

[Back to Article](#)

Hay-Adams Opens Author Events to the Public

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Roll Call Staff

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Imagine sipping wine on a hotel rooftop that happens to be smack-dab in front of the White House. Add a well-dressed crowd and the hum of intelligent conversation centered on books, and what do you get?

You get the Hay-Adams Hotel's revamped author series.

Built in the 1920s, the historic hotel (at 16th and H streets Northwest) recently opened its quarterly book club, the Hay-Adams Author Series, to the public. The previously invitation-only luncheons bring historians, novelists and journalists to talk about their books over a three-course meal and wine.

The Hay-Adams sits before Lafayette Park, a block from the front of the White House. The rooftop view is unmatched by any hotel in D.C., with its unobstructed view of the president's home and the Eisenhower Executive Office Building.

Last week, the rooftop — nicknamed Top of the Hay — opened to the public for the first time during the series with an event featuring Ron Chernow, author of "Washington: A Life."

With his back to the White House and the Washington Monument and the Jefferson Memorial peeking out from the skyline beyond, Chernow told jokes about George Washington's dentures and poked fun at the president's odd journal entries that detailed the exact number of "fashionable ladies" he spotted that evening.

The Hay-Adams sits where the homes of John Hay, personal secretary to President Abraham Lincoln and former secretary of State, and historian Henry Adams, descendant of Presidents John Adams and John Quincy Adams, used to be. Both men hosted soirees at which Washingtonians gathered to talk politics and literature, inviting distinguished guests such as Mark Twain and Edith Wharton.

Hotel President Kay Enokido started the series in 2005 because she said she wanted to "rejuvenate" the tradition of intellectual conversation.

Thus far, the series has honored well-known authors, including Pulitzer Prize finalist Patricia O'Toole, author of "When Trumpets Call: Theodore Roosevelt after the White House"; Robert Merry for his book "Sands of Empire"; and best-selling author John Grisham for "The Associate." The hotel even welcomed President George W. Bush during his presidency when his daughter, Jenna Bush, led a talk on her book, "Ana's Story: A Journey of Hope."

Now, the series is hosted on the hotel's rooftop, which underwent construction from June 2010 to January. Before Top of the Hay was built, guests who ate dinner on the roof were exposed to the elements, and employees covered the roof with a tent to block out the cold in the winter.

But Top of the Hay now features a built-in shelter, decorated in cream, gold and light green carpets, wallpaper and curtains that frame the floor-to-ceiling windows. A grand piano sits in the corner. Fresh flowers burst from table centerpieces.

The 3,200-square-foot Top of the Hay is lined with an outdoor terrace, inviting guests to saunter outside despite the chill.

A mix of 130 businessmen and women, politicians, historians, academics and lawyers — all united by their love of books — attended this year's first sold-out author series.

Alan Porter's love of history drew him to the series. The lawyer at K&L Gates called the luncheon a "high-end show."

"Events like these are one of the reasons Washington, D.C., is such a great place to be," Porter said. "All of the well-known historians and academics come to the Hill to lecture."

Erin Pinckney, director of marketing at Comcast Spotlight D.C., came to the event to network and meet new acquaintances. One couple flew from Indiana to see Top of the Hay. Another couple who owns a vineyard and hotel in Virginia attended the series for the third time.

The next Hay-Adams Author Series event is tentatively scheduled for June. The organizers have extended an invitation to two-time Pulitzer Prize winner David McCullough, author of "1776," "John Adams" and "Truman."

Each luncheon costs \$85. To learn more about the series, visit hayadams.com and click on the Author Series tab.



Courtesy Katie Garlock/Hay-Adams Hotel

The Hay-Adams Hotel rooftop — called Top of the Hay — is set up for an author series event last week.

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