

THE RELIABLE SOURCE

Rapper 2 Chainz's red-carpet proposal at the Met Gala wasn't a first. **c2**

BOOK WORLD

Three notable science fiction and fantasy novels for the month of May. **c4**

ARCHITECTURE REVIEW

Steven Holl's dramatic Markel Center is unlike any other Richmond building. **c9**

KENNEDY CENTER

The completion of the arts facility's expansion is now set for 2019. **c9**

Some people priced out of D.C.'s rental market turn to Airbnb for long-term housing



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: Sireenat Tengamnuy, left, and her twin sister, Sireenuch Tengamnuy, operate Capitol Square BnB, a hostel-style townhouse in Southeast Washington that the sisters rent out via Airbnb. Stephen Weiland, right, who has been a guest since December, sits in the common area. One of the rooms can accommodate five visitors, and Capitol Square has enough beds for 35 people.

T.J. KIRKPATRICK FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

Home, suite home

BY ELLEN MCCARTHY

Divisions exist in every social ecosystem. And on a recent Friday night inside the cement walls of a District rowhouse turned church turned hostel, two major camps emerged. There were the young French speakers who headed to their rooms toting backpacks only to emerge an hour later in jackets and heels en route to a wedding celebration. And there were the gentlemen on the slipcovered couches of the basement common area — eating noodles, watching wrestling, settling in.

The French-speaking folks were on their way out. The guys were already home.

Via Airbnb, you can rent a castle in Ireland, a treehouse in Nicaragua or a windmill in the Netherlands. You can also, it turns out, rent a bunk in a shared room near the Potomac Avenue Metro station for as little as \$30 a night. And you can stay for as long as you like. Maybe, even, indefinitely.

Stephen Weiland has been here since December. Mohammed Allaghabi since March. Dadsad Dixit is finishing up his second month. Omar Talpur is on week 17. They are buddies now — housemates who came for the free breakfasts and stay for the free shower gel. And, a little bit, for one another.

AIRBNB CONTINUED ON C3

Facts give way under Giuliani's media blitz



Margaret Sullivan

Dazzle 'em with discrepancies? Baffle 'em with baloney?

It wouldn't have seemed possible a mere week ago, but the Trump

administration's notorious problems with truth-telling have hit a new low.

And oddly enough, that might be on purpose.

Since last Wednesday's mind-bending appearance on Fox News Channel's "Hannity," Rudy Giuliani has blithely skipped from one media appearance to another without apparent regard for consistent adherence to the facts.

And then he proclaimed victory.

First, of course, he flatly contradicted his own client about hush money paid to Stormy Daniels, saying on "Hannity" last week that Trump had reimbursed attorney Michael Cohen for a \$130,000 payment to the porn actress who says she had an affair with Trump. (Trump had publicly denied knowing about the payment.)

Giuliani later told ABC News's George Stephanopoulos that he didn't even know if Trump had met Daniels — despite photographic evidence to the contrary.

Then he offered the firm conviction that the president might not need to comply with a subpoena from independent counsel Robert S. Mueller III.

He made statements one day and walked them back the next. He shrugged off the shocked reactions, saying he wasn't yet fully up to speed — only about halfway there.

"I am focused on the law
 SULLIVAN CONTINUED ON C3

BOOK WORLD

Tales of despair told from behind bars

BY RON CHARLES

More than a week before the release of Rachel Kushner's new novel, "The Mars Room," the New York Times published an excerpt in a special 12-page section. Hauntingly illustrated and

An Airbnb rental appeals to visitors who are in transition

AIRBNB FROM C1

"You can learn a lot from this guy," Dadsad says, pointing at Stephen, who is entering his daily expenditures — which so far totals one indulgent lunch at Chick-fil-A — into a handcrafted personal finance spreadsheet.

Stephen is a veteran of the Peace Corps who has a master's degree in sustainable development. He lives in the hostel because the District is expensive. Because permanent jobs here aren't guaranteed, but astronomical rents are. And because Airbnb rose to meet a need — not just for tourists, but also for people in transition. Those clawing their way up in the world, or out of a hole, or back to stability.

For them it's a fixed-rate, utilities-included, move-in-ready place to live. Security deposit and credit check not required. It isn't fancy, but it's an opportunity. Perhaps the only one they can afford.

Capitol Square BnB's entrance is on the side of the house, away from neighbors who might object to all the coming and going. Down 10 chipped steps to a black door. The code to the lock came via text message, along with a note stating that guests should remove their shoes upon arrival. A basket of communal slippers is on offer, but I brought my own.

An urban planning professor who analyzed Airbnb listings in New York City has argued that some of the rentals have become modern society's flophouses — the equivalent of Depression-era boardinghouses.

But this isn't quite that. It's too clean. Glade PlugIns fill every hallway with sugary freshness. Pop art hangs in the stairwell.

Another code unlocks my room for the night. The aesthetic is euro chic, with a hint of white-collar prison cell. Two sets of metal bunk beds, standard-issue orange blankets, an empty coat rack and junior-high-style lockers to store precious belongings. Also, one accent wall painted buttery yellow and long, sheer drapes across the windows.

All but one of the hostel's 10 rooms are en suite. At capacity, it hosts 35 guests. The bathrooms contain a sink, toilet, shower and, in my case, a pink-and-black tie-dye bra hanging from the towel rack. Privacy is not among the featured amenities.

I head to the basement. It's a fully stocked kitchen with two long tables, a few high-top tables and a couple of small couches positioned near a flat-screen TV. To the left is a laminated sign: "Sleeping on sofa is not allowed at ANYTIME." Make yourself comfortable, but not too comfortable.

At 5:15 p.m., \$14 glasses of rosé are being served at crowded bars around the city. But the hostel's common room is quiet, save for the shuffling slippers of one of the Thai American sisters who run the place. A 20-something man hovers over a laptop, and an older gentleman in gray socks and pants scrolls through his phone.

I introduce myself to Mohammed, and he says the guy with the laptop is one of his roommates, "but he doesn't speak English." Speaking English is Mohammed's primary objective. He teaches the language at home in Saudi Arabia and is spending a year in the United States improving his



skills. The rest of the people in his program live together, out in Fairfax. But they speak mostly Arabic to one another, and Mohammed, who is 40, married and has two kids, wanted a more immersive experience.

"Hey, Mohammed, how are you?" asks Stephen, who enters just before 6 p.m. After finishing his Peace Corps service in Gambia last summer, Stephen set his sights on Washington, where he hoped to find work with an international aid organization that might send him back to Africa. He booked this place through Airbnb — it got good ratings and the price was right for a guy moving to a city with no job.

"I lived in a hut with a thatched roof for two years," says Stephen, 36.

Here, "there's running water and electricity all the time." But in Gambia, life was about community and caring for one another. In the District he can't get people to even look up at him when he says hello.

Soon, Stephen and Mohammed are joined by Dadsad, an information technology administrator who grew up in Mumbai, moved to New York City and is working in the District on a project that should last until August, and Omar, a Pakistani doctor doing a volunteer externship at St. Elizabeths Hospital.

As Stephen cooks the Harris Teeter store-brand pasta he eats almost every night, Omar tells the others about a barber shop he found. "It's called Instyle salon. Twenty-four bucks only," he says.

In Washington, studio apartments often rent for \$1,500 or more per month. With the "Long Term Stay" discount at Capitol Square, these guys pay about half that, and they don't have to buy their own breakfast cereal.

At 8 p.m., Omar turns on a broadcast of professional wrestling, which he says is not really wrestling, but theater. And Dadsad tells Mohammed to become vegetarian — "Over here



TOP: Sisters Sireenuch Tengamnuy, left, and Sireenat Tengamnuy spent eight years redesigning the 2,200-square-foot townhouse into a hostel. ABOVE: Stephen Weiland, left, and John Maguire in the kitchen space of Capitol Square's common area.

you will not find halal, man."

Soon, the conversation between the four men — once strangers, now companions and guides to one another — turns philosophical. "Mohammed, let me ask you something. Answer me, truly," Dadsad says. "What is more important than yourself? What do you think is above you?"

For Mohammed, the answer is family. For Stephen, it is everyone. For Dadsad, it is no one. Omar has stepped away.

The hostel's current elder statesman isn't in tonight.

He has gone to the movies. But Sam doesn't like to mix it up too much, anyway. And he is embarrassed to be living here, so he doesn't want his last name used.

Fifteen years ago he had everything — a wife, a home, a thriving academic career. The marriage hit the skids and then, a while

later, so did the career. Sam hit the bottle. He moved from Washington to Nashville, where there was always a party.

Now, at 49, he is attempting to rebuild. "I'm the best-dressed guy you'll meet," he says, after chatting at a nearby coffee shop. But his clothes are across the river in a storage unit. He is trying to lose weight so he can fit into them again. He is trying to get healthy, get himself together, get away from the booze. (Which is prohibited at the hostel, anyway.)

For a month, he has slept in the same bed. "But I've never had a conversation with the guy in the bottom bunk," he says.

Sam has found project-based work in the District. He is taking workout classes and eating well and getting closer to his old wardrobe size.

"I think this is going to be my last month here," he says.

seems, into another universe.

There is no noise from the occupied bunk until I walk into the shower. And then: "Good morning, good morning, good morning!" she sings to a child on the other end of the phone.

Check-out time (for those who do check out), is 11 a.m. Before I leave I say, "Excuse me," in the direction of the occupied bunk and a middle-aged woman pops up with a big smile. She's a federal worker from Cincinnati, assigned to a year-long project in Washington. But the project didn't come with any increased housing allowance. She's a late worker and a heavy sleeper and frequent traveler; and here she has all she needs.

As I say goodbye, she lies down. For a while, at least, she has the room to herself.

Sireenat Tengamnuy bought the 2,200-square-foot townhouse in 2009 for less than \$400,000. She is a software engineer by training, but the plan was always to build this place with her twin sister, Sireenuch.

It took eight years to redesign it. To obtain the right permits, find the right contractors, get the business license in place. The hostel is in Southeast Washington, two blocks from Pennsylvania Avenue and a block from a housing project, in an area where developers gobble up properties, slap on fresh paint and walk away with six-figure profits.

The sisters traveled extensively in their youth and knew that a European-style hostel would work in the District. Except that overseas, visitors stay a night, maybe a week. Here, many of them reserve beds for a month at a time.

When they started out in 2009, there was no Airbnb. The phrase "gig economy" was just entering the lexicon. But as those phenomena bubbled to their apex, the Tengamnuy twins were ready. They opened their doors last September.

They are already booked up for the summer.

Opponents of Airbnb and similar companies say renting rooms and apartments for brief stays gobbles up living space that could ease the District's shortage of affordable housing and drives up rental rates.

Airbnb's defenders argue that the city's high housing costs have made it necessary for people to rent out rooms to earn enough money to remain in the District or to establish a foothold here.

As Saturday morning rolled into afternoon at Capitol Square BnB, Stephen, who recently started working at an aid organization, sat in the common room with Mohammed, showing him how to sign up for a money-saving Metro pass.

Sam was back, eating baby carrots while he watched a show on his laptop.

And outside, real estate signs went up down the block, listing two-bedroom condos for \$650,000. Less than a mile away, at Eastern Market, packs of millennials held coffee cups, pulling out credit cards for artisanal treasures they never knew they needed. And the sun beat down on all of the city.

But it takes a minute, as you emerge from the hostel, for your eyes to adjust to the light.

ellen.mccarthy@washpost.com