



# The Big Easy

## Brentwood Bay Lodge & Spa celebrates its relationship with its natural setting

by Ron Forbes-Roberts

The terrace delights diners with an expansive view of the lodge, its gardens and native vegetation, the swimming pool, the marine industrial area and, naturally, stunning Brentwood Bay.

With its striking contemporary West Coast design – all sharp, clean lines and airy, uncluttered spaciousness – there would seem to be few, if any, stylistic similarities between Brentwood Bay Lodge & Spa and the rustic, log-constructed fishing resorts that are its nominal antecedents.

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Yet, while there isn't a stuffed moose head mounted in the lodge's dining room...the Brentwood Bay Lodge has more in common with the traditional lodges of yore than immediately meets the eye. This is particularly true in the relationship between the

design of the building, externally and internally, and its exquisite ecological setting: a semi-rural landscape heavily treed with century-old hemlock, arbutus and chestnut trees and a singularly stunning westfacing view of Brentwood Bay.

From the inception of the project, celebrating this relationship was central to owner Dan Behune's vision and is reflected in every aspect of the lodge, from the shape of the the three conjoined, red-cedar sided buildings... to the exclusively natural materials used in its custom-made furnishings and appointments.

Although the lodge only opened this past May (immediately becoming one of three establishments in Canada selected to join the Small Luxury Hotels of the World), Dan Behune is no newcomer to the local hospitality industry....Having developed a passion for the industry, Behune turned his hand to constructing a world-class lodge and enlisted Vancouver-based architects Ron Lea, Melissa Higgs and Dimitri Harvalias for the project. Lea says that his design incorporated



PHOTO BY VINCE KLASSEN

elements of the park-like setting, as well as features of the older marine repair shops and boathouses nears the lodges's marine area.

“We said, ‘Those structures are nice, honest and straightforward,’” Lea explains. “We wanted to use forms that recalled what was already there. So we went to simple shed roofs that were metal finished because it was the nature of the marine industrial that was there.” The roofs on the three sections slope or “kick” upwards, as Lea puts it, in a westerly direction. The entire west wall of the

lodges's central section, which contains the wine bar, spa and fine dining room, is made of floor-to-ceiling windows that present an astonishing vista the instant one enters the space....

"In a sense, you're in the view because you're picking up all the sky component as well as the water and the tress," Lea explains. "In effect, every space leads outside." This is true even in the spa. With its subdued light and gently curving, labyrinthine passageways joining the therapy rooms, the spa has a muted, subterranean feel that suddenly gives way to light and open space when one reaches the glass-faced cool-down room, which looks out across the bay...

The challenge for interior designers Sandy Nygaard and Christa Schone was to leave these elements exposed and complement them while slightly softening their austere planes and edges. "We felt that a space can have sharp, fine lines...and still be very warm," says Nygaard. "So it was all about the textures and the natural materials; again that kind of inside/outside theme. Warm wall, the textural fabrics, the slate floors, all that – you want to touch them. The colour choices are all warm tones." In fact, Nygaard says, the earthy organic hues she used came directly from a landscape painting by Philip Mix, one of several local artists whose work hangs throughout the lodge. "I looked at it and said, 'That's the colour palette...here's the maroon, there's the shocking orange, there's the burnt umber. It was the really vibrant on-fire version of fall.'"

This colour scheme informs the wholly natural materials Behune and Nygaard chose for the lodge's entirely custom-made furnishings, rugs, bathroom fixtures (all slate tiled with inlaid stone borders around the bathtubs), and other appointments.

"Our philosophy," say Behune, "was if God didn't make it, don't use it." Even the bedside light fixtures – a unique Nygaard design in which an Asian sensibility is brought to bear on a



lamp shape reminiscent of an old ship's lantern – are shaded with rice paper. These earthy hues and organic surfaces conspire to infuse the elegant simplicity of the six-sided guest rooms and suites housed in the lodge's southern wing with a cozy, casual feel.

Contributing to this look and ambience is the solid ash and black walnut furniture that Joseph Gelinas and Sandra Carr designed and build especially for the lodge. The surfaces of the mortised and tenoned armoires, side and sofa tables, beds and even the breakfast trays glow with a deep, buttery sheen. Gelinas and Carr are also responsible for the solid ash folding shutters in the bathrooms of the suits. These open on to the glass-faced bedrooms with their superlative views of Brentwood Bay, allowing guest to soak in the whirlpool tub while enjoying a spectacular sunset over the water and western hills.

As with so many of the lodge's details, Gelinas and Carr's work is rife with grace and subtlety, from the finely tooled coast pegs on the solid black walnut, full-length mirror frames to the slightly back-ward sloping, leather-paneled headboards that allow for ultimate comfort while reading in the king-sized beds that are fitted with Italian linen. The pair also designed and built the sturdy, knee-high fir tables in the wine bar (recently awarded two medals at the Vancouver International Playhouse Wine Festival). Behune says he wanted these table to have a robust, substantial look in contrast to the more graceful lines of the guest rooms. "We tried to mix in bits of a standard lodge feel," he says, "and used the big chunky coffee table and wool shag carpet to give it a warm, comfortable look."

Dan Behune is proud of all the lodge's physical details, from the curving wooden waterfront walkway below the building to the fine wine store and two-level glass-fronted pub in the northern wing, to artist Derek Heaton's exquisite arbutus tree reliefs carved into yellow cedar and displayed above the fireplace in the dining room. Still, he explains, however impressive its physical details are, they are subordinate to the lodge's working philosophy.

"What we want guests to walk away with is a total quality experience from the second they walk in the front door to when they go off in a shuttle boat to Butchart Gardens," Behune explains. "All of us here want to give guests the best experience they can have. It's all about just relaxing and enjoying fine food, fine wine and fine art."

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