

GASTOWN

by Sheri Radford



Top: Sunset on the cobblestone streets
Above: The 'hood's "Gassy Jack" statue
Left: The streetcar in The Old Spaghetti Factory is popular with wee ones

Vancouver began in Gastown. In 1867, a feisty fellow by the name of "Gassy Jack" Deighton set up the Globe Saloon, and Gastown soon developed around this hub of conviviality. Although Gastown declined over the years and was almost demolished in the 1960s, its recent revitalization has made it once again near and dear to Vancouver hearts. Everywhere you look in this neighbourhood, stretching mainly along Water Street from Richards to Carrall, you come face-to-face with a mix of history and modernity. Elegant Victorian-era buildings abut flashing-neon ATM machines. Old loft buildings, newly renovated, bear the urban scars of graffiti. Gastown is located a few blocks from some of Canada's most expensive condominiums, but also a few blocks from troubled Hastings Street. It's a fascinating place to visit in daylight hours.

RETAIL THERAPY Shops hawking t-shirts and souvenirs flank high-end clothing stores such as One of a Few, Obakki and Tabu. Fast-food outlets and cigar shops compete for attention with unique home-accessories stores such as Koolhaus and Parliament. Numerous galleries explore First Nations history and culture: Hill's Native Art, Marion Scott Gallery, Inuit Gallery of Vancouver, Spirit Wrestler Gallery.

TOP TASTES Gastown is Vancouver's oldest district, but it keeps pace with the contemporary dining scene at So.cial at Le Magasin, European-style dining; Chill Winston, tapas; Bon-eta, modern bistro fare; Cobre, Latin cuisine; and Jules, casual French. The old stalwarts remain popular: Steamworks Brewing Co., The Old Spaghetti Factory and The Irish Heather.

THE GOOD LIFE Evidence of the past is everywhere in Gastown, from the working train tracks between Water Street and the waterfront, to the old-fashioned street signs, the much-photographed steam clock and the statue of "Gassy Jack" himself, overlooking Maple Tree Square.

ONE OF A KIND The most unusual dining concept to emerge is a restaurant with a minimal kitchen and no chef: at Salt Tasting Room, meals consist of cured meat, cheese and condiments, paired with wine.

EDITOR CAN'T RESIST Derby Swirl Angels from John Fluevog Shoes. This classic ankle-height boot from the Vancouver designer is just as striking as the Gastown showroom, with its soaring glass ceiling and sweeping ocean view. The brand celebrates its 40th anniversary in 2010.