

# THE NORTHWEST CURRENT

## *Wagshal's set to open Wesley Heights market New location takes its cue from Spanish marketplaces*

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When local landmark Wagshal's Delicatessen opens its second location at New Mexico Avenue this spring, the new store will have a uniquely European — and eco-friendly — atmosphere.

That's because owner Bill Fuchs has devoted the past year to developing a cafe and deli that captures the essence of authentic Spanish "mercados" — markets where shoppers socialize, eat and buy groceries from experts in fresh ingredients.

Wagshal's, originally opened by Sam Wagshal at 9th and G streets NW in 1925, is known for gourmet eats that have fed former U.S. presi-



Bill Petros/The Current

**Owners have designed the new location with a European flair.**

dents including Harry S. Truman, Gerald Ford and Richard Nixon — earning it the moniker "The President's Deli."

Longtime customer Fuchs bought the delicatessen in 1990 after he

"finally got the gumption" to ask Sam Wagshal's son, Sam, if he would sell the business.

Wagshal's currently has one flagship location on the 4800 block of Massachusetts Avenue, though it is divided into a separate market and delicatessen. It also operates a rapidly expanding catering company, Spring Valley Catering.

While the Massachusetts Avenue store remains a throwback to the traditional D.C. deli established almost a century ago, Fuchs has decided to forge a new identity at the 4,000 square-foot space at 3201 New Mexico Ave., formerly home to gourmet grocery market Balducci's.

"We didn't want to try to replicate exactly the same feel and look of those locations," he said. "It's an icon, and we don't want to jeopardize that feeling."

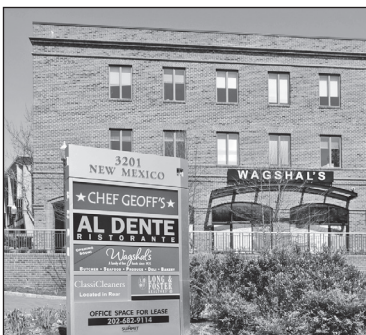
Instead, Fuchs and his team traveled around Barcelona and Madrid, and quickly fell in love with the Spanish marketplaces — then set to work capturing that atmosphere at their new store.

Fuchs imported terra-cotta tiles to mount on the store's 15-foot ceilings to simulate the clay roofs at the Spanish mercados, and installed steel poles and beams to emulate the look of the market stands.

The Wagshal's team is also taking unique steps to make customer service more personal.

In 2007, Wagshal's launched an importing business, and became the exclusive importers of the award-winning Ibérico de Bellota pork cultivated by Fermín, a family-owned firm based in Salamanca, Spain.

For the new store, Fuchs has also opted to import glass dividers from Portugal that are about 40 inches lower than typical deli or food counters. During travels in Europe for the importing business, he found that customers and butchers were not stuck on opposite sides of large glass cases at grocery stores. "It's almost like a jewelry case — all glass," he said of the Portuguese versions. "You can literally be talking to the person [behind the counter] face-to-face." The goal is to make the customers and retailers "friendlier and more in tune to each other, [rather] than just having someone's hand coming over the counter," he said. The Wesley Heights location will also feature a sit-down restaurant, with between 45 and 50 seats inside and another 40 seats outside in the farmers market during the growing season, when the market will offer locally grown produce.



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**The new Wagshal's will occupy part of the former Balducci's.**

Wagshal's is also applying for a hybrid Class C liquor license — which allows sales of beer, wine and spirits for on-premises consumption — with Class B license components (which allows grocery stores and wholesale markets to sell beer and wine), similar to a license held by Whole Foods. But the liquor license isn't a priority right now, Fuchs said. "Alcohol is a very small part of our business. We'll probably open without that, but we will probably have applied for it by the end of this month."

The new Wagshal's will also come with a few "surprises," he said. His chefs have developed a new recipe for half-smoke sausages and hamburgers, and the market will offer a bar of freshly picked condiments, as well as a homemade gelato section.

"We really feel we can offer a wide variety of things for customers rather than just sandwiches," Fuchs said.

And at its new location, Wagshal's is committed to going green. Fuchs said his team is working to provide electricity through wind power, with "smart" compressors programmed to pump energy through the refrigeration system only as needed. The flooring is reclaimed barn wood, the tables are glued-together butcher blocks, and the utensils are made from scrap metal. An electric vehicle will make food deliveries.

Originally from Germany, Fuchs moved to New York when he was 12 — and learned all of his butchering skills from his relatives. "I remember when my grandfather was slaughtering pigs up in the attic," he said.

While the new location was projected to open in early April, Fuchs said he now aims for the end of the month. Some elements are moving slowly, he said, like the Portuguese food cases that just landed in Baltimore last week. And the storefront is still covered — though spokesperson Ellen Siegel said some of the coverings will come down before long to allow neighbors a peek inside.

"We are working diligently to open as quickly as we can," Fuchs said. "It really depends if all the stars are aligning properly."