

## SOOKE HARBOUR HOUSE-ART & FLAVOURS.

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Sooke Harbour House Dining Room View.

With the lower Canadian dollar why not have a staycation closer to home? I decided to use local buses, the Canada line and BC Ferries and stay a night at the lovely Sooke Harbour House and Resort Hotel on the southwest coast of Vancouver Island. Yes, the scenic trip took me 7.2 hrs to travel from Vancouver to Sooke while my friend Baila only took 3.2 hrs sailing and driving her car.

The Sooke Harbour House on Whiffen Spit Beach, has 28 ocean front rooms. Sea lions are popular on this coast of Vancouver Island and my Sea Lion room had sea lion drawings on the wall. The room also had a wood-burning fireplace, a steam shower and a jetted tub for two on the verandah overlooking the harbour. A nice touch on arrival, was the welcoming glass of port and freshly baked chocolate cookie on the counter.

Sharan Nylander, the gallery manager, offered to show us paintings by local artists displayed on 2 floors. Ken Kirkby's "Sentinel" showed a stark tree at the end of a lake with grass created by numerous dots. Kirkby while spending 5yrs in the Arctic with groups of Inuit, became involved with social issues in the north.

Abstract artist Ira Hoeffcker's "Transition" featured geometric shapes, showing a city's different identity. The painting process used layers of resin separating one layer of paint from the previous one, giving it visual depth.

Martin and son Justin Gilbertson are Artist Blacksmiths working out of their Foggy Mountain Forge. The "Kelp" metal sculpture seemed to float in the air.

There will be a new gallery at year end comprising of a free-standing building of 1700 sq.ft. for corporate and social functions including weddings for 110 for a sit down dinner and 150 for a reception.

The Potlatch Room suitable for meetings and weddings is decorated with 1st Nations art by Victor and Edith Newman of the Blue Raven Gallery. Edith's beautiful button blanket graced one wall and Victor's painted motif encircled a totem head embossed on another panel.

I didn't have time to experience the Far Infrared Sauna whose 40-50c (110-130f temp.) is more comfortable than a steam sauna. The sauna penetrates 3.5in beneath the skin to soothe blood vessels, improve circulation and promote quicker healing.

The Copper Room Bistro will open shortly too for casual dining.

However I was here with 2 friends to experience a 4 or 7 course food with BC wine pairing, in their dining room, with a magnificent view over the harbour. Exec.Chef Brock Windsor and staff use vegetables and fruit sourced from their 2 acre garden and meat and seafood obtained locally. The portions are regular size rather than those smaller ones on tasting menus so we chose the 4 course menu. We ordered a bottle of 2014 Joie Gamay with notes of Black Cherry, Red Plum and Savoury Sage.

Garcia's salad of Sooke Harbour House Greens was a pretty display of baby Saanich beets, loganberry vinaigrette, Whiffen Spit raspberries and edible garden blossoms.

The Sooke wasabi aioli and Umi Nami farm daikon winter radish slaw provided a nice bite to my wild mussel and gooseneck barnacle tempura.

Braised Silver Spray lamb was lovely and moist with sage braising jus and trailing blackberry mint chutney.

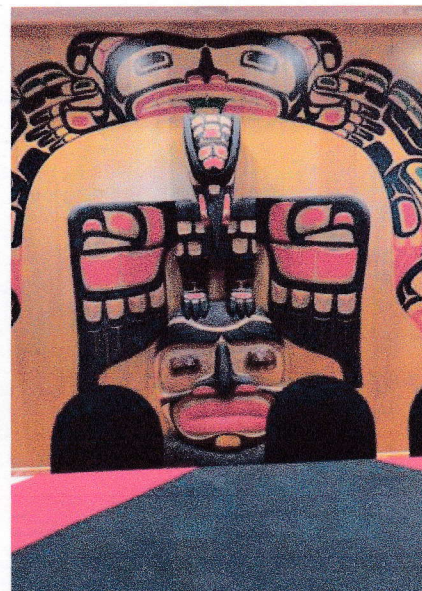
Baila's and my Cowichan duck breast surrounded with Saanich grow beets, honey glazed carrot, crisp fingerling potato, mustard greens and huckleberry jus was pan seared to a nice medium.

Garcia's slab of sablefish "pho" was in a ginger soy broth, filled with Ragley Farm sweet peas, lovage leaf infused polenta, pickled shallot and daikon.

The Dark Chocolate Roulade dessert was a chocolate lover's dream. Dark chocolate sponge rolled with 72% dark chocolate mousse, coated in chocolate ganache, served with chocolate sauce and chocolate chip ice-cream!

My ice-cream trio was a gentle, smooth wasabi, a white chocolate and a roasted fig leaf that tasted like almond when crumbled.

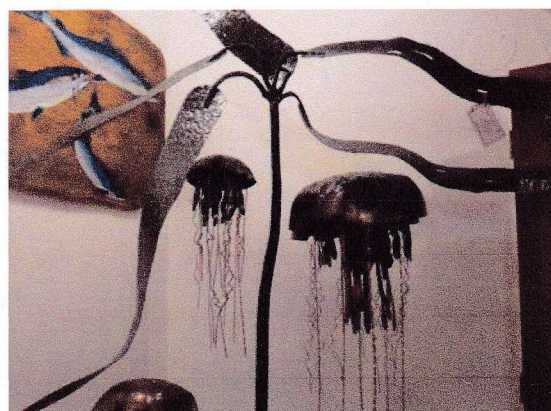
The chef and the gardener work closely together and create a new menu each night depending on what's available. Our thanks to gardener Debbie Crookes for an interesting garden tour. There are 10 types of lettuce giving 3 harvests, Goji berries, Chilean guava, white strawberries and fragrant Lemon Verbena. Bon appetite!



Victor Newman's carving in Potlatch Room.



Sooke Harbour House Gardener - Debbie Crookes.



"Kelp" created in Foggy Mountain Forge.