



Vancouver: Almost Too Good To Be True

Things are different in the West.

Vancouver is almost too good to be true. It is built on hills with mountains in its back yard, the ocean in its front, clean air, year-round pleasant temperatures and flowers and handsome, sculptured shrubbery everywhere.

It is on a peninsula, and the remaining open land is reserved for farms. Until recently, the understandable impulse was to build up, since there was no room to move out. The provincial government was planning the highest skyscraper in western Canada when a reaction set in. Vancouver has its high, handsome skyline, but it is now not likely to get much higher. For the centre of the city, Arthur Erickson has designed Robson Square — a three-block complex that includes a civic centre with gardens, shops, restaurants, a day-care centre and an ice-skating rink that becomes a market place in the summer; a court house; and an art gallery in the old court-house building.

Vancouver also has slums, but they are neither as appalling nor as visible as those in the older East, and the remodelling of its greatest eyesore, the central waterfront, is slowly getting underway. False Creek, once a scrofulous collection of sheds, warehouses and hippie pads, has been changed into a sparkling residential neighbourhood with breathtaking views; and Gastown, a flophouse slum in the sixties, is a bustling tourist attraction. Chinatown, saved from demolition ten years ago, is a reborn natural neighbourhood with the second greatest concentration of Chinese in North America.

Gastown



Gastown began with Jack Deighton's saloon in 1867 and expanded to be incorporated as the City of Vancouver in 1886. Three months later it all burned down. Most of the city's oldest buildings were built in Gastown just after the fire. They and the streets are red brick, and the red brick got mighty dingy as

the years went by. By the 1930s Gastown was skid row with flophouses in every block.

In 1969 businessmen began fixing things up, for purely commercial reasons. Gastown is now booming as a tourist attraction, full of shops, restaurants, boutiques and street celebrations.



John Sullivan, who owns several ancient piles including the Hotel Europe (built in 1908 and modelled after the Flatiron Building in New York), is currently marketing both office and residential space. The Europe has a handsome turn-of-the-century saloon on its triangular first floor and apartments upstairs, some remodelled, some not. The ground-floor drinkers include the prosperous young and tourists as well as retired loggers and seamen, some of whom still live upstairs. "I threw the rubbydubs out, but I've got a half-dozen old guys who are going to stay on." One, a retired logger, has lived at the Europe for 35 years.

Gastown is still next door to what is left of skid row, and there is room for expansion.