

VILLAGES OF VANCOUVER

GASTOWN

Let's Go Down in History

BY SHERI RADFORD

This is where Vancouver began. 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 beer and conviviality. Though Gastown declined over the years and was almost demolished in the 1960s, its recent revitalization has made it once again near and dear to Vancouverites’ hearts.

Everywhere you look in this area, stretching mainly along Water Street from Richards to Carrall, you come face-to-face with an intriguing mix of history and modernity. Elegant Victorian-era buildings abut flashing-neon ATM machines. Gorgeous 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, yet close to troubled Hastings Street. After dark it’s best to visit the area by cab.

Shops hawking T-shirts and souvenirs flank high-end clothing stores such as Obakki, Tabu and Richard Kidd, with its soaring glass ceiling and sweeping ocean view. Fast-food outlets and cigar shops compete for attention with unique home-accessories stores such as Inform Interiors, in its expansive new space, and Industrial Artifacts, where everything is made from reclaimed industrial materials. Numerous galleries explore First Nations history and culture: Hill’s Native Art, Marion Scott Gallery, Inuit Gallery of Vancouver and Spirit Wrestler Gallery. Looking back to European history, Revival Art Gallery sells new hand-painted reproductions of works by da Vinci, van Gogh and other masters whose copyright has long expired.

Gastown is Vancouver’s oldest neighbourhood, but it’s also the hottest dining district right now. Newcomers keep springing up: So.cial at Le Magasin, for European-style dining; Chill Winston, for tapas; and Jules Casual French Bistro. 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. Of course the old stalwarts remain as popular as ever: Steamworks Brewing Co., The Old Spaghetti Factory, The Irish Heather and Incendio. For those with a sweet tooth, Rogers’ Chocolates is happy to oblige.



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 famous steam clock and the statue of “Gassy Jack” himself, overlooking Maple Tree Square. Now, as then, Gastown’s future looks bright.



The Hotel Europe, a typical early Gastown flatiron building