

My cat had fallen asleep on top of my Bose radio and, WITH THE VOLUME BUTTON AT HER EPICENTER, PRODUCED AN EXQUISITE OXYMORON: THE

SOUNDLESS ALARM. So I awoke to the jarring of an inner clock just 30 minutes before my flight to Vancouver was scheduled to depart from LAX. I buttoned, zipped and tied on anything within reach, made the plane and, once seated, congratulated myself on the matching socks. The three-hour flight went without incident, as did an intra-airport cab ride to the south terminal—I made a cabbie happy by mindlessly paying the \$10 Canadian tab with 10 American dollars. There I waited for the puddle jumper that would take me to Tofino, home of the Wickaninnish Inn.

The flight was beautiful: navy water stippled with whitecaps, a view of Vancouver and its off-shore isles of pine forests, rocky coasts and smooth beaches. When we landed, a van from the Wick, as recidivists call it, scooped us up, and, with a Louis Armstrong CD belting “Mack the Knife,” we headed past a nine-hole golf course to the 46-room Relais & Châteaux property.

In the lobby, a picture window fronts a dramatic seascape of woolly waves crashing over gigantic boulders. I dropped my gear off in my room and went outside to take a stroll on Chesterman Beach, a long stretch of nearly deserted shoreline that runs in front of the hotel. Waves swell up to 25 feet during storm season (November through February), and humpback whales can be seen breaching during their migration (March through May) to the Bering Sea. As dusk descended, chimneys from beachside homes exhaled the smoke of their evening fires.

Inspired, I went back to the hotel and lit one of my own. All the Wick's rooms, which are large and simply but very comfortably furnished, have wood-burning fireplaces that start at the flick of a switch. They throw off so much heat guests may want to crack open the sliding door leading to the balcony, which, in my room, overlooked intermittent geysers of ocean spray shooting through a towering tumble of rocks. Given the heat of the fire, the white noise of the surf and the bed's down duvet, I was soon out cold.

I rallied for dinner only because the hotel's Pointe Restaurant has made a name for itself in foodie circles for using local



and organic ingredients and for an impressive wine list that highlights extraordinary regional vintages. The tiered dining room is warm and romantic, with a copper potbellied stove and exposed beams hand-adzed by the inn's resident master carver, Henry



Nolla. Floor-to-ceiling windows are especially dramatic during winter storms, when driving rain, lightning and swells put on a show. And the food is delicious: giant oysters grown especially for roasting and served with a variety of sauces, wild sockeye salmon with spaetzle and fennel cream, fire-roasted jumbo prawns with spinach-and-brie risotto, an outrageous orange tiramisu.

The Wick is a family affair. Charles McDiarmid, the manager, grew up in Tofino and spent 13 years working with the Four Seasons before returning to start the inn with his father, Howard, the town's beloved (now retired) doctor, and his brother, Bruce, an engineer. They built the hotel on family property and have maintained an intimate rapport both with the magical natural surroundings and the picturesque waterfront town of Tofino. Hotel staff can point

you to hiking trails, arrange trips to hot springs on a nearby island and set you up for whale-watching, kayaking, biking and windsurfing. After a visit to one of Tofino's bakeries (“White Bread” and “Brown Bread,” as they're known), check out First Nation artist Roy Henry Vickers's gallery, where



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THE DRAMATIC LANDS AND SEASCAPE DRAW GUESTS TO THE WICK; ITS COZY GRACIOUSNESS BRINGS THEM BACK

wood carvings and silk screens are on sale. And stop by the newly opened garden designed by ex-Harvard botanist George Patterson, who imported some of his plants from Costa Rica. Trails of cedar mulch wind through old-growth forest and are dotted by romantic perches.

Between (or instead of) such excursions, the inn's new spa offers all manner of pampering: massages (hot stone, aromatherapy, acupressure), hydrotherapies, facials, manicures, pedicures and a full line of Aveda products. And at night, entertainment is easily come by. During a postprandial walk along the beach, the sky was barely visible for all the stars—

the Milky Way, the Dippers, Orion's omnipresent belt. By the time I got back to my room, I'd been completely seduced by the Wick's charm and, enveloped in its luxurious bedding, slipped once again into a blissful sleep. —MARGOT DOUGHERTY

THE FACTS

Wickaninnish Inn

Osprey Lane at Chesterman Beach, Tofino, British Columbia, Canada, 800-333-4604 or www.wickinn.com. Accommodations \$129-\$300. Fly to Vancouver and take North Vancouver Air to Tofino. From April to October, flights from Seattle to Tofino are available on Sound Flight.