

IFR

IN-FLIGHT REVIEW

The View Up Here

Helijet's Flight-Seeing
Season Lifts Off

Point of Protocol

Lt.-Gov. Steven L. Point

The Spirit of Sail

Self Discovery
for Youth
at Sea

COMPLIMENTARY

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BC
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 A Helijet Sikorsky S-76A lifts off from the Vancouver Harbour Heliport, en route to Victoria.

Photo: Jeff Wilson

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How Time Flies

By Daniel Sitnam, President and CEO, Helijet

*Danny Sitnam*

IT'S SOMETIMES EASY for me to forget that Helijet has been flying for more than 22 years. I often look around our Vancouver hangar and marvel at how the faces here have become like family. When you work with people as dedicated and passionate as these, two decades can pass in the blink of an eye.

When we started flying in 1986, we had a vision and one helicopter. We flew just one route—Vancouver/Victoria—and were Canada's first scheduled helicopter service. Since then, we've grown to a publicly traded company with a fleet of 10 helicopters and airplanes. Sightseeing flights, charters, cargo services and even flying for the film and television industry have all become part of our daily work.

In recent years, we've diversified further by becoming the largest provider of air ambulance services in British Columbia.

Every year, Helijet flies more than 600 adult and infant patients to and from hospitals across the province with our Sikorsky S-76 helicopters and Learjet air ambulances.

Caring for passengers and responding to the communities we serve is a responsibility we don't take lightly. In recent years, British Columbians have begun paying more attention to green issues and sustainable living, and accordingly, Helijet is keeping pace with expectations. To that end, we've just launched an online, paperless booking system to lessen our environmental footprint. It's one of many small steps we're taking in the right direction and I'm sure passengers will find it offers them more flexibility and ease of use.

To be sure, commercial aviation is a dynamic and ever-changing industry, with little room for those who don't adapt. Change is the name of the game, and over the past two decades we've undergone some pretty dramatic transformations to make sure Helijet remains a fixture in the sky above Vancouver and Victoria. We've come a long way over the years, but the one constant all along has been the dedication of our employees and the loyalty of our customers. On behalf of everyone here at Helijet, thanks for flying with us and welcome aboard. ✈️

Retire? Who? Me?

Dave McLean, Senior Director of Sales

By Katie Nanton



DAVE MCLEAN has over four decades of airline experience, and it shows in his business mindset: “An airline seat is probably one of the most perishable products in the world,” he observes. “When that plane takes off and a seat isn’t filled, it is gone forever.”

Helijet’s Prince George-born and Vancouver-raised Senior Director of Sales started at the company in 1999, bringing with him 32 years of experience working for Canadian Airlines International (formerly Canadian Pacific Airlines). McLean honed his talents at Canadian, but his last 10 years involved a lot of traveling, living in a near constant state of jetlag. “An airline job is not so much a job as it is a lifestyle,” he says.

Adjusting to multiple time zones is no longer an issue with Helijet, where McLean deals with government, travel agencies, cruise lines and various corporations on a daily basis. In many ways, his work in sales is similar to what he did at Canadian Airlines, but with one

notable difference: “[Helijet] has a very efficient, streamlined system; that is one of the major benefits that comes with working for a small, close-knit organization.” He adds, “We can make a decision fast and work on it.”

Away from the office, McLean has a variety of earthbound interests. In 1999 he took up tenor sax in a local ensemble, the Bruce James Orchestra, and he moonlights as a part-time instructor at the Art Institute of Vancouver where he teaches college level business courses, passing on his wealth of experience to another generation.

After so many years in aviation, McLean says he looks forward to the quasi-settled lifestyle of a retiree, indulging his love of music and teaching. And having retired from Canadian with airline travel benefits, he plans to travel extensively with his wife. When the time is right, he says, “I’d like to take my wife to India to see the Taj Mahal – now that’s a building that takes your breath away.” 🐬

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whistler.com/dine

MAY 4

BMO BANK OF MONTREAL VANCOUVER MARATHON

Elite runners and casual walkers alike combine at the starting line of the 37th annual BMO Vancouver Marathon.

vanmarathon.ca

MAY 12 TO 19

VANCOUVER INTERNATIONAL CHILDREN'S FESTIVAL

A week-long celebration of performing arts for youngsters.

childrensfestival.ca

MAY 16

CHINATOWN NIGHT MARKET

Shades of the Middle Kingdom go on sale as another summer season of the Night Market opens for business.

vancouver-chinatown.com

MAY 17

ALL BRITISH FIELD MEET OF CLASSICAL CARS

VanDusen Botanical Garden hosts 600 vehicles at this annual celebration of the British motorcar and motorbike over the Victoria Day weekend.

westerndriver.com/abfm

MAY 29 TO SEPTEMBER 27

BARD ON THE BEACH

The summer season of Shakespeare kicks off in Vancouver's Vanier Park.

bardonthebeach.org

MAY 29

KRAZY!

The Vancouver Art Gallery's newest exhibit, *Krazy! The Delirious World Of Anime + Comics + Video Games + Art*, redefines the scope of visual culture in the 21st century with a dynamic glimpse into the artistic subculture of comics, animated cartoons, anime, manga, graphic novels and computer/video games.

vanartgallery.bc.ca



MAY 31 TO JUNE 7

WHISTLER WELLNESS WEEK

Get in shape and commune with the cosmos during a week of wellness activities in Whistler.

whistlerwellness.com

JUNE 4 TO 14

MAGNETIC NORTH THEATRE FESTIVAL

Embarrassed and ashamed of your unilingual heritage? No longer! Anglophones can take pride at the 6th annual Magnetic North Theatre Festival of English Canadian Theatre.

magneticnorthfestival.ca

May 17:
All British
Field Meet of
Classical Cars

Photo:
Cam Hutchins

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VANCOUVER BG TRIATHLON
WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP

This year's 20th anniversary of the Vancouver Triathlon World Championships at English Bay is the final Olympic qualifier for Canadian athletes trying to earn selection for the Canadian Olympic team going to Beijing.
triathlonvancouver.com

JUNE 12 TO 24
FESTIVAL D'ÉTÉ FRANCOPHONE
DE VANCOUVER

Get in touch with your Gallic side during this two-week festival of French culture.
lecentre culturel.com

JUNE 21 & 22
RIO TINTO ALCAN DRAGON
BOAT FESTIVAL

The waters of False Creek will be churning to the beat and stroke of thousands of paddles at the first major Canadian dragon boat race of the 2008 season.
adbf.com

June 21 & 22: Rio Tinto Alcan Dragon Boat Festival

Photo: Anita Webster

JUNE 22
SCOTIABANK VANCOUVER
HALF-MARATHON & 5K

You have to admire a race that bills itself "Canada's easiest scenic half-marathon".
canadarunningseries.com

JUNE 28
VANCOUVER PRIDE SEASON

Vancouver kicks off the 2008 Pride Season with a summer schedule of events and celebrations leading up to the Pride Parade on August 3.
vancouverpride.ca

JUNE 20 TO 29
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Victoria & Vancouver Island



May 24 to 26:
Swiftsure
International
Yacht Race

CONTINUING TO MAY 31 EMILY CARR COMMUNITY FESTIVAL OF THE ARTS AND ECOLOGY

A celebration of the eco-cultural legacy of artist and author Emily Carr.
emilycarrfestival.ca

MAY 10 TARTAN PARADE

As a prelude to this year's 71st Victoria Highland Games & Celtic Festival, pipe bands and highland dancers parade from the Provincial Legislature up Government Street to Centennial Square for colourful demonstrations of singing, piping and highland dancing.

victoriahighlandgames.com

MAY 17 & 18 71ST VICTORIA HIGHLAND GAMES & CELTIC FESTIVAL

Sons and daughters of the Old Sod come to gather at Victoria's Topaz Park for two days of Celtic culture, including highland dancing, bagpipe and drum competitions, sheep dog herding, caber throwing, and, of course, whiskey tasting.

victoriahighlandgames.com

MAY 14 TO 16 VANCOUVER ISLAND INTERNATIONAL CHILDREN'S FESTIVAL

An abundance of performances, activities and workshops delivers sensory overload for the wee ones. (*Nanaimo festival takes place May 11 to 13.*)

childrensfestival.com

MAY 19 ISLAND FARMS VICTORIA DAY PARADE

The provincial capital's eponymous parade draws thousands of local and out-of-town spectators for this popular annual event, sponsored by Island Farms.

tourism-victoria.com

MAY 24 TO 26 SWIFTSURE INTERNATIONAL YACHT RACE

The venerable highlight of the Royal Victoria Yacht Club's annual racing calendar is this year's 65th annual running of the Swiftsure International Yacht Race.

swiftsure.org

MAY 25 SUBARU SHAWNIGAN LAKE INTERNATIONAL HALF IRON

The Canadian triathlon season gets underway with a chilly 500m swim in Shawnigan lake, a 22km bike around the lake and a 5km jaunt along the Cowichan Valley trail.

lifesport.ca ShawniganLakeHalfIron2008.htm

MAY 30 TO AUGUST 24 WARHOL: LARGER THAN LIFE

The Art Gallery of Greater Victoria prolongs Warhol's 15 minutes of fame with a three-month exhibit of works by the renowned American artist who defined and personified 20th Century Pop Art.

aggv.bc.ca



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May 17 & 18: 71st Victoria Highland Games & Celtic Festival

JUNE 2 TO 8 BIKE TO WORK WEEK

Cities and towns across Vancouver Island band together over the course of a six-day work week to promote the commuting benefits of the bicycle.

biketowork.ca

JUNE 5 TO 8 ST. ANN'S ACADEMY 150 CELEBRATIONS

A special sesquicentennial celebration of St. Ann's Academy includes a historic re-enactment of the 1858 arrival of the Sisters of St. Ann's.

friendsofstannacademy.com

JUNE 6 TO 8 TOFINO FOOD & WINE FESTIVAL

Foodies and wine lovers savour three days of sensory delight.

tofinofoodandwinefestival.com

JUNE 14 TO 15 COMOX VALLEY SHELLFISH FESTIVAL

Celebrate B.C.'s bivalves at the 2nd Annual Comox Valley Shellfish Festival.

harbourliving.ca/festivals

JUNE 20 TO 22 VANCOUVER ISLAND'S 6TH ANNUAL AFRO-CARIBBEAN CARNIVAL

Victoria's Selkirk Waterfront comes alive with the sights, sounds and vibrations of Africa and the Caribbean during the 6th annual celebration of this cultural event.

ahavi.ca

JUNE 20 TO 22 Sooke River Bluegrass Festival

You don't have to travel far from the bright lights of Victoria to find yourself in banjo country.

sookebluegrass.com

JUNE 20 TO 29 JAZZFEST

Ten hot days and cool nights of the coolest music in town, with over 80 jazz performances around Victoria.

jazzvictoria.ca

JUNE 22 NEW BALANCE VICTORIA HALF IRON

Elk Lake is the site of this low-key and popular competition.

island-multi-sports.com

JUNE 26 TO 29 TALL SHIPS FESTIVAL

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tallshipsvictoria.ca

JUNE 29 TO JULY 6 VICTORIA PRIDE WEEK 2008

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victoriapridesociety.org

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A Whirlybird's-Eye View

On May 15 Helijet launches another season of spectacular scenic heli-tour adventures.

By Garth Eichel

AS THE OLD SAYING GOES, “If you’re going to do something, do it right.” Accordingly, if you want the best vantage possible of Vancouver and the Coast Mountains, there is no better way to view both than from a helicopter.

Depending on the size of your group, Helijet can organize a customized charter flight using different sized aircraft from any of our locations. That said, we operate two distinct package tours on a regular basis from the downtown Vancouver Heliport.

The *West Coast Spectacular* is a grand 20-minute local flight past Stanley Park, over the Lions Gate Bridge, then along the rugged coastline to Horseshoe Bay. From there a gentle climb lifts you between the twin peaks of The Lions, unveiling a panorama

of the Coast Mountains beyond. Returning to the Heliport, you pass over verdant mountain valleys and the waters of Capilano Lake before touching back down in Vancouver Harbour.

Alternatively, the *Great Vancouver Scenic* is a 30-minute tour that provides a unique aerial perspective of the area’s most prominent sights. Lifting off past the iconic sails of Canada Place, your flight heads past Stanley Park and the Lions Gate Bridge towards Lighthouse Park, before proceeding north up Howe Sound to greet the majestic Stawamus Chief standing guard high above the town of Squamish. This flight is remarkable for expansive mountain vistas and views of West Coast rainforest.

Both flights are operated using our spacious five-passenger

Bell 206L LongRanger, which gives everyone aboard an unparalleled view not found in other aircraft. Every guest has their own headset so they can speak with the pilot and each other as points of interest come into view.

In addition, Helijet operates other scenic tours, including *Crown Mountain*, *Lion’s Peak*, *Coastal Scenic* and, depending on snow levels, the *Grand Glacier* tour. And if you happen to be atop *Grouse Mountain*, there are daily tours departing from the helipad near the Peak Chalet, between 11:00 and 18:00.

Whatever tour you choose, you can be sure the experience will provide you, your family and friends with an intimate and unforgettable experience of one of the most dramatic land-, sea- and cityscapes in the world. 🇨🇦

Weather permitting, downtown Heliport flights depart every day at 09:30, 10:00 and 10:30. Reservations are recommended. Grouse Mountain tours are sold on a first-come, first-served walk-up basis; reservations are not accepted. For more information, please call Helijet Charters at 1.800.987.4354



Galiano Getaway

Largely undeveloped and lightly populated, Galiano Island is one of the most unspoiled destinations in the Southern Gulf Islands.

By Garth Eichel

EVER GET THE FEELING you want to escape everything and everyone around you? Not forever, of course; just a few days of solitude and tranquility, free from those who depend on you all the bleeding time. As a rule, I am a far better person if I periodically retreat from society and go somewhere remote to realign my perspective. Fortunately, this lovely Lotus Land of ours has no shortage of such places, all readily accessible within a few hours' travel.

On a Thursday afternoon in late April I decide to knock off

work early and treat myself to an impromptu long weekend on Galiano Island in the Southern Gulf Islands. The sailing from Swartz Bay is on one of those sunny, sweater-weather days that make you feel like you should be congratulated for living on the West Coast. The ocean is calm as a lake and I enjoy my Earl Grey tea on deck as the ferry rumbles comfortably through the archipelago, past idyllic lighthouses and fat seals sunning on rocky outcrops.

Turning into Active Pass, the channel between Galiano and

Mayne Island, the sea comes to life as millions of gallons of seawater accelerate through the narrows with the constant ebb and flow of the tide. The wild rush of ocean churns up baitfish below, making the length of the pass a 24-hour all-you-can-eat buffet line for every variety of creature, including eagles, salmon, seals and sea lions, right up the food chain to Dall's porpoise and killer whales.

At the east entrance to Active Pass is Sturdies Bay harbour. At first blush, it is rather unimpressive: just a small collection of

ABOVE: The Galiano Inn offers five-star treatment without ostentation.

Photo: Helen Schnare



gorgeous homes way, way out of my income bracket. However, one place that stands out on shore is the Galiano Inn, a manicured hotel that houses the Atrevida restaurant and Madrona del Mar Spa and Wellness Retreat. All perfect for someone suffering from a passing case of entitlement.

The Inn is no more than a hundred yards from the dock, and the short walk makes for a pleasant stroll through downtown Sturdies Bay, which consists of a general store, post office, a gift shop, the local watering hole and the world's hippest book store. While Sturdies Bay is a bit on the "earthy" side, the grounds of the Inn are tasteful and sophisticated, without being ostentatious. There is a delightful courtyard with a fountain, surrounded by arbutus

trees, cherry blossoms and local palms. Further on is a garden with spring flowers in bloom, koi-filled ponds and assorted native greenery.

Outside the hotel lobby, I am greeted by "Humphrey Bogart," the resident cat, who tries to use me as a Trojan Horse to sneak inside. The Inn's co-owner, Conny Nordin, intervenes and gently chases off the tabby with a mild reproach. Conny, who operates the Inn with her partner, Mel Gibb, is an elegant lady whom you can't help but like immediately.

She shows me to my "spa suite," a ground-floor room looking out over the harbour. The interior décor is distinctly West Coast and furnished with exquisite artwork produced by local artists. There is a wood fireplace all ready to

light and a number of other amenities, including a fold-out spa table for in-room massage treatments. Sweeeeet.

After a quick nap and a shower, I head for dinner in the Atrevida restaurant. The small dining area is intimate and comfortable, offering an expansive view of Active Pass with its ongoing silent slide show of passing ferries. The Atrevida has a surprisingly limited menu, which suggests the chef is either limited in ability, or really good at what he does. Fortunately, it's the latter. Just as skilled is Atrevida's sommelier, Richard Massey, who will probably forget more about wine than I will ever learn. While I'm waiting for my Mediterranean Rack of Lamb, he introduces me to a couple of superb B.C. wines,

TOP: The reward of a hike (or drive) to the bluffs overlooking Active Pass, one of the best vantages of the Southern Gulf Islands.

Photo: Helen Schnare

ABOVE RIGHT: Marine life abounds in the waters around Galiano Island.

Photo: Helen Schnare

ABOVE LEFT: Deer are a common sight on Galiano Island.

Photo: Helen Schnare

including a refreshing Alderlea 2006 Pinot Gris and a jazzy CedarCreek 2006 Dry Riesling.

When the main course arrives, Massey pairs my meal with an Alderlea 2004 Clarinet. The balanced red, with its hint of pepper, is an excellent match with the smoked paprika of the crusted lamb, accompanied with caramelized lentils and cherry tomatoes. In the distance, the Georgia Point lighthouse on Mayne Island winks at me as if in knowing approval.

The next morning I wake early and set off to explore the southern end of the island on foot. Not much stirs on Galiano at 6:30 a.m. and the hike up to the bluffs overlooking Active Pass is a solitary one. Other than the sound of my breathing and heartbeat, a light breeze in the evergreens is the only thing to be heard. After an hour of easy hiking, I reach the bluffs with their commanding view of the Gulf Islands and watch the sun come up in the east. The place is wild and still. Peaceful.

Feeling considerably improved, I start back down towards Sturdies Bay. I still see no signs of life on the island yet, until I round a corner and interrupt three does gathered together in the road. They seem annoyed, as if I've intruded on a private conversation. Clearly, I am nothing to be concerned with and they saunter off into the bush. Watching the whole exchange a short distance away is a ridiculously huge sea otter, still wet from the ocean. He, too, is unimpressed.

By 8:30 I am starting to get concerned that I haven't encountered a single human being. Finally, I hear engine noise in the distance and am reassured to


see a vehicle approaching. It's a 1970s Volkswagen van, painted with daisy flowers and peace symbols. Well, this is the Gulf Islands, after all.

Certainly, the Islands are famous for their aging hippies, but many are also world-class artists. I decide to visit a few local studios and am impressed by the range and quality of work, including the peculiar ceramic pottery of Sandra Dolph and Bill Boyd and the inspired glasswork of Marcia DeVicque. These artists are no lightweights making wind-chimes out of beer cans; their work is sophisticated and can stand up in urban galleries anywhere.

After a life-affirming hike and a dose of arts and culture, I head back to the Inn and indulge at the spa. The Madrona del Mar offers a number of original treatments, but as a red-blooded male I'm not sure I'm quite ready for the "Blueberry Bliss" or "Chocolate Addiction" experience. The "Healthy Hemp" package crosses my mind, but in the end I settle on a mineral salts flotation bath that does wonders for aching muscles and rattled nerves.


Of course, all good things must come to an end. After a couple days of sightseeing, trekking and beachcombing, it's time to return to society. With the enthusiasm of a kid returning to school after summer break, I drag myself back on the ferry home. Pulling away from the dock, I feel a certain melancholy at leaving the isolation and tranquility of the island, but I have a sense I'll be seeing Conny, "Bogart" and the folks at the Inn again before long. When I return, I'll probably bring a companion. But then again, maybe I'll be selfish and keep this sanctuary to myself. ➔

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The SPIRIT OF SAIL

Two 18th-century-designed schooners provide a world of self-discovery for youth at sea.

Story by Garth Eichel

NICHOLAS IS 13 YEARS OLD, but quick to note that he is “almost 14.” He has never been on a sailboat in his entire life, but after a week crewing aboard *Pacific Swift*, a square-topsail schooner operated by the Victoria-based Sail and Life Training Society (SALTS), he talks and moves about the classic tall ship with the comfort of one born to sea air.

It didn't start out that way, though: “The first day aboard, I didn't know what anything was... and I couldn't sleep at night because of the ship noise and all my bunkmates moving around me. By mid-week, I was starting to know all the sails and lines, and I was getting used to life on board.” With an enthusiastic grin, he adds, “My favourite part of the ship is up on the whiskers, near the jib-boom. Up there I can see everything, and I can feel the wind more than anywhere else on the ship.”

Nicholas is not alone. He is one of more than two dozen teenagers — “trainees” — from a Surrey school who are spending their spring break learning to sail and live together aboard a tall ship that is part floating classroom and part micro-society. Over five days together, they learn traditional sailing skills, but, more importantly, they realize what it means to be part of a greater community. In the process, they discover a lot about themselves and what they are capable of.

Seagoing Society

Founded in 1974, SALTS is a non-profit organization geared towards teaching youth seafaring and life skills aboard two traditional schooners, *Pacific Swift* and *Pacific Grace*.

At its core, SALTS is a non-denominational Christian organization, focused on instilling values and character in kids, regardless of their personal beliefs. Indeed, aside from saying grace before meals and a simple Sunday service when at sea, there is little obvious evidence of religion on the vessels; social talk around the ship's wheel revolves more around playoff hockey than theology.

Built by SALTS using traditional methods, *Pacific Swift* and *Pacific Grace* are both based on original 18th-century schooner designs. Construction on *Swift* began over 20 years ago when she was a working exhibit

at Expo '86, and *Grace* was built in SALTS's Heritage Shipyard in Victoria between 1993 and 2001. Since being launched, both schooners have sailed all over the world with young trainees, sometimes away for up to a year at a time.

When not offshore on extended voyages, both ships provide five- to 10-day coastal sail training programs for young people between the ages of 13 and 25. At present, *Pacific Grace* is at sea, returning to Victoria after a year-long voyage of Asia and the South Pacific. In her absence, *Pacific Swift* has been tasked with the short-term coastal program, sailing the waters around Vancouver Island.

Far From the Mall

On the final day of this five-day program, Nicholas and his fellow Grade 8 crewmates are finishing up the last of their seamanship exercises and test requirements. Almost all are clad in hoodies and sweatpants and look like they just came from the mall or local skateboard park, but with one notable difference: they are an unusually cheerful pack of adolescents, thoroughly engaged in every aspect of the ship. In fact, there isn't a brooding or sullen teenager in the bunch, though several are a little green around the gills and still reaching for the Graval.

OPPOSITE: Nicholas, a Grade 8 student from Surrey, perches on the bowsprit of Pacific Swift — a place he can enjoy his own company, survey the ocean and feel the wind.

Photo: Garth Eichel

BELOW: SALTS trainees pull together to hoist Pacific Swift's foresail.

Photo: Erin Kelley Gedisch





Pacific Swift flies her courses with a following wind.

Photo: Sail And Life Training Society

Thirteen-year-old Steven seems like a rather shy kid, but after a half-hour at the helm, steering the heaving ship on a broad reach in a freshening breeze, it is plain to see that he is focused and feeling more sure of himself than he did an hour ago. Meanwhile, Jessica, 14, is conquering her fear of heights by climbing the ratlines up to the foremast cross-trees. There is the occasional frightened squeal at first, but after 20 minutes she finally

makes her way aloft, swaying comfortably 40 feet above the deck. You can just make out her pink toque at the yardarm.

Down below, there is less glamorous work to be done. The Port Watch is on galley duty, and after a big pasta lunch there are dozens of dishes to be cleaned. Lisa, Matthaus, Karli and Sammy are all busy scrubbing away, singing lines from “Stand By Me” to pass the time. They all agree the experience on board the SALTS ship has been memorable and a huge thrill. Each relates their own unique highlight during the voyage, but one thing they all share is a genuine affection for the regular crew who have shepherded them through the Southern Gulf Islands for the past week. All feel they have accomplished something worthwhile and each wants to come back to sail again.

By Sea and By Land

Pacific Swift’s Master, John Andrachuk, made his first voyage on a SALTS schooner at the age of 12, which is awfully young to discover your life’s calling. Now, at the remarkable age of 26, he is skipper of an 81-foot topsail schooner, and thus responsible for all 35 souls on board.

Not surprisingly, Andrachuk is mature beyond his years. Constantly alert to the surrounding sea, mercurial weather and the movements of his ship and crew, the “Skipper” has a relaxed and affable manner that encourages trainees to open up and ask questions. At the same time, he and his regular crew challenge the kids and expect them to perform at a high standard, because life aboard a SALTS’s schooner is no cruise vacation. Each year, approximately 2,000 young trainees participate in the experience. They have a full educational curriculum while at sea, learning everything from seamanship skills, chart work, and pilotage to sail theory, galley chores and, of course, knot tying, among other things.

“It’s a very tangible, hands-on education where they can apply what they learned five minutes later,” says Andrachuk. “It’s not uncommon to see a kid who doesn’t excel in the classroom really shine when we get them working on the ship.”



ABOVE: First Mate Antony Dickinson works his way out the main boom of Pacific Grace to adjust rigging while en route to Hawaii from Victoria.

Photo: Jose LaRoche

ABOVE RIGHT: Thirteen-year-old Steven receives helm instructions from Pacific Swift's skipper, John Andrachuk.

Photo: Garth Eichel



Learning respect and co-operating with others is a principal tenet of the coastal program, but so too is raising expectations for trainees. Second Mate Radine DeWitt says, "These days, so many kids are listless and focused on TV and video games. On board we try to instill a work ethic where everyone has to pull their own weight. Sailing skills may be unique to the ocean, but the underlying principles — relationships, working as part of a team and realizing your capabilities — can be applied at home and at school."

DeWitt is realistic. She knows five or 10 days at sea isn't necessarily a pivotal life experience for most kids, but she feels it can make a difference. "The biggest change we see in kids is self-confidence. They really come away with a sense of who they are and what they can do." She adds, "If you set high standards for youth, they will reach it every time." 🐦

However, as any skipper knows, it is one thing to be a good sailor, another to be a functioning member of a crew. As such, the Skipper says SALTS programs stress the importance of being part of a sea-going community. "A ship is a great place to encourage kids and teach them how to build relationships. The level of care they have for their shipmates increases dramatically while at sea; they develop a more outward focus towards their fellow crew."

Pacific Swift

Rig: Topsail Schooner
Accommodation: 37 berths
Coastal Complement:
 5 crew, 30 trainees
Offshore Complement:
 6 crew, 21 trainees
Sparred Length: 111'
Length Overall: 81'
Beam: 20' 6"
Draft: 10' 6"
Displacement: 98 tons



Pacific Grace

Rig: Gaff Schooner
Accommodation: 38 berths
Coastal Complement:
 5 crew, 31 trainees
Offshore Complement:
 6 crew, 24 trainees
Length Overall: 115'
Beam: 22'
Draft: 11' 6"
Displacement: 175 tons



POINT OF PROTOCOL



Their Honours Gwendolyn Point and Steven Lewis Point, British Columbia's 28th lieutenant-governor.

Photo by John Yanyshyn, Visions West Photography

His Honour Steven L. Point brings a fresh First Nations perspective to his role as B.C.'s 28th Lieutenant-Governor.

Story by Isabel Nanton

GARDENS HAVE, in recent years, linked British Columbia's lieutenant-governors. Iona Campagnolo liked to potter in the Government House garden, chuckling privately to herself when busloads of overseas visitors mistook her for hired garden help. And before her, David Lam consulted with Queen Elizabeth when he made changes to the garden at Government House. The House's current residents, Their Honours Steven Point and his wife Gwendolyn Point, are no exceptions.

Born in Chillwack, Point grew up on a Fraser Valley farm. Not surprisingly, he appreciates the 36 acres of rose gardens, ducks and Garry Oaks of Government House where he and Gwendolyn often fulfill their myriad duties and also take time to unwind, from a hectic schedule.

"I like to decompress in the wild part of this garden," says Point. "I've seen a five-point buck there with his harem of two does. I like to go and sit there; it takes me back to the Valley, back to the mountains and rivers. It gives me time to relax."

Intellectually, Gwendolyn Point is also drawn back to the Fraser Valley where she is an Instructor in the History Department and the School of Social Work and Human Services at University College of the Fraser Valley. Concurrent with her teaching and her duties as Chatelaine, she is also completing her PhD in First Nations' Education of the Chilliwack/Sto:lo Fraser peoples at Simon Fraser University.

Sworn in as British Columbia's 28th lieutenant-governor on October 1, 2007, Point's appointment came after his work as Chief Commissioner of the British Columbia Treaty Commission. A lawyer by training and later appointed a provincial court judge in 1999, Point was also an elected chief of the Skowkale First Nation, and served as tribal chair of the Sto:lo Nation government and was honoured as Grand Chief by the chiefs of the Sto:lo tribal council.

"As a Sto:lo chief I did a lot of socializing on a regular basis, lunching from Langley to Hope. Now I am extending that leadership role to the whole province of B.C.," he observes, while describing evenings in



Victoria packed with lots of entertaining. As patrons of 80 organizations, ranging from the opera to Air Cadets, the Points can be found presiding at afternoon teas, then formal dinners with folk like the RCMP, teachers' associations, former parliamentarians and "elders," as Point calls all seniors.

When he describes a day in his current life, Point's time as a Sto:lo chief filters into his conversation. His eyes light up as he describes recently hosting tea for 200 Victoria elders who were entertained by school choirs — reverence and respect for seniors being a pillar of First Nation culture and identity. His Honour is also proud to show pictures in his office of his four children and 12 grandchildren, acknowledging that family and one's place in the family unit is another key tenet of First Nations' life.

The reign of monarchy dictates dignity and a devotion to serving every citizen — to be their voice and to hear their heart for others to know and feel. And as the Queen's representative in British Columbia, Lt.-Gov. Point presents a relaxed, accessible demeanour that belies his packed working days.

His Honour Steven L. Point reviews the honour guard at his installation as lieutenant-governor at the B.C. Legislature Buildings.

Photo by John Yanyshyn, Visions West Photography



His Honour meets with representatives of the Comox Indian Band.

Photo courtesy of the Office of the Lieutenant-Governor

Typically, by the time Government House staff arrive at 8 a.m., the Points have made their own breakfast (he puts on the coffee, Gwendolyn makes tea), then the protocol begins. There are embassy and core diplomatic staff from countries visiting Western Canada to be greeted before taking up their Ottawa posts. Gifts are exchanged (Rosemary Neering's excellent book on Government House is a favourite), then tea may be taken in the Drawing Room, complete with photographs and a handshake.

His Honour's signature is used for royal assent on all constitutional matters, so when the house is sitting, there is a steady stream of documents to sign from the Legislature and Premier's office, judges to be appointed, orders-in-council set. In the evening, dinners typically run from 6:30 – 9 p.m. "One or two events is a short day," muses Point.

Then there are the university convocations, art gallery openings, and honoured guests to receive. Should the Royal Family stop by, there is a Royal Suite overlooking the bay, one of the 103 rooms that comprise Government House.

But B.C. is big territory and Lt.-Gov. Points' duties are not confined to Victoria or even the Lower Mainland. This summer he is hoping to tour the West Coast with the navy, enabling him to visit numerous coastal communities. "I'm really looking forward to exploring the province," says the man from the Valley.

And it was in the Valley that a Grade 8 Sardis Secondary School home-room classmate identified Point's leadership capabilities. "Steve was easily the most popular kid in the class," she says today. "We always felt there was something different about him. He always had this huge smile on his face and we were all drawn to his warm glow. Often he would drum his hands quietly under his desk. Fast-forward to today, when I heard he had been appointed our lieutenant-governor, I could almost have predicted that he would be our man in Victoria and that time or success would never change who he was." 🐾



Lt.-Gov. Steven Point (right) shares a laugh with Premier Gordon Campbell during the opening of the B.C. Legislature.

Photo courtesy of the Office of the Lieutenant-Governor



The Power of Place

Connecting with a profound personal space revitalizes the mind and soul.

By Star Weiss

DO YOU HAVE A PLACE you go to that refreshes, re-energizes, and re-centres you? A place from which you emerge stronger and better able to carry on with a productive, full life? Many people do, and if you don't, you may want to start thinking about the benefits of such a place. A sacred place, where you find renewal and healing, can play an important part in helping you balance your life and offers a time to slow down and concentrate on what is important — to give yourself breathing room.

A favourite place of solace and refreshment may be almost anywhere, from a small chapel, to the centre of a labyrinth, to a child's bedside, but it is clear that a large number of people turn to nature for inspiration and renewal. After listening to dozens of British Columbians talk about their chosen places, I'm convinced that having a personal sacred place contributes to a healthier lifestyle.

In fact, I'm so sure that I've just spent the better part of the last two years working on a

recently released book, *Havens in a Hectic World: Finding Sacred Places* (TouchWood Editions, Spring, 2008), which examines the ways the spiritual geography of the West Coast affects us.

What did I learn? In a milieu where nature itself is often considered sacred, people find wonder in the natural world that enriches and gives meaning to their lives. We are nourished spiritually, intellectually, emotionally, and physically by being attentive to the landscape.

Lower Myra Falls, near Campbell River, B.C.

Photo: Star Weiss



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Mountaintops, bodies of water, and our ancient forests are places that revitalize our souls.

As my friend and lifelong outdoorswoman Linette Smith puts it, “At the simplest level, observing nature helps us to feel more connected to something greater.” Smith’s sanctuary is Pacific Spirit Park in Vancouver, where she walks or runs nearly every day. She says that entering the park is “like walking through a curtain into a totally different space. When I go in there, I don’t like to talk. I like to go in there and just listen — to nature and to my inner voices. It’s a wonderful, ever-changing feast for the eyes.”

University of Victoria chaplain Henri Lock, who took part in a “Tree of Life Celebration” in the rainforests of Vancouver Island a few years ago, remembers standing under the canopy of an 800-year-old Douglas fir with hundreds of other people, and feeling the roots and “phenomenal biomass” beneath him, while Victoria’s Gettin’ Higher Choir sang. It was, Lock says, a “profound, worshipful experience, one of the portals to the sacred, something much larger than ourselves.”

Artist Robert Bateman says one of his favourite places is an opening in the forest near his home on Salt Spring Island, where an old maple tree creates a cathedral-like setting under a huge arch. He loves the volume of empty space under it, and says it’s “a place to pray, think of hopes and dreams.” Poet Patrick Lane affirms that he has found “tremendous peace” in old-growth forests.

When we become aware of the delineations that set a

place apart, we find how much we appreciate the experience of being separated from the daily routine, and how it nourishes us. For some people, of course, that happens in a house of worship. Bernice Packford, one of the longest-serving members of Congregation Emanu-El in Victoria, says, “I walk in there and the synagogue just suffuses me.” The sense of place, Packford says, is “powerful... I get a feeling in that building, an aura.”

“Certain places have an aura of spirit, of peace, of well-being,” adds Charles Joerin, Manager of Spiritual Care for the Vancouver Island Health Authority, and a longtime fan of Queenswood retreat centre in Cadboro Bay. “The grounds and building of Queenswood have it... Lots of people have made life decisions there.”

My terminally ill friend Sharon Hall found her place of healing and re-energizing at Myra Falls, a cascading series of falls that tumble 70 metres down cliffs into Buttle Lake in Strathcona Provincial Park. Her return there one summer day was “a coming home,” she said, a rediscovery of an energy that gave her strength. “I can just feel it going through me... a cleansing. It’s a feeling that stays with me, a feeling of peace.” After her trip to the falls, Sharon told me she was “emotionally and spiritually feeling just fantastic. It is a wonderful feeling reconnecting with myself.”

When Sharon died nearly two years later, I honoured her last request by returning to the falls with my husband, Russ, to scatter Sharon’s ashes there.



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Water is often a place of transformation and renewal. When I asked CBC radio host Shelagh Rogers to tell me about the place she feels is sacred to her, her response was, “Strangely, my sacred place is Locarno Beach in Vancouver. I say ‘strangely’ because it isn’t very secluded, and in the summer it is positively ripping with people.

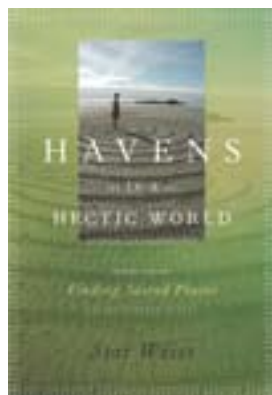
“But for me [in the fall] especially, I love going to the beach and slipping into the water. I wear a wetsuit so I can do this all year long, and it is especially restorative in fall and winter because there are so few people around. I love being weightless in the water... I love splashing around like a kid. I love just floating and staring at the mountains or the sky. Once or twice, a seal has come to join me and that was a profound thrill. It’s like swimming in the biggest pool of them all. I always emerge feeling serene and purified, and reborn from the water.”

On a personal note, one of my favourite sacred places to slow down, feel a sense of peace, and reconnect to something greater is my writing hut, a tiny eight-foot by eight-foot shed located on the hillside above my Metchosin home.

I’ve started to think in terms of our need as a society for “hutedness,” the essence of which includes tranquility, beauty, simplicity, mindfulness, connectedness, creativity, repose, and solitude. My hut represents my own creative corner of the universe, and that’s part of what I cherish, but there is something more: the transformation that occurs

with each three-minute walk through the cool, green forest, up, up, brushing past patches of lush, thick moss, meandering up the winding path. It is a thankfulness ritual, a meditation, a rejoicing.

Over time, my hut has become a touchstone, my place of refuge. I’ve gone there when illness struck the family and I needed to find strength; I’ve taken friends there to share in my joy on a quiet summer’s evening; and every spring, I await the arrival of waves of wildflowers, first the purple satin flowers, next the hopeful white Easter lilies with their fawn-mottled leaves, then brilliant pink shooting stars, spring gold, sea blush, and the radiant blue camas. A carefully woven carpet of yellow and pink and blue. My little hut has taught me that when we recognize the *genius loci* (spirit of place), we may gain access to the deepest part of ourselves. 🐦



Adapted especially for In-Flight Review, the above story is based on excerpts from the author’s new book, *Havens in a Hectic World: Finding Sacred Places* (TouchWood Editions, Spring, 2008), now available at bookstores.

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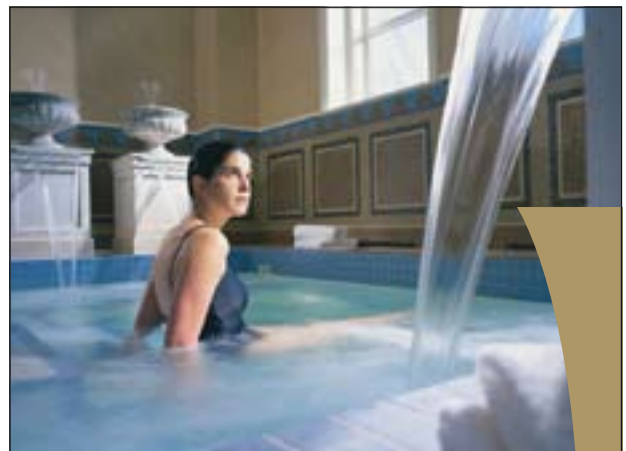
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Luminous Lifestyle

Nick Milkovich and Arthur Erickson combine light and life into a pair of 2010 Olympic Village buildings on the shores of False Creek.

By Isabel Nanton

“WE DON’T COMPETE with nature; we try to blend with, and respect, what’s there,” says Vancouver architect Nick Milkovich. Indeed, every architect deals with the demands of location, and Parcels Four (Athletes’ Housing) and Eleven (Community Centre) of the 2010 Olympic Village on the south slope of Vancouver’s False Creek are no exception.

Over the past four decades, Milkovich has collaborated with Arthur Erickson, another Vancouver architectural icon, designing and overseeing construction of some of the city’s

great landmarks, such as the Museum of Anthropology. This year marks their 40th year working together, and it is fitting that their current project is an Olympic design.

Born in Strathcona, B.C., in 1939, Milkovich spent three seminal years in Europe as a lad when his family returned to their native Yugoslavia at the end of the Second World War. A cousin studying architecture there took time to teach the ten-year-old Milkovich simple perspective drawings. A fast study, he also watched the army building “quick bridges” out of logs, which he

replicated in miniature. This fascination with scale models “lit a fuse” that led to a professional career in architecture.

Now 69, Milkovich sits in a light-saturated Vancouver office, where he delicately explains his scale models of the Olympic Village’s anchor buildings. “I always felt I could build anything, and Arthur appreciated my construction savvy. The ‘how to’ is fun and easy,” he says, repositioning the models on a black glass table. “And it’s all about the light.

“In design, we have to look at climate. In Vancouver, we

ABOVE:
An artist’s rendition of Parcel Four (Athlete’s Housing) in the 2010 Olympic Village, on the shores of False Creek in Vancouver, shows how the structure leans outwards a full 12 feet to allow natural sunlight into the courtyard.

Image: Nick Milkovich Architects Inc.

“It’s fun to get buildings leaning.”

— Nick Milkovich

get a lot of grey skies, which are very light in the winter, so we need to take advantage of that watery, soft light. It’s delicate, so we cannot contrast it with buildings which are too hard and jarring.”

Milkovich says the three-storey, 46,000-square-foot Olympic Village Community Centre is designed to respect the waters of False Creek, making light bounce off it, creating a building that is simultaneously alive and reflective. Life and light go both ways, though, he notes, adding, “The Parks Board wanted an extroverted building open to the urban situation, so we have stressed the visibility of what is going on in the building to passersby, so they can see the activity.

“Since the site is challengingly narrow (100 feet by 300 feet), we didn’t want an ominous facade, so, with a mandate to make it transparent, we turned the gym, kicked the space out and peeled away the building, breaking it in the middle with a large atrium

space — a large, light-catcher, 30-foot-high lobby, which announces welcome and entry on the street side.”

The wedge-shaped building is signature Erickson and Milkovich, “LEED platinum” in its sustainability rating and infused with light. A dimension is dedicated to the water sports of the creek — kayaking, dragonboating and racing shells — with parking for 100 cars underneath. Lights on in the gym at night will animate the side of the Creek, while lots of railings are an homage to the site’s industrial past and Kenron, the steel fabrication company whose factory was once here.

Parcel Eleven anchors the east side of the village, Parcel Four, the west. Initially designed as U-shaped residences, the client wanted through suites to help with ventilation, so Milkovich and Erickson broke that building into two, with the higher density (12 storeys) on the west and a large garden in between. “We leaned the building away from a garden to the west, so it would not cast a shadow on and impede the growth of plants.” In fact, it leans a total of 12 feet to diminish any shade in that garden.

“It’s fun to get buildings leaning,” says Milkovich of this design challenge, explaining that standard window cladding doesn’t work on the tilt. Instead, a confection of delicate cladding mimicks fish scales. These give the building a different read, a certain fluidity. The garden has two large reflecting pools, with one car entry diving under one of the pools. Spilling water drops from one pool to another, achieving an almost painterly reflection. After the Olympics, these 168,000-square-foot mid-rise buildings will become private residences.


Several years ago, Erickson jump-started Vancouverites into the concept of density, predicting that, one day, the city’s population would nudge 10 million. That thought was unnerving for many, but not for avant-garde architects such as Milkovich and Erickson.

They see how the green-fringed oceanfront to the west of the city provides relief from compact living, and how public spaces — like the cafés of Europe — can become social living rooms. As Milkovich optimistically observes, “There is no need to be scared of density.”




Vancouver architect Nick Milkovich sees opportunity and optimism in high-density living.

Photo: Nick Milkovich Architects Inc.



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Chocolate Therapy

Local chocolate is cheaper than therapy and you don't need an appointment.

By Kerry Slavens

IN THE LIST OF LIFE'S indulgences, chocolate rates right up there with sex for many people, particularly women. A recent Canadian study found that 50 per cent of women claim to prefer chocolate to sex. A U.K. study reported that melting chocolate in one's mouth leads to increased brain activity and heart rates so intense, it's more invigorating than passionate kissing — and the effect lasts longer.

On a recent spring morning, I had no thought of passion in mind when I walked into Monde Chocolat on Vancouver's Burrard Street. At 10 a.m., all I craved was coffee. But sometimes passion comes unexpectedly. One bite of a Monde Chocolat truffle and I was infatuated. It was divine, smooth and incomparable.

"Chocolate is good for the soul," says Monde Chocolat co-owner Karlo Flores, a fifth-generation chocolatier who, along with partner Fabiana Makon-Flores, launched Monde Chocolat last year, inspired by a desire to create truly amazing chocolate. A walk through their Burrard Street chocolaterie is a mouth-watering experience: there are over 400 varieties of chocolate, with pairings such as bacon bits, banana curry, rose and basil, pineapple and pepper, and much more.

Chocolate, explains Karlo, was considered by the Toltecs and Aztecs to be a food of the gods. Legend tells of the god Quetzalcoatl who transported a cacao tree from Paradise to Earth. People believed the cacao bean brought wisdom and

strength. Unfortunately, the act of kindness got poor Quetzalcoatl kicked out of Paradise.

Beer & Chocolate

At Spinnakers Gastro Brewpub in Victoria, the god Bacchus joins Quetzalcoatl in the ranks of chocolate superheroes. This pioneer of craft brewing and Canada's oldest brewpub has already educated the palates of many when it comes to true quality. Now, Spinnakers has added chocolate to the brewpub experience with amazing *Chocolate & Beer* tastings. Of course, being Spinnakers, this is not just any beer, and chocolatier Crystal Duck's creations are not just *any* chocolates.

Upstairs in the cozy pub, Duck lines up six beers in front of me, with six perfectly matched

"Death By Chocolate" Buffet at the Fairmont Empress in Victoria.

Photo: Fairmont Empress

I am dreamy as I taste my new favourite...

truffles, from creamy milk chocolate to glorious dark. I begin with a Honey Blonde Ale and a milk chocolate truffle of caramel and thyme. The flavours seem completely natural together: the tang of the ale balances out the sweetness of the chocolate. In fact, as Spinnakers' publican Paul Hadfield points out, some people believe beer complements chocolate better than wine.

Next, we try Mitchell's ESB, a favourite with Spinnakers regulars. This satisfyingly complex copper-coloured ale is pleasantly bitter, tempered by the flowery hop aroma. Its companion is a dark chocolate truffle with peppercorn and lavender grown right in Spinnakers' guesthouse garden.

We next try Jameson's Scottish Ale, a traditional amber that is malty and sweet. Once again, Duck finds its perfect complement with a truffle of dark chocolate, chivaise and toffee. From here on, the rush of chocolate and the mellow glow of the beer kick in. I am dreamy as I taste my new favourite, a Belgian Dubbel served with a truffle of dark chocolate, raspberry and wine vinegar made right at Spinnakers. Oh, those Belgians! They know great chocolate and they know great beer.

Guilty Delight

After almost a week of chocolate decadence, I've become a nouveau connoisseur. I've tasted Rogers' Chocolates' famous Victoria Creams, Daniel Chocolates' cilantro lemon truffles, and the handcrafted exotic treats at Chocolate Arts on

Vancouver's West 4th, where organic wild blackberries, pears and pumpkin add a flavour fest to the handcrafted chocolates. I buy several First Nations-style chocolate medallions, whose design molds were created by artist Robert Davidson and taste of sweet magic is given by chocolatier Greg Hook.

Charlie's Chocolate Factory in Burnaby, with its chocolate river, and the Chocolate Buffet at Vancouver's Sutton Place Hotel are next on my wish list. This all-you-can-eat chocolate buffet features cakes, pastries, pies, velvety sorbets, ice creams, and the Bar's famous Brittany crêpes, made right before your eyes. Comparable in scope is "Death By Chocolate" at the Fairmont Empress.

I've been chocolate-free for three days and am still feeling the delicious guilt that often sets in after too much indulgence, but I am comforted by the health benefits I accrued. That's right — some studies show that my cognitive performance may be enhanced and I've gained some major anti-oxidants. My free radicals are probably down and my libido is probably up. Some scientists even claim that chocolate, eaten in moderation, can lower blood pressure, but I wouldn't know.

All I know is that my adventures have opened up new frontiers in chocolate for me. Never again will the supermarket variety be enough. I need chocolate with thyme, cilantro, rose, basil, tea, bacon bits and lavender the next time I happily succumb to this food of the gods. ☞

Kerry Slavens is CEO and Creative Director at Artemis.



ABOVE: Spinnakers Gastro Brewpub in Victoria offers a unique tasting experience unlike any other, with a variety of original chocolate creations each paired to its own artisan beer.

Photo: Garth Eichel

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The Elixir bistro and brasserie stands out in the competitive Yaletown restaurant scene.

Photo: Opus Hotel

Classic Innovation

Elixir combines old-world inspiration with new-world ingredients.

By Katie Nanton

DON LETENDRE is a busy man. As Executive Chef of Elixir, an elegant French bistro and brasserie located in Vancouver's stylish Opus Hotel, he is tasked with maintaining a contemporary and innovative menu in the heart of the competitive Yaletown restaurant scene. That's a tall order for any chef, but the Vancouver native distinguishes Elixir's offerings with gusto by melding classic French inspirations with the wild flavours of the Pacific Northwest.

True to this ethos, the atmosphere of Elixir's sunken dining room melds an old-world feel into an ultra-modern space. We are seated in a small area off the main dining room; red brick

walls and a few potted plants pair with starched white tablecloths and a view of the dark wooden bar. On a quiet Thursday night, Kellen, my boyfriend and dinner companion, and I appreciate the hip music playing softly overhead and attentiveness of our server, Andrew, right off the bat.

In keeping with the name of the restaurant, we start the evening with a selection from the exotic cocktail menu. I opt for Passionfruit Caipirinha, (Brazil's national cocktail) brimming with fruit juices and cachaca, a liquor made from fresh sugar cane. Kellen chooses the Pomegranate Patron, arriving generously iced, with fresh lime,

pomegranate juice and a dash of star anise. Andrew advises savouring the aromas of the drink before sipping (licorice and tequila are the prominent scents), and the drink itself is smooth and warming, despite the ice.

With our whistles whetted, we delve into the menu. To start, we are served an amuse-bouche of apple and celeriac villute, which has the thick consistency of chowder, but tastes sweet and rich with a hint of grainy pear and drizzle of oil. For an appetizer, I order the mixed-greens salad, which I always find to be a good way to mark the creativity of any kitchen. A fine first impression,



Executive Chef Don Letendre fuses classic themes with novel inspirations.

Photo: Opus Hotel

it is a selection of aromatic greens fluffed and drizzled with olive oil and elderflower dressing atop sweet Belgian endive. On the side is a small dish cradling organic dried fruits and nuts, scattered over thick yogurt laden with herbs and cucumber. The crunch of hazelnuts and almonds with the savoury yogurt and a leaf of endive works surprisingly well with the tangy dressing. Kellen also tries a salad, a variation with organic red and orange beets, sprinkled with David Wood's goat's cheese and pistachio vinaigrette, the sweet, firm beets offset nicely by the sharpness of the salty, soft goat's cheese.

Moving on to our entrees, I order the Pacific sablefish with enoki mushrooms, nabe turnip and delicate shiso leaves, served hot-pot-style in a Japanese soba dashi broth with firm tofu. Marinated for three days in white barley miso prior to serving, the rich sablefish melts in my mouth and flakes at the touch of a fork. The surrounding broth is infused with flavours of kelp and soy, authentic to a traditional dashi soup broth. Firm turnips add texture while the soft, little enoki mushrooms complete the presentation of the dish with a delicate, earthy mushroom taste. I pair my fish with Brussels sprouts, sold on the idea that the Elixir variety is mixed with organic chestnuts and cooked with fireweed honey and celeriac. Rich and flavourful, the chestnuts are soft flavour pockets — I would order these Brussels sprouts again, no matter my main course.

Kellen is a vegetarian, which means he is always looking for novel entrees. Fortunately, Letendre eschews the standard pasta-and-rice route that is proffered too often as a meatless meal alternative. He opts for a portobello mushroom steak with a thin layer of melted goat cheese, topped with short tips of roasted asparagus, which is just enough to complement the full flavour of the "steak" without overpowering it. As a side, roasted fingerling potatoes and turnips are cooked and seasoned just right, outshining our extra side of potato gratin — gruyere cheese and thin layers of potatoes, presented like a tiny lasagna — which could have perhaps used a little more pepper or spice.

At the beginning of the meal, we both eyed the banana sticky toffee pudding, but feeling a bit less ambitious now, we were slightly relieved when Andrew suggested something cool and homemade for dessert. To cleanse the palate after a satisfying meal, we had two scoops of the sorbet, strawberry and coconut. Both were slightly soft, the perfect consistency for a just-churned taste, and smooth to the tongue with coconut cream richness and molten strawberry sweetness. At Elixir, mixing old-world French bistro offerings and Japanese fare on the menu works exceptionally well because Chef Letendre is well-versed in both, providing ample opportunity to experiment with new flavours and well-done traditional dishes, both rich in local ingredients and both in the same sitting. *Bon appétit.* 🍴



Elixir's dining room has a distinct old-world atmosphere.

Photo: Opus Hotel

Homegrown Muse

Consumed in sufficient quantity, absinthe truly does make the heart grow fonder.

By Dave Preston

TABOO ABSINTHE

(Okanagan Spirits, 500 ml bottle, 60% ABV, \$55)
okanaganspirits.com

“A DANGEROUSLY ADDICTIVE, psychoactive drug.” That’s what many people once thought about absinthe, and some still do to this day. In reality, absinthe is a complex, distilled anise-flavoured spirit that is no more harmful than any other highly alcoholic beverage.

Nevertheless, because of its association with Bohemian culture in Europe in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, an illicit mystique grew up around absinthe, fuelled in large part by the notorious reputations of some of its adherents, such as Vincent Van Gogh, Oscar Wilde and Ernest Hemingway, many of whom attributed creative properties to the spirit. Hence absinthe came to be known by many names, including “The Muse,” “The Green Fairy,” and the “Train Direct to Charenton,” in reference to an insane asylum in a southeast suburb of Paris.

Fear and legend surrounding absinthe have always been rooted in the perceived narcotic properties of the ingredient *Artemisia absinthium* — or wormwood, as it is commonly referred to — which has small

traces of the chemical thujone. (Bad science once linked thujone with THC, the active chemical in marijuana.) At one time, chronic use of absinthe was even believed to produce a syndrome known as “absinthism,” characterized by violence, hallucinations and seizures, among other things.

Cheap to produce and highly intoxicating, absinthe became an affordable and popular alternative to wine in Europe, particularly in France. By the turn of the 20th century, governments were increasingly concerned about the spirit’s broad effect on society and, egged on by wine growers and producers, absinthe was soon banned in most of Europe and later North America for almost a century.

Nevertheless, absinthe made a gradual comeback in the 1990s as enforcement eased and bans were lifted. It’s still an uncommon beverage, but much easier to find locally now since Okanagan Spirits in Vernon, B.C., began producing Taboo Absinthe.

Not usually taken neat, there’s an art to preparing absinthe. Traditionally, a measure of the spirit is poured into a glass, then iced water is dripped over a sugar cube that’s held over the glass by a perforated spoon. As the sugar-water falls into the glass, the greenish



Vernon, B.C.-based Okanagan Distillers produces Taboo Absinthe, which has won a number of international awards, including a silver medal at the 2008 World Spirits Award & Festival in Klagenfurt, Austria.

Photo: Okanagan Distillers

liquid becomes attractively opaque and milky. Ratios of absinthe to water vary from equal parts to 1:3, and some prefer it *sans sucre*.

The strong anise aroma fills a room and wouldn’t be lost on the breeze outdoors, and even sipped lightly, the strong floral flavour almost overwhelms the palate. It’s not to everyone’s taste, and not an easy beverage to pair with food, but it’s a refreshing drink for warm summer evenings. At the very least, it’s a cue for lively conversation and debate about its mind-altering potential. ☞

Dave Preston is a Victoria writer.



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