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The Owners of 'Sascha's Cafe' Have Put their Landmark Building on Charles Street Up for Sale

1 Written by: [Ed Gunts](#) | Thursday, Apr 20, 2017 12:11pm

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The restaurant building at 527 N. Charles Street was used to film a key scene in Barry Levinson's movie, *Diner*.

In its kitchen, food was prepared for Tom Brokaw, Kevin Spacey, Richard Gere, Arianna Huffington and all the Christmas parties of John Waters.

The building once served as headquarters of the Baltimore Opera Company. Wallis Warfield Simpson had her hair done there before she became the Duchess of Windsor, when it was Andre's Empire Salon.

Now, all that history is up for grabs. Sascha Wolhandler and Steve Suser, longtime owners of Sascha's Cafe, recently listed the property for sale.

The listing comes less than two months after Wolhandler and Suser sold their longtime catering businesses, Sascha's Catering and Sascha's Silver Sacs, to Mallory Staley, general manager and co-owner of *The Elephant* restaurant at 924 N. Charles Street.

The catering businesses have moved up the street to operate in conjunction with *The Elephant* and have kept the Sascha's name. Wolhandler has agreed to work with *The Elephant* for a transition period that runs through June.

The Sascha's restaurant property in the 500 block, with about 9,500 square feet of space on four levels, wasn't part of the transaction with *The Elephant*. Without the catering business, Wolhandler and Suser say, they don't need such a large building.

So, after more than 30 years at the location, they are preparing to part with it, though *bracing themselves* might be a more accurate phrase.

"This place has so many memories. I have a million stories," Wolhandler said yesterday, looking around the restaurant with its sloping wooden floor, Deborah Banker's trapeze artist sculpture over the bar and her brother's artwork on the walls.

But also, "it's a very emotional thing," she said of the sale. "It's incredibly emotional."



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The couple had been looking to sell the building and the business in preparation for eventual retirement, but they didn't know in what order that would happen, Suser explained.

"The first offer came from The Elephant to purchase the catering business and Silver Sacs," he said. "And then we proceeded to put the building up for sale."

The property dates from the 1800s and is located just south of the Washington Monument. It's listed with [Byrnes & Associates](#), a firm that specializes in commercial and investment real estate, primarily along the Charles Street corridor.

According to principal Brad Byrnes, the price is \$1.05 million. That includes the restaurant, a liquor license, two upper-level apartments and 14 parking spaces in the rear, with an address of 527 N. Lovegrove Street.

It also includes the building's history. Wolhandler and Suser said they first became tenants in the building in 1986, using part of the lower level for a catering kitchen from which they delivered food in "silver sacs" — their version of box lunches. Another tenant at 527 was the opera company. It was actually the second Charles Street location for the business, after the Park Plaza, where Wolhandler started out with Sascha's Crepes.

In 1997, they bought the 527 building and have since used the lower levels for both a restaurant and catering business.

Before they moved in, the building was Andre's, a high-end beauty parlor for high-society Baltimoreans. The first floor was lined with beauticians' stations for discerning patrons such as Wallis Warfield Simpson, the Baltimore woman for whom former King Edward VIII abdicated his throne to marry her.

"That was before she ran off with that foreigner," Wolhandler says. Wolhandler and Suser keep a postcard on their bar showing the space when it was Andre's salon.

Wolhandler and Suser are full of stories about the restaurant and the catering business. Wolhandler remembers that her first catering job was for publisher Reg Murphy at *The Baltimore Sun*, where she brought meals to the sixth-floor conference room for board meetings. One time, it was just Murphy and a single guest, NBC's Tom Brokaw.

Another time, she said, she brought Poisson en Papillote (fish baked in parchment packets) and the *Sun* executives didn't know how to eat it. As she was leaving the building following her delivery, she recalls, Murphy's assistant, Imogene Holtz, ran after her to show them.

"She always makes us something interesting," Wolhandler remembers one of the *Sun* executives remarking.

Suser recalls the filming of a "Diner" (1982) scene that portrayed Boogie Weinglass' character in a fight just outside the restaurant's front entrance. Wolhandler said producer David Simon used the cafe for at least one of his TV productions, but she doesn't remember if it was "Homicide: Life on the Street" or "The Wire," or both.

Wolhandler said she's catered every one of John Waters' Christmas parties, including the one he missed last year because he was in the hospital. She's catered for "House of Cards," "VEEP" and other locally made productions. For many years, she was the food service provider for Center Stage. She's had weeping brides and happy brides. She helped two people plan their own memorials.

When asked about their plans, Wolhandler and Suser say they're contingent on what happens with the building. For now, they're working with The Elephant on the catering business. Just yesterday, the pair helped a customer make plans for a wedding rehearsal dinner in June.

Wolhandler and Suser say they plan to keep operating the restaurant until the building is sold. The hours are Monday through Friday, 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. They don't intend to close abruptly, the way [Ware House 518 did](#) recently across the street. They don't want to be responsible for another empty storefront on Charles Street.

Beyond that, they say, they're willing to be flexible and work with a potential buyer. They've considered continuing to make chopped salads, one of their specialties.

"We're here for the foreseeable future," Suser said. "If and when the building is sold...it will be up to the future owner as to how the building will be used."

"We're not departing," Wolhandler said. "We're not going so quickly."

The building is zoned for commercial use. Suser said the most logical purchaser would be someone who wants to have a food operation there.



Wolhandler and Suser standing in their space, which is now listed for sale.

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"It's best used by someone ...in the food business," Suser said. "Opening a restaurant and possibly a catering business. That's what we did. It was an ideal use for us. It would be ideal for a creative food person who wants to set up in the midtown area."

Wolhandler said she's pleased with the way the catering transaction worked out. "I'm excited to see Sascha's continue, and I'm excited to see Mallory behind it," she said. "It's nice that it's still in Mount Vernon. It's nice that it's just up the street. It's nice that it's still called Sascha's."

Wolhandler said she has one goal before they leave the building entirely. "I am going to have a huge party, and I want to have a camera where everyone can tell their stories," she said.

"This building has been so good to me," she added. "It has great history. I can only wish that someone comes along that continues that great history. I can only wish that all the ghosts and spirits and lustiness that happened here will continue."



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