

# BEAUTIFUL BRITISH COLUMBIA

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## CUMBERLAND

Dark Past to  
Bright Future

River of  
White Death:  
Running the Alsek

Whistler  
Heats Up

Portfolio:



Floral Tribute



\$4.50







# Heritage

A • M • O • N • G

# HIGH RISES

By Caroline Jackson  
Photography: Graham Osborne

Concrete jungle or cosmopolitan Valhalla? Your impression of Vancouver's bustling West End will probably depend upon your preference for the vintage or the modern, or for the comfortable or the exciting. At the turn of the century, this downtown peninsula crowned with Stanley Park to the west and northwest was once a quiet neighbourhood of family houses and manicured lawns.

Situated on high land, these gracious settlers' homes commanded beautiful views of English Bay and the North Shore mountains. In less than 15 minutes businessmen could trot over to the then commercial area of Gastown. It was an idyllic place.

Of course, because of its convenient location and spectacular views, it would be only a matter of time before many in rapidly growing Vancouver would want to live in the West End. Since the mid-1950s the area has been sprouting high-rise apartments at the same rate as rhubarb on a compost heap. These now hold nearly 40,000 dwellers, making the West End one of the most densely populated neighbourhoods in North America. Scattered here and there, only 114 heritage buildings remain in the shadows of this teeming 10-block-square area.

In 1976 only one block in the West End — bounded by Broughton, Haro, Nicola, and Barclay — was high-rise-free. It was then the plan of Vancouver's parks board to level the 17 old homes on the block for parkland. However, when one — Roedde

*Roedde House, foreground, glows cozily as dusk falls over Vancouver's West End.*



House — was given a Class A heritage designation this stopped the plans of the parks board. Heritage organizations then jumped in to persuade the city to restore this pocket-sized enclave.

The project was finally completed in 1990 as Barclay Heritage Square. If you wander a block southward from downtown's stylish Robson Street through a typical canyonlike West End street, you suddenly come upon a tranquil patch of heritage homes and green space.

The square retains nine of the old houses that were on the block and adds a small park. Preserved in their original settings, the houses date from 1890 to 1908. Some have become non-profit municipal housing; one is a senior citizens' centre; another is a museum.

Among the restored buildings is Barclay Manor. Built as a family home in 1890, it served as a hospital for a decade, then a Catholic working girls' residence. In 1926 it became a boarding house. Now it is used by the West End Seniors' Network.

The most notable of the buildings in Barclay Heritage Square is Roedde House Museum. Gustav Roedde, a German immigrant who began the city's first book bindery, and his wife Mathilda paid \$6,000 to erect their home in 1893. Believed designed by family friend Francis Rattenbury, an architect known for Victoria's Empress Hotel and the B.C. Legislative Buildings, the house was built from materials hauled by horse on a trail from Granville Street.



*Coffee grinder and pot in Roedde kitchen, with wood stove in background.*

*“The feeling we want to give people is that the family has just gone out.”*



*Museum staffer in period costume cleans up at the kitchen sink.*

Rattenbury designed an attractive Queen Anne style house with a cupola, bay windows, an upstairs sleeping porch, and a verandah at garden level. A visit to Roedde House today is a step into the past. Behind the creaky front door a portrait of Gustav Roedde hangs in a cedar-panelled hall.

It must have been a hectic home: Roedde and his wife Mathilda raised six children and several St. Bernards during their 32 years here. Today Mrs. Beeton's All About Cookery lies open on the kitchen table with recipes for jugged hare and instructions on how to truss pigeons, rabbits, and plovers.

“The feeling we want to give people is that the family has just gone out and that if you walk quickly enough, you might be able to catch up with a Roedde,” says Cindy Kravchenko, curator and house manager. “We encourage people to absorb the fabric of the house. In a museum, you come up against a barrier — maybe a glass case — and people get frustrated because they want to get closer. Here they might get the opportunity to actually sit in a chair.”

Each room on the main floor has been carefully restored and authentically dec-

orated and furnished in Victorian-Edwardian style. Scorch marks near the bay window in the dining room hark back to a worrisome day in 1914 when the candlelit Christmas tree caught fire.

“For everybody there is something. If they are elderly people, it reminds them so strongly of their parents' home. With children, they have often never seen anything like this,” says Kravchenko.

Gustav Roedde died a respected pioneer businessman in 1930. Like many West End homes, the building became a boarding house known as the Oehlerking Rooms before volunteers from the Roedde House Preservation Society restored it in the late 1980s. More than 2,000 people have since passed the portals through Roedde House.

Shortly before the official opening on May 12, 1990, a skunk from Stanley Park took up residence under Roedde House, leaving its unmistakable smell with the building for more than a year. “On opening day we had all the windows open and had lots and lots of flowers around,” Kravchenko chuckles. “Later one Grade 6 boy wrote in his school report that ‘Roedde House looks really nice, but it smells.’”

Fortunately the skunk has returned to Stanley Park and Roedde House, at 1415 Barclay St., now is open to the public. Tours are offered along with lectures, musical evenings, and workshops. Call (604) 684-7040. On the same street Barclay Manor is open for short tours between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m.



*Victrola phonograph features dining-room sitting area.*





*Even the scorch marks from a 1914 Xmas tree have been preserved in house turned museum.*

*Barclay Square's park is a quiet refuge for nearby high-rise dwellers.*



*A Victorian-style gazebo highlights grounds of Roedde House.*

