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PREVIEW – VISIT – INTERNATIONAL SPY MUSEUM

Article by Jan Tegler

The Secret History of History
Learn All About the Unseen World of Spying and Intelligence Gathering at The International Spy Museum in Washington D.C.
Interior Images Courtesy of International Spy Museum

Some people might think of history as done, permanent, set in stone. But the reality is that history — as taught in schools and covered in the media — is continually interpreted and reinterpreted. Researchers, scholars, and authors revise the public record of generations past and of our own as new information comes to light. More often than we realize, however, there are stories behind the “official” versions of history we know — tales that cannot be told for a variety of reasons.

Since ancient times, espionage has influenced the course of history. Shedding light on the unseen world of spying and intelligence gathering is the mission of the International Spy Museum (ISM). Hiding in plain sight just a few blocks from the U.S. Capitol in Washington D.C., the ISM is the only public museum of its kind in the world, giving a global perspective on the craft, practice, history, and contemporary role of espionage.

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Opened in July 2002, the museum was conceived in the mid-1990s by Milton Maltz. Chairman of the Malrite Company and a founder of the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame, Maltz served with the National Security Agency as a young enlisted man in the U.S. Navy. Throughout his career in business he maintained an interest in intelligence and thought Americans should have a better idea of its role in history.

Over the course of seven years he brought together leading experts and practitioners from the intelligence community to aid in the creation of the one-of-a-kind museum. The ISM's Advisory Board of Directors includes former directors of the CIA, FBI, and MI5, as well as a former KGB Chief, the president of the Center for Counterintelligence and Security Studies, a renowned expert in the history of cryptology, and the CIA's ex-chief of disguise, among others.

The cleverly curated museum has been a hit, drawing 600,000 to 700,000 visitors per year.

"I like the idea of trying to give a holistic view of espionage to the public," Executive Director Peter Earnest says. "We're providing insight into the different aspects of intelligence in an informative and engaging way."

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International Spy Museum



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