson's Beetle**  
By Rachel Joyce  
Dial Press  
352 pages  
\$18.00

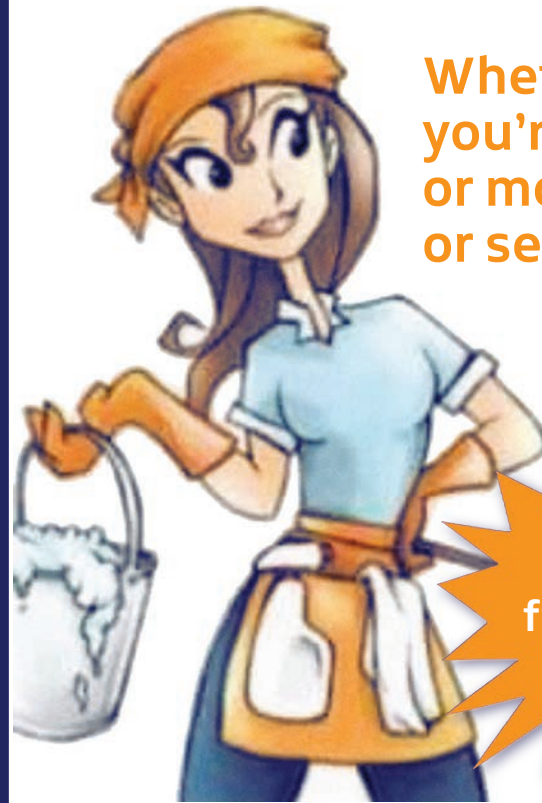
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## WHAT'S NEW

# One Three Guitar Sales, Repairs, Lessons

by CHARLES MCGUIGAN

**L**ATE ONE AFTERNOON, as sunlight drained out of the world and the acorn street lights along MacArthur Avenue winked on in rapid succession, I met a group of Bellevue residents who were just stepping out of the newest shop to open on Bellevue's interior commercial strip—a place called One Three Guitar, which had previously operated out of a 300-foot square space at Sound of Music in Scott's Addition. This new space is significantly larger.

The cluster of folks who stood out in front of the guitar store included two of Bellevue's new breed of musicians, members of Sun Against Artemis. Both were extremely impressed by One Three.

June Kambourian, vocalist for the band whose soulful voice is reminiscent of Janis Joplin, said: "It was really chill. One of the instructors there was a local musician. The owners seem very community-oriented."

Her fellow band member, lead guitarist Nick Erickson, nodded. "I was really impressed by the shop," he said. "It's a welcome addition to the neighborhood."

Owner Matt Avitable invited me in and showed me around the shop. It's an open space, inviting with two blue couches and walls lined with guitars of every description, acoustic and electric. In the rear there is a workshop area, along with a couple of small, private rooms for guitar lessons.

"This space seemed to really make sense for what we were trying to do," Matt said. "Our original idea was to really focus on repairs, and we've kept that part of our mission here by building out a full-service shop where we can do any kind of repair on guitars and guitar-like instruments." Pretty much any instrument with strings and frets.

"We've expanded our retail offering," Matt added, gesturing toward the guitars hanging on the walls. "We've also added lessons to our roster of things that we provide. And so we have two lesson rooms that are eight-by-ten, and we designed them to be as safe as



possible. We have air purifiers; we have a mask-on policy. We've done our best to make it as safe as possible." Those who do not want to do in-person guitar lesson have the option of learning online. "We can support that as well," said Matt.

Along with an offering of consignment guitars, and other stringed and fretted instruments, One Three also offers a line of AMI guitars that range in price from about \$300 to \$700. "These are wonderful instruments inspired by tradition," said Matt. "You're getting some high level features in these quality instruments." AMI, incidentally, has its headquarters onsite. They sell guitars to independently owned dealers across the country.

Within the first week of operation, One Three had already attracted customers from the neighborhood and beyond. It's not surprising because in Bellevue if you swing a possum that's playing possum, you're likely to strike a musician.

When asked why he chose the name One Three, Matt said, "The short version is that thirteen has always been a good luck number for me. It's my lucky number." **NJ**

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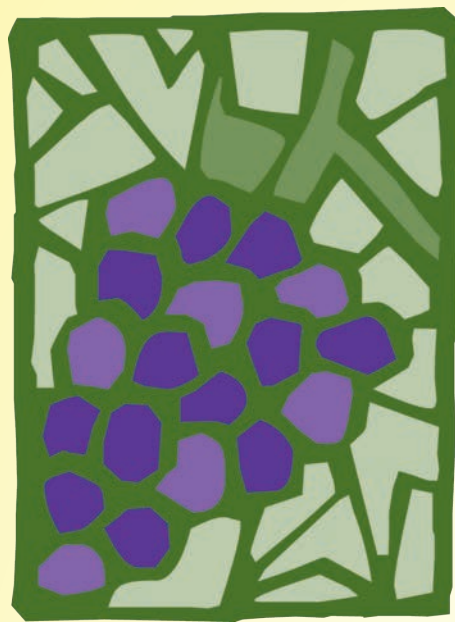
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## ART

# Nicole Renee Randall at Schindler and Natural Bridge at VMFA

**NEW WORK BY  
NICOLE RENEE RANDALL AT  
ERIC SCHINDLER GALLERY**



*Loss In Red* by Nicole Renee Randall

**A**MONG WOMEN, an exhibit of new works by Nicole Renee Randall, will be featured through April 3 at Eric Schindler Gallery. In an interview with Nicole three years ago, the artist said this: “Art is the intersection of craft and idea. You can have craft all day long, but if you don’t have an idea, you have nothing. And people filled with ideas who have no craft, have nothing.” Nicole’s work consistently has it all, wedding art with craft in a perfect union.

“Nicole Renee Randall’s work is inspired by her life and the lives of the women around her,” according to the Eric Schindler Gallery website. “She works with acrylics on wood panels in a narrative style that is personal, poignant and often heart wrenching.”

Open house on March 5 from 5-8pm and on March 6 from 1-5pm.

Follow Eric Schindler on Facebook and Instagram for updates!

**Eric Schindler Gallery**  
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**VIRGINIA ARCADIA:  
THE NATURAL BRIDGE IN  
AMERICAN ART**

At the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts through August 1

VMFA presents Virginia Arcadia: The Natural Bridge in American Art. Explore the artistic legacy of an iconic natural wonder. Depicted and celebrated for centuries, the Natural Bridge is the Shenandoah Valley’s breathtaking centerpiece—a towering, primeval witness to human history and timeless muse. The free exhibition examines its image in paintings, prints, decorative arts, photography and more. Featured artists include Frederic Church, David Johnson, Edward Hicks, and many others.

Virginia Arcadia: The Natural Bridge in American Art examines one of the most frequently depicted sites in American 19th-century landscape painting, likely only surpassed by Niagara Falls. Natural Bridge prompts both aesthetic and scientific contemplation and has figured prominently in discussions of western expansion, slavery, tourism, and ecological conservation. While the rock formation is more than 400 million years old, the earliest published references to the natural wonder involve historical figures such as Thomas Jefferson and George Washington. The Natural Bridge is a site for mythmaking—the creation of American foundational lore that continues to this day. Its historical importance notwithstanding,

the Natural Bridge has escaped serious scholarly contemplation and art historical examination.

Situated in the Shenandoah Valley, within the evocatively named Rock-bridge County, the Natural Bridge formed gradually as the waters of Cedar Creek caused erosion, resulting in an arched formation measuring 215 feet high and 90 feet wide. In 1774 Thomas Jefferson purchased the site from King George III as part of a 150-acre tract of land. The land remained in the Jefferson family for seven years after his death in 1826. The arch quickly became one of the most reproduced and easily recognizable natural wonders.

Artist-explorers such as Joshua Shaw and Jacob Caleb Ward, whose works are featured in this exhibition, found in the formation a scene of picturesque beauty. For artists and authors, it became a recurring device with which to underscore the beauty of the American landscape. Along with landmark paintings by Frederic Church and David Johnson, Virginia Arcadia contains important depictions of the Bridge by Edward Hicks, Caleb Boyle, and unidentified decorative artists. **NJ**

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Detail: *Natural Bridge, Virginia, 1860*, David Johnson (American 1827-1908), oil on canvas.



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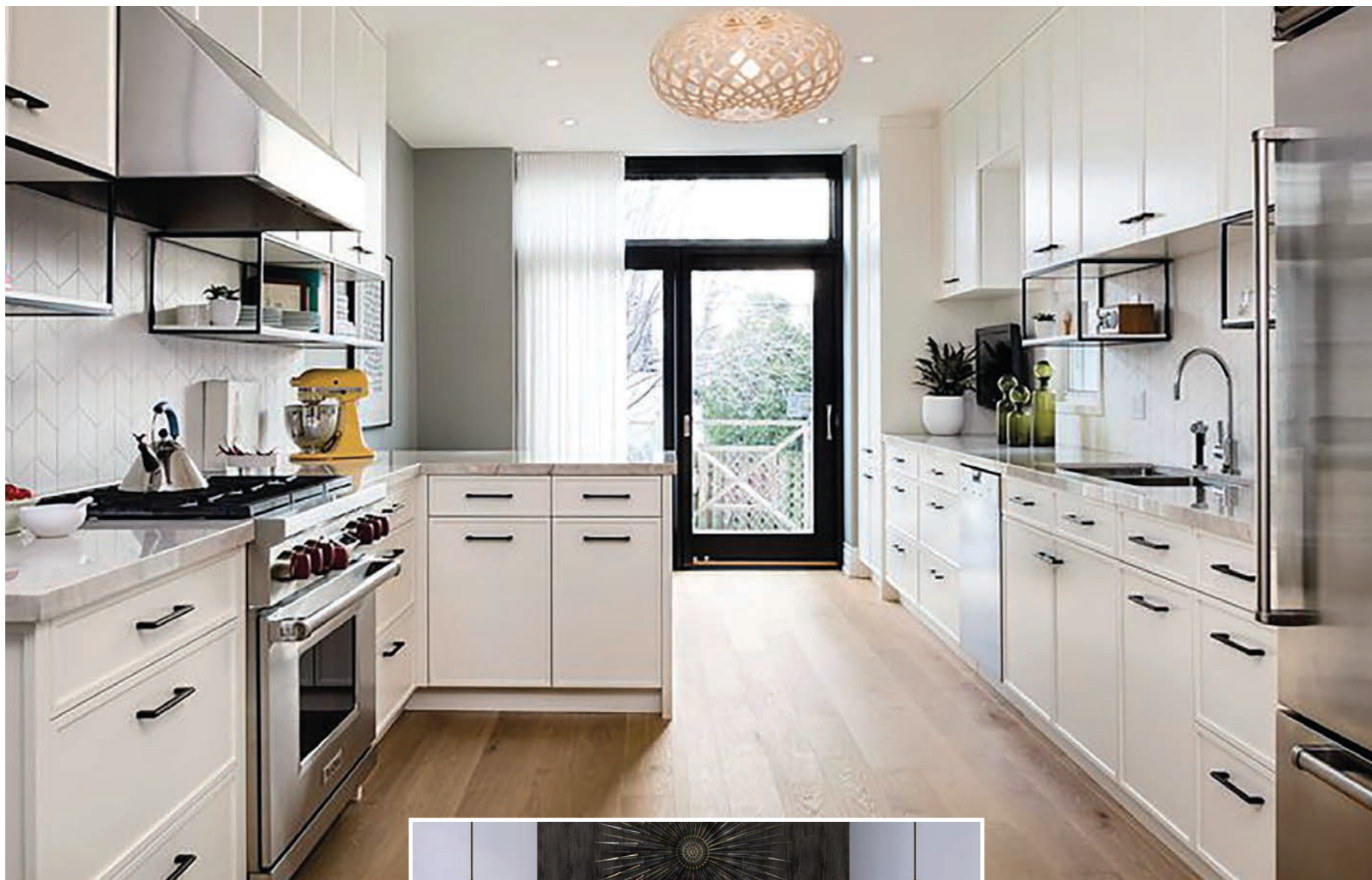


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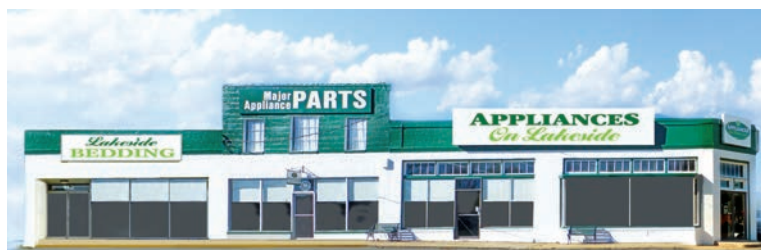


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