

# JOHNERICHOME™

Magazine

Real Estate and Lifestyle Magazine  
September 2013, Volume 15  
DC | VA | MD

## Bernardo SILES

COVER STORY

Artistry Through Life

The Green Book: A Brief History

The Queen of the Southwest: Santa Fe, New Mexico

Your Bed, Your Sanctuary

The Napa vs. Sonoma Showdown

Secrets of The Lafayette

A Walk Through the National Gallery's Garden

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WASHINGTON | VIRGINIA | MARYLAND

John Eric



1206 30th Street, NW | Washington, DC 20007  
C: 703.798.0097 | O:202.333.1212 | E: john@johneric.com | www.johneric.com



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A Special Feature on the Residence of the Italian Ambassador

# JOHN ERIC HOME

I'm an extrovert! I truly enjoy, no, actually, I love talking to people. I'm a sponge when it comes to finding out what people think and feel, and what makes them tick. We each have a story, a past, and a point of view that make us who we are today and shapes where we are headed in the future.

The Washington region is comprised of some truly amazing and fascinating people. These Washingtonians have experiences and stories to tell and we are excited to share them with our readers. The *John Eric Home* September issue is our very first profile and cover of an outstanding local Washingtonian and artist, Bernardo Siles. Bernardo's amazing journey began in Bolivia; his life was shaped by family, politics and safety concerns which led him and his family to other countries in South America and Europe. He finally landed in Washington where he found love, friendship, a new home and a renewed reconnection with his passion for painting and creating art.

I feel privileged that Bernardo is sharing his story with *John Eric Home* and its readers. His truly personal story will draw you in and shed light on the amazing art he produces.

Have you heard of Washington's social bible, The Green Book? We have a fascinating story on the history of this Washington institution. In "Expressions," we get to spend time in the lovely Sculpture Garden of the National Gallery of Art.

In "Foodie," we are delighted to feature the amazing recipes of The Lafayette at The Hay-Adams. "Mixology" brings us the best of Scotch based cocktails. In "Home Trends," it's Bedding 101. In "Stylist" Men, it's all about Fall Fashion and what's in for the season.

In "Vineyard," it's the ultimate showdown of Napa vs. Sonoma. Personally, I think we should declare a tie and just enjoy and drink. In "Tech," we profile how devices are getting the bling treatment. And, in "Money & Finance," it's part III of Marc Schliefer's series, "Castles and Moats."

Are you looking for a great getaway this fall? In "Destinations," we visit the wonderful world of Santa Fe. And, as always, in "Premium Listings," I showcase some of my amazing listings.

I hope that you will read this edition from cover to cover and then pass it to a friend. Enjoy!

Best,  
John Eric  
Publisher, Principal and Realtor

# JOHNERICHOME™ Magazine

Publisher **JOHN ERIC**

Managing Editor **ANGELA CASEY**

Senior Editor-at-Large **LK**

Creative Director **HILLARY BROADWATER**

Photography **AM & SEAN SHANAHAN**

## CONTACT

### EDITORIAL

e-mail | [angela@johneric.com](mailto:angela@johneric.com)

### ADVERTISING

phone | 703.798.0097

### ONLINE

[www.johneric.com](http://www.johneric.com)

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**JOHN ERIC**  
WASHINGTON, D.C.

# Bernardo SILES

Artistry Through Life



Our personal histories define us. Through them, our characters, our beliefs, our choices and our voices are firmly rooted. They provide the lens through which we see life. Often times, these histories transgress the boundaries of one's own little world. They can be interpreted by others. They can be interpreted by oneself for others. They paint the canvases that represent our lives. What happens when an artist with an extraordinary personal history interprets his life through brush and canvas? Meet Bernardo Siles and find out ...



I WANT TRANSLUCENCY, LIGHT, COLOR AND CLARITY TO BE AN ESSENTIAL PART OF THE VIEWER'S EXPERIENCE.

The personal history of Bernardo Siles is uncommon. Not many can boast of having to live in a political family. Or, of having to protect their father's life at the age of 13. Fewer still are those that can claim their father as a former president of a South American country. Or, their grandfather for that matter. Add elements such as hopscotching around the globe and living in various South American and European countries. Of becoming a respected architect and giving it all up to pursue a career in art. As paint is layered on a canvas to produce a visual effect, so the layers of one's life create a living canvas. The composition reflecting the life of Bernardo Siles comes sharply into focus.

"I can say that having been born and raised in a very political family has defined many aspects of my life. Both sides of my family have been very active and influential in Bolivian politics. But, through my father I learned much about the enormous value of democracy, justice, human rights for all."



*Inauguration Day, Presidential Palace, La Paz, 1969*

Bernardo Siles' father, Luis Adolfo Siles Salinas, was born with politics in his blood. The son of former president Hernando Siles Reyes (1926–1930) and half-brother of two-time president, Hernán Siles Zuazo (1956–1960 and 1982–1985), he was selected by the Eisenhower Fellowships in 1955 to represent Bolivia. Joining the small Partido Social Demócrata (Social Democratic Party), he supported René Barrientos in the 1966 elections. When Barrientos won, Siles became the Vice-President of Bolivia. When a helicopter crash took the life of Barrientos, Siles took over the presidency in 1969.

Luis Adolfo Siles Salinas' presidency was cut short. Then, Commander of the Armed Forces, General Alfredo Ovando, consistently undercut him in attempts to seize power. These challenges were rooted in Ovando's disagreements with the previous Barrientos' administration and the subsequent support that Siles gave the mayor of La Paz, Armando Escobar Uria in the next election. (Bolivian law does not allow the direct re-election of a sitting president.) Ovando decided not to wait for elections and launched a coup on September 26, 1969, overthrowing Siles and, with him, Bolivian democracy. The Siles family was then exiled to Chile. However, returning to Bolivia during the dictatorship of Hugo Banzer (1971–78), Siles played a prominent role as a defender of human rights. He is internationally recognized for his steadfast stance in defense of democratic principles in Bolivia.



*Luis Adolfo Siles Salinas, addressing the United Nations, 1969*







"There was so much turmoil growing up," says Bernardo Siles. "So much anxiety, pain, anguish and tension as a result of the various circumstances my family was put through. We lived through some very traumatic experiences. Being exiled to Santiago, Chile. Upon our return to Bolivia a couple of years later, the witnessing of a bloody military coup by Hugo Banzer. I saw the bloody bodies of university students being thrown onto trucks and anguished over whether they were dead or not. Then, when my father became the leader of the opposition to restore democracy back in Bolivia, the threats my family received. The one nefarious incident was when close to forty armed militia came to our house to apprehend my father. This traumatic incident marked me forever as I hid my father in a narrow space behind built-in bookshelves that I had to very quickly move myself and then faced the armed men with their machine guns pointing at my mother, my eight-year old sister, my ten year old cousin and myself. I was only 13. Protecting my father's life is my proudest achievement."

Life in exile is difficult. Especially, if you are a young child. However, it was during this period that Bernardo Siles naturally developed a childhood hobby into a passion. This passion would remain with him through the rest of his life.

"I had painted throughout my life," says Siles, "and taken various classes since I was a child and with some remarkable teachers. I had done figure painting, portraits, landscapes and still life. As a child, I was so devastated when we were exiled that my mother thought putting me in a painting class would be good therapy. And I loved every minute of it. My teacher in Santiago, Sara Puelma, was a formidable woman who felt the pain I was going through as an eight-year old child and taught me to express my feelings with a brush and color."

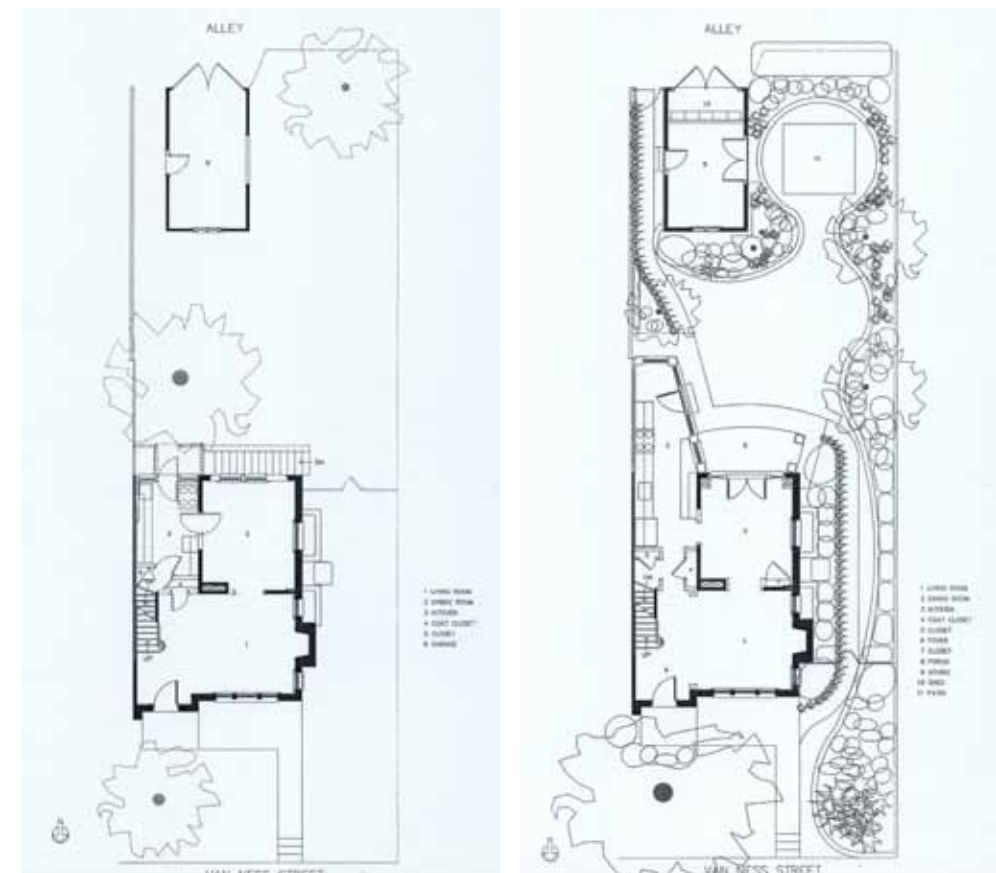
This love carried Siles into his eventual career as an architect and then further along as an artist. To recognize this passion and inherent ability at such a young age is impressive.

"I had two passions growing up," says Siles. "I had an innate ability to draw well from an early age. So, drawing well and having a natural love for art and architecture, I knew at a very young age that I wanted to be either an architect or a painter. I had it in my heart that I would do well in either path I would take.

My father steered me into architecture because it promised a 'secure' future. So after graduating from high school I went to Universidad Mayor



Architecture school 1982, Bernardo Siles top center.



Before and after architectural renderings of Bernardo Siles home.





de San Andres in La Paz, Bolivia to study architecture. Politics had gotten a hold of the university and I decided I would not get very far there. My brother and many of my friends were studying at the University of Arkansas in Fayetteville. I applied and after a very rigorous first year of pre-architecture, I entered the school and graduated with my five year architecture degree.”

After spending time in Madrid, where his father served as ambassador, Siles moved to Washington in December of 1985. His sister lived in the area and he chose the District as the place where he wanted to establish himself. He did so by first obtaining a solid job and then a partner.

“I came out in my fourth year in the school of architecture. But officially came out to my parents while we lived in Madrid. Not an easy experience but the initial shock of my family gave way to all their love and support. Three years after moving to DC I met Tim.” Siles describes his partner as his anchor and the two have remained together through and through. Through his career as architect and his transition to artist.

“I practiced architecture in the DC area for most of my life,” says Siles. “I had worked at various firms in all aspects of architecture and various types of projects - commercial, residential, corporate, government, health care, education, base building and interiors. My projects were primarily in the DC Metropolitan Area but I had various projects in Chicago, Philadelphia, New York, Canada, Bolivia and Abu Dhabi.”

In 2008, Siles was working on a commercial/residential project in Abu Dhabi when the downward spiraling global economy caused the developer of the site to pull funding. Although Siles enjoyed success as an architect, his childhood passion of painting never abated. He used the experience to implement change in his life and return to this passion.

Breaking into the business of art is not an easy task. It takes not only skill but a track record to be taken seriously.



*Bernardo's father serving as ambassador to Spain, 1983*

Artists must prove their viability to a fickle public through exhibitions and commissions. While Siles both studied and worked as an architect, he had unknowingly been building a portfolio on the side.

“While we lived in Madrid I was commissioned to design a medal in bronze with the likeness of Mariscal Andres Santa Cruz, president of the Confederacion Peru-Boliviana, my great-great grandfather. Also, in 1996, my father had asked me to paint his likeness for the Galeria de Presidentes at the Casa de la Moneda in Sucre, the capital of Bolivia. I was deeply touched that he had asked me to do this for him. And after a couple of mock-ups I proceeded to do a final portrait of him based on many photographs from the time when he was president.

During the 1990's I worked on a number of figurative drawings that derive from classic works by Michelangelo and yet with a fresh new take on color and composition. They have excruciating detail. They were part of my first solo exhibit I had at Gallery Plan b in 2012.”

There is an innate enthusiasm that artists draw upon when creating their pieces. This enthusiasm spurs them to creatively translate their emotional dispositions to canvas, paper or other mediums to invoke feelings. Although, Siles was endowed with this inherent enthusiasm since a young child, good artistry takes work. It involves studying, witnessing, practicing and then, finally, creating. Once, Siles chose his new path, he let nothing stop him in his pursuit.

“Over time I had been exploring different ways to express my art and also took painting and sculpture classes. I was



eager to make the switch. I had longed to pursue that dream to paint I had as a child. And as much as I enjoyed the various classical painting techniques and compositions, I had this fire inside to materialize an array of the abstract compositions to better reflect my own emotions.

I practiced and practiced and practiced various techniques of oil painting until I came up with my own. I had a very specific imagery goal and technique in mind. And little by little, day after day I was determined to reach my goal."

This artist uses his pedigree in architecture for technical development in his work. His 23 plus years in that industry have taught him a tremendous amount of both discipline and process. And, it shows.

Siles says, "I take advantage of the aspects and methodology to bring to life my concepts of paintings. And I take advantage of very basic elements in architecture - light, color, transparency, depth - everything."

Of course, artists have influences and Siles is no different. From Piet Mondrian - "His very clear definition of each and every one of the elements in his compositions have played a big role in my work, whether figurative or abstract" to Charles Sheeler - "His geometries, architecture, precision, color, light and shadow have been a huge influence on me" to Gene Davis to the Washington Color School - "His use of line as a vehicle for color are instrumental in my work" and Ellsworth Kelly - "His hard edged and minimalist paintings." Siles combines the distinct methods of each artist to which he pairs his own technique. This creates works that are almost ephemeral in nature but weighted at the same time. And, his creative process takes time. Siles is not one to throw oils on a canvas without precise thought.

"It is a very long process," he says. "I work through every piece I make, from concept to final painting. My process is largely based on my architectural training and experience. And yet, I apply all that knowledge in a fresh, spontaneous and playful way. I have used existing technologies in ways they were not imagined. And I pride myself in that my work is very much of its era.

Each piece has its own meaning and mood. I observe and derive from various settings I am in and I do so in a very encompassing way. I blend the mood of the place, the colors, the light and the type of energy of that setting and I always, always incorporate music into that setting.

Music of any kind is one of the primary influences on any piece I do. Primarily classical. I derive much energy from Johann Sebastian Bach! And Antonio Vivaldi! But, I also come up with wonderful compositions inspired by the Bossa Nova genre and Latin music and everything in between. Music affects me tremendously."

Bernardo Siles translates his personal history through his canvases. He uses his childhood, young adulthood and manhood to depict through art his experiences. It not only shows but motivates his style of painting.

"I hate confusion!" he exclaims. "Yet, there is confusion everywhere, in so many settings and circumstances. I seek clarity in confusion. I like to define elements for what they really are. There is also the aspect of me wanting to make everything nice and perfect and simple as a vindication to all the malice I had witnessed and sadness I lived through. My compositions and colors reflect emotions - radiant arrangements and vibrant hues or calming displays and soothing colors. I realize my paintings are the only thing I have control over."



Bernardo Siles Studio

Siles next exhibition will show the pieces his fans have favored with a twist. "I decided to inject Latin color and energy into my work via color and compositions. I am very pleased with the blend of my Washington and Latin influences!"

When asked what he would like the viewer to take from his pieces, Siles seeks knowledge and growth for both himself and others. "Every viewer has her/his own reaction to my pieces. I am always fascinated by the comments I hear and I enjoy them all. I learn from their comments. I want to excite the viewer. I want to peak their interest. I want them to observe the composition from a distance and I also want them to get close and intimate with the piece by observing the level of detail all around. I want them to delight in all the various conditions and colors that are created as a result of the various elements and juxtapositions. I want translucency, light, color and clarity to be an essential part of the viewer's experience. I want them to do a double take. I want them to remember the piece when they leave. I want them to smile or contemplate the piece.

That is quite a tall order. Fortunately, Bernardo Siles delivers.

gallery plan b is mounting a solo exhibition by Bernardo Siles. *John Eric Home* will announce the date when it has been made public.

Visit [www.galleryplanb.com/artists/bernardo-siles/artist.html](http://www.galleryplanb.com/artists/bernardo-siles/artist.html) for more information.

