



CULTURE

The etiquette of wealth in the DMV: Less flaunting, more power

In the DC region, it's not always easy to spot the rich and powerful.

By **David Hodes** | December 5, 2019 at 9:49 am

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In this town, where many successful careers are built on answering to constituents or interest groups, flaunting your wealth is generally frowned upon.

“Showing your wealth here is more rare than not,” says Barry Glassman, founder and president of Glassman Wealth Services, a Tysons-based financial planning

firm. “When we think about pockets of wealth in various areas of the country, we think of what makes great headlines or Instagram posts. But the norm for most people here is to keep it relatively private to the point where some people, even some of our well-to-do clients, don’t even view themselves as wealthy.”

Of course, that doesn’t mean the region’s wealthiest residents aren’t spending their money. It just means they’re not doing it with flash (think more Mercedes SUVs in McLean, not Bugattis in Beverly Hills).

Besides, says Lauren Rothman, a local stylist, author and fashion expert who outfits many of the region’s rich and famous, wealth here is often defined by access to power, not your bank account.

“Flaunting your wealth is not what true wealth is about here,” says Rothman. “Wealth is not about spending money and showing it off, because the true key to success here is power. That power may have wealth as a component, but that power has connections. It’s a long-term game here in terms of accumulating wealth and keeping it quiet,” Rothman says.

But, in enclaves like McLean, where many of the region’s wealthiest reside, you can find a window into that world of rarefied air.

“In McLean,” says Rothman. “Everyone is living their best life privately in their own home. So, you walk into a McLean home and you find the community is in their home—the chef, the driver, the household staff.”

Amenities in particularly high-end NoVA neighborhoods also offer insights into the world of the wealthy. The Giant supermarket in McLean, for example, offers valet parking.

“But you would never suspect who is the wealthiest customer in the store just by looking at who is walking around,” Rothman says. “You walk in and you will not see any customers sporting designer fashion.”

For those who need even closer proximity to DC, a city pied-a-terre can be a status symbol.

“A family in McLean or Great Falls wants four seasons of clothing in their home here and their apartment in CityCenterDC,” says Rothman. “They are not showy about it, they just don’t have time to do packing. And these places may be only 20 to 40 minutes away from each other. To have two places so close together is clearly an expression of wealth, but it’s something that no one would talk about.”

Over-displays may be the exception (this is the town, after all, where Dan Snyder, spent millions of dollars on a custom yacht with an IMAX theater on board), but you’re unlikely to get a behind-the-scenes look on social media.

“It’s about what is more unique, like having a certain custom-made car and being one of only a select few in the world to be able to afford that opportunity,” says Rothman. “That is more interesting than flaunting. It’s a private experience.”

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