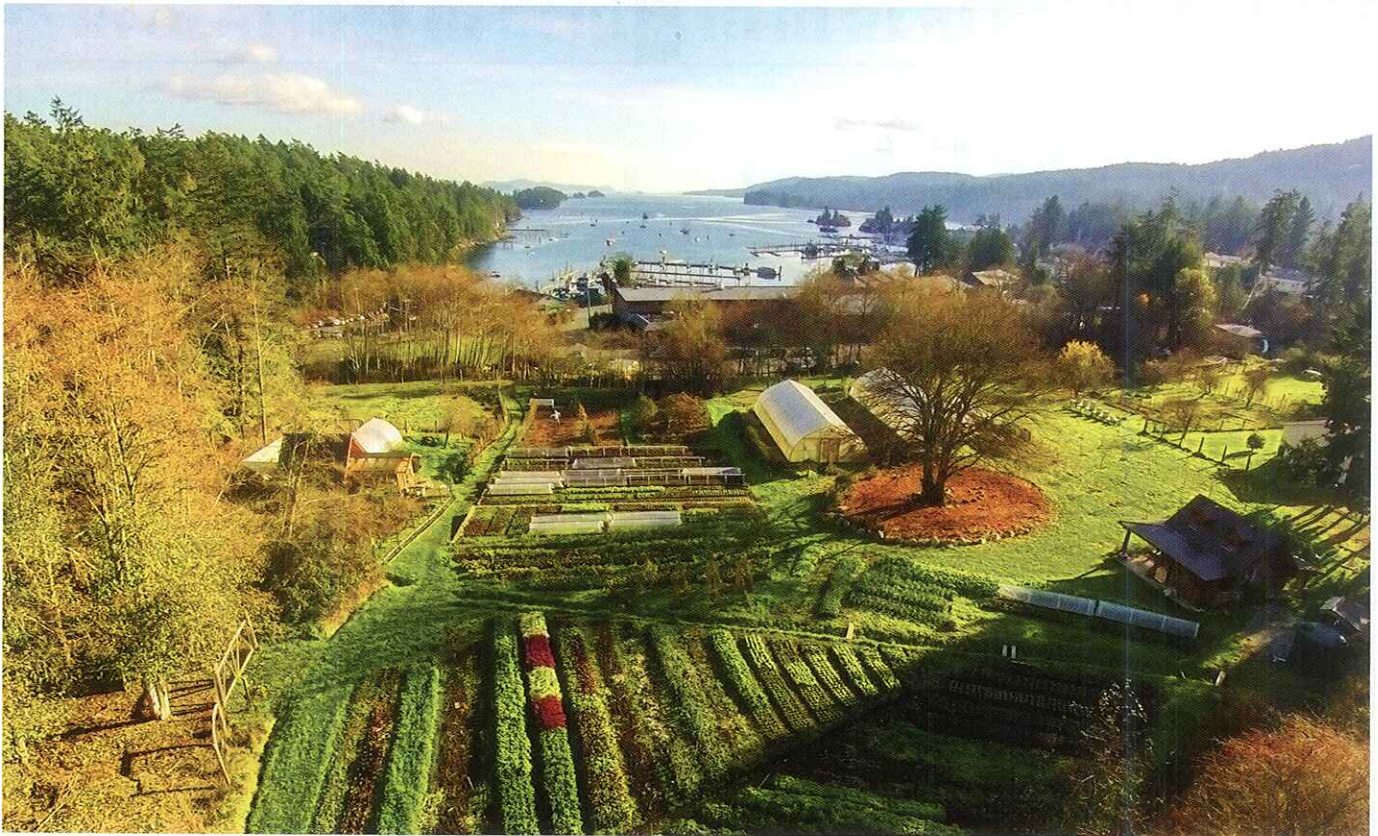


Seaplane & Boating *Destinations*

Harbour House, Salt Spring Island, BC

By Russ Young



Spend a little time on British Columbia's Salt Spring Island, and certain adjectives will come to mind: words that include "welcoming," "casual," "relaxing" and "unpretentious."

Then spend a little time at the island's Harbour House Hotel, Restaurant and Organic Farm, and the same adjectives will apply.

Couple with that great views of Ganges Harbour, an outstanding restaurant that redefines "farm to table," live music on the weekends, and an almost slavish devotion to sustainability, and there is something about the Harbour House that should appeal to almost anyone.

The hotel is located just a pleasant stroll away from the Ganges seaplane dock and marinas, and the activities

and shopping of Ganges Village. You can walk across the road to charter a sailboat or rent a kayak, and if you don't buy too much at the Saturday Market in Centennial Park, you'll be able to walk back to the hotel with your purchases. (And burn off some of the calories from the variety of foods that the market's vendors are offering. Make sure you visit the market during a weekend stay.)

Many of the 38 rooms face Ganges Harbour; this traveler had a corner room with a large, sunny balcony that offered views of both unfurled spinners, and the farm's goats and sheep grazing alongside a split-rail fence. Deluxe rooms have covered balconies, fireplaces and jetted tubs.

The hotel also has its own yoga studio, offering yoga/wellness packages. In-room spa services are a phone call away. Harbour House is completely non-smoking, and pet-friendly rooms are available. And if you just can't spend a little time without a wi-fi connection, the hotel's is complimentary, and genuinely does perform at "high speed."

For those who may not be visiting Salt Spring to get away from it all, Harbour House also prides itself on hosting events including conferences, banquets and weddings. The larger of two banquet/meeting spaces can accommodate up to 160 attendees.

Every traveler has their preferences and pet peeves, so this traveler gets to point out how Harbour House fared in

addressing three of his:

First, the plumbing fixtures do not require an instruction manual, unlike those in an increasing number of hotels;

Second – the room key is a real key. Not a plastic card that may take two or three swipes to open the door, but a real metal key;

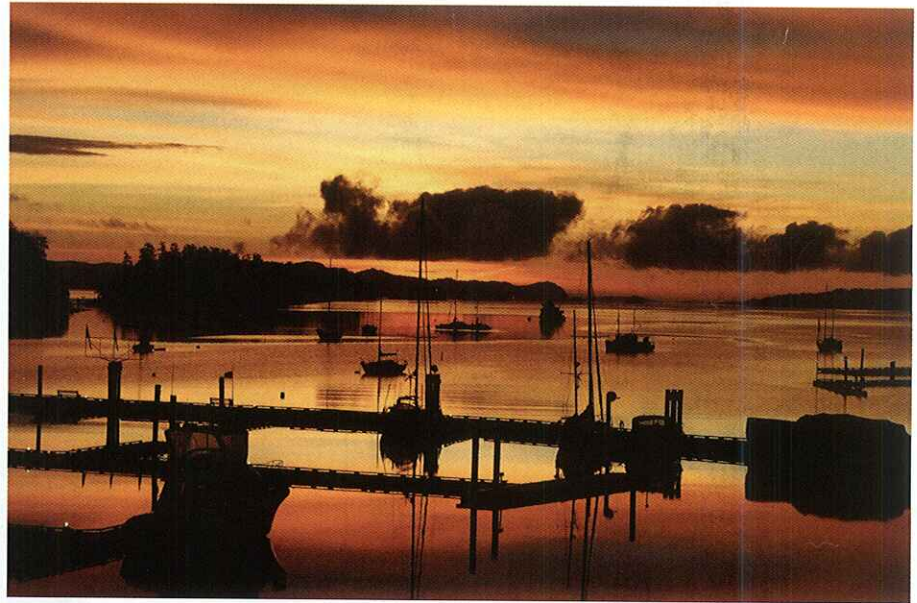
Third – but perhaps foremost – the bed is covered with a real down comforter between two soft cotton sheets. There are no polyester covered, synthetic "comforters" at the Harbour House! Nestled underneath, I slept for almost 12 hours one night. (The curtains don't leak light, either – another plus!)

Okay, perhaps those are small details, and maybe they only appeal to this particular guest – but feeling comfortable and relaxed in a hotel is often based the little things.

The little things extend into the restaurant. They include a server who wants to know how you like your eggs poached – soft, medium or hard? – and a busy bartender who still takes the time to properly chill a martini glass. The Harbour House may reflect Salt Spring's casual vibe, but that doesn't mean there is a lack of attention to quality or service.

In a world where "locavore" and "farm to table" appear to be adopted as buzzwords, the Harbour House is the real deal. The distance from the farm to the table is measured in yards (or metres), not miles – the 2.5-acre organic farm is behind the hotel. (The restaurant and farm deserve their own story. We'll feature a story about the partnership between chef Brooke Winter and farmer Rob Scheres in our next issue.) The farm is open for tours, and the goats get along well with pint-sized guests.

And while almost every hotel touts "sustainability" in terms of optional changing of linens and bath towels, the Harbour House takes sustainability seriously – and to the next level. The bathroom amenities are all-natural local products; the cleaning materials and paper products are all



eco-friendly. The coffee and tea are organic. The eggs served in the restaurant are from the farm's free-range chickens. The beef is grass-fed and, along with the chicken, free range; the seafood is ocean wise. The restaurant and farm both compost, and the waste cooking oil is used to make bio-fuel. Oh – and the hotel's website is

powered by solar energy!

Perhaps it is just this traveler, but don't be surprised that after availing yourself of the fine food and drink, casual comfort and friendly vibe, you're giving serious thought to missing your flight back to Vancouver and extending your stay, or – at least – planning your next visit to the Harbour House. 🐐

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