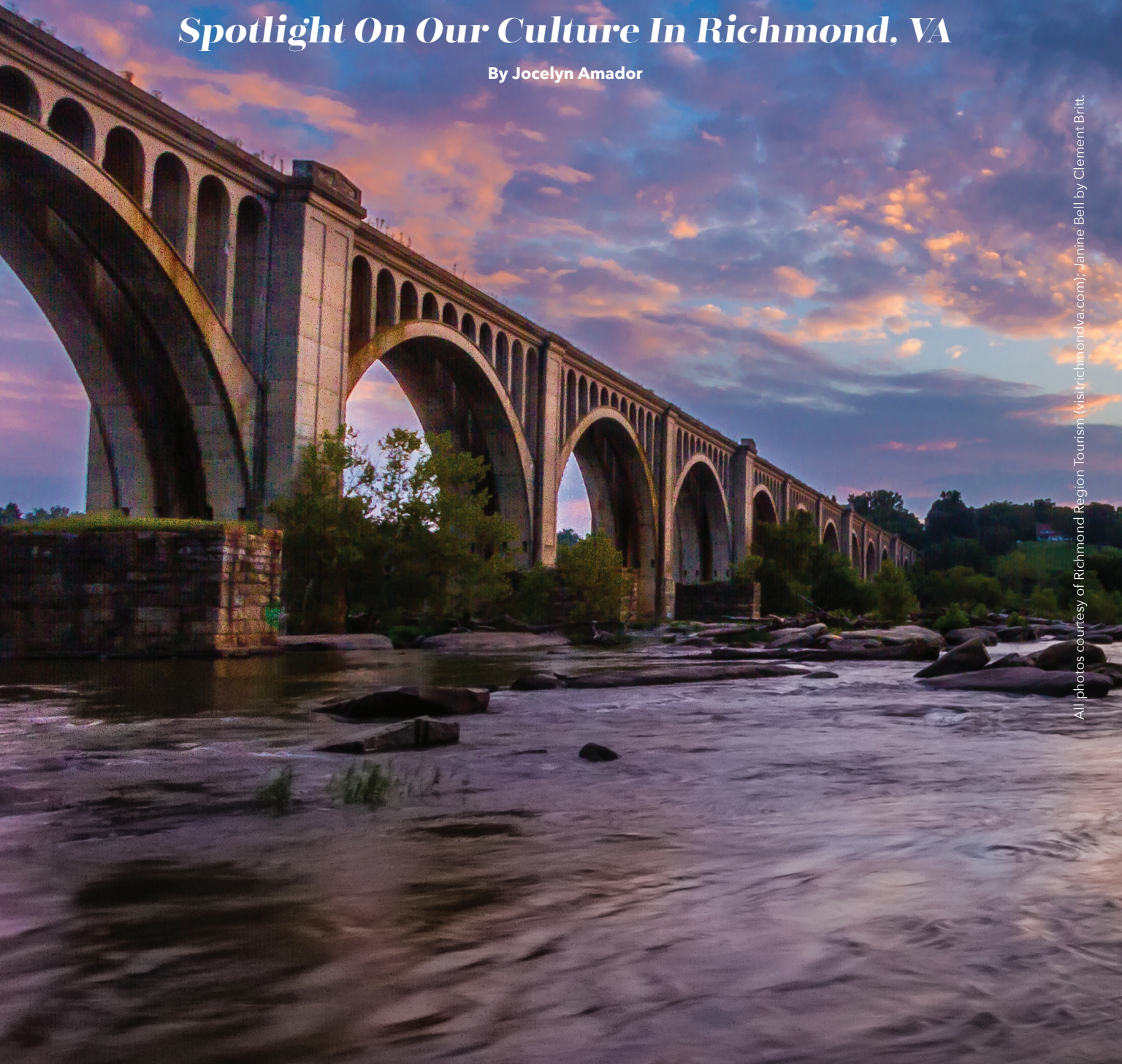


Travel

EXPERIENCE BLK RVA

Spotlight On Our Culture In Richmond, VA

By Jocelyn Amador



All photos courtesy of Richmond Region Tourism (visitrichmondva.com); Janine Bell by Clement Britt.

With Black History Month underway, a hidden-gem travel destination worth exploring is Richmond, VA (popularly known as RVA). Deeply ingrained with our history then and now, this southern city today offers a trove of culture and cuisine thanks to Black-owned businesses, renowned museums and a thriving art community devoted to showcasing Black creators. Here, *Upscale Magazine* turns the spotlight on the experiences that should be on your radar when visiting BLK RVA.

James River

Emancipation era



CULTURE

For lovers of history and art, these Richmond museums will excite and inspire... Don't let the castle-like facade and the building's former life as an armory dissuade you from discovering the treasures inside the Black History Museum & Cultural Center of Virginia (blackhistorymuseum.org). Far from stodgy, the museum's bright, state-of-the-art interior houses many artifacts (including items from enslavement's painful past) and tells the important stories of Black cultural achievements and entrepreneurship in Virginia—and its resulting contributions to the rest of the country. "Forging Freedom, Justice and Equality," a special exhibition running through April 2023 celebrating the museum's 40th anniversary, is a must see and worth making BHMVA a first stop during your visit to Richmond.

Another museum of note is the Institute For Contemporary Art (icavcu.org). Located on the Virginia Commonwealth University's Monroe Park Campus, the ever-changing exhibits, performances, films and programs make this free-admission museum popular with modern art enthusiasts.

Ready for a full-on art immersion? (We're talking permanent collections from almost every major world culture.) The Virginia Museum of Fine Arts (vmfa.museum) is it. Even before you enter the museum, its manicured grounds and outdoor sculptures deserve your time. Make a stop to gaze up at "Rumors of War." The 27 feet tall bronze equestrian statue of a loc-wearing Black man dressed in modern garb was created by artist Kehinde Wiley as a rebuttal to Confederate iconography. You will be awed.



The Black History Museum & Cultural Center of Virginia



CUISINE

Foodies are going to love indulging in the varied offerings from Richmond’s Black-owned restaurants. Here’s three that had us hungry for more...Located across the street from the historic home of Maggie L. Walker, the first Black woman to own a bank in the US, female-owned Southern Kitchen Restaurant (southernkitchenrva.net) has a well-earned reputation for serving some of the best soul food in the city. Proprietor Shane Roberts-Thomas’ mouthwatering menu and the resulting meals don’t disappoint—like the Fried Okra and Blackened Catfish washed down with Sweet Tea.

If you’re looking to catch a meal at Mama J’s (mamajskitchen.com) plan ahead because a line forms quickly at this family owned and operated establishment. The restaurant’s success is based on the time-tested soul food recipes of founder Velma Johnson (a.k.a. Mama J). Try the Fried Chicken (request “fried hard” for extra crispy skin) with a side of Collard Greens then finish with a generous serving of Peach Cobbler.

For a chic dining experience without the pretense, head over to ML Steak Modern Chophouse (mlsteakrva.com). The upscale decor frames an open kitchen allowing diners to view the choreography involved in crafting their meals as overseen by Chef Mike Lindsey, a star on the Richmond culinary scene with several restaurants under his Lindsey Food Group banner. Don’t miss out on the Filet Medallion Flight, a steak trio dressed three ways, and pair it with the Come Back And Dance cocktail (“guaranteed to make you want to shake that booty”).





Mending Walls "Say Their Names" mural

EXPERIENCE

If you seek an adventure truly unique to Richmond, look no further than these offerings...An art gallery, shopping experience and cultural center all in one, the Elegba Folklore Society (efsinc.org) celebrates the beauty and resilience of the Black community in Richmond. Under the leadership of Janine Bell, President and Artistic Director, the organization offers immersive experiences ranging from history tours to performance-lectures and workshops.

"Walking The Ward With Gary Flowers" (visitrichmondva.com/listing/walking-the-ward-with-gary-flowers/6665) is a great way to get your 10K steps in while absorbing stories about Richmond's Historic Jackson Ward. Moving at a brisk pace during the 20-stop walking tour, Flowers' ability to make the Ward's rich Black history and notable individuals come alive (like entrepreneurs and power couple Maggie and Armstead Walker, "the Beyoncé and Jay-Z of their day") is both entertaining and informative.

Finally walk, bike or drive to view the Insta-worthy The Mending Walls (mendingwallsrva.com) of Jackson Ward and the Museum District. This collection of public art murals was created by a diverse group of artists with the goal to open dialog about where we are in society today. And, as you'll pleasantly find after spending time here, it looks as though it's a conversation the city of Richmond is pursuing.



Elegba Folklore Society's President and Artistic Director Janine Bell



Mending Walls "Together We Rise" mural