



## Brentwood Bay Lodge & Spa

by Deana Lancaster

Near the end of the ice age the glacier that covered southern Vancouver Island finished the cold, dirty work of digging a ditch, and as it pulled away it left Canada's southern-most fiord: the Saanich Inlet.

The name Saanich means "still water" in the language of the local First Nations, and it's fitting. This is a quiet place, heavy with mist and the grey-green branches of Douglas fir and yellow cedar, thickets of wild rose and the tangled trunks of arbutus.

It's here, tucked into a bay just north of where the inlet begins to narrow, that the Brentwood Bay Lodge & Spa has been built.

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Until the resort's completion in May, Brentwood Bay was best known as the eastern landing for the ferry that that travels to Mill Bay (a shortcut for travellers to northern Vancouver Island); as a put in for kayakers, and as a base from which to explore some of the best Scuba diving in the world.

Now add to that list a five-star resort and one of Canada's best new restaurants. A trip here just might be the pinnacle of Christmas gifts for the foodie in your life.

From the sidewalk, the Brentwood Bay Lodge & Spa is unassuming. It could be an upscale community centre, hewn from cedar and crouched against the edge of the bay.

But step inside and catch a glimpse of the inlet through windows that climb to the high angled ceiling. Throughout the lodge's interior, spare, elegant furnishings play backdrop to the views and to artwork by internationally acclaimed B.C. artists. Suddenly, the resort is transformed from modest to spectacular.

In November, its fine dining restaurant – the Arbutus Grille & Wine Bar – received several awards from enRoute magazine's annual new restaurant awards. The Arbutus Grille made number 5 on the list, was deemed to have Canada's Best New Wine List and the Sommelier of the Year, in wine guru Brian Storen.

Dinner there – with a host of other B.C. food and wine writers – confirmed the accolades. Executive chef Alain Leger (previously of Vancouver eateries Diva at the Met and Bistro Patis) is committed to cooking local, regional and seasonal; while Storen (who also helped create the legendary wine list at Sooke Harbour House) peers over the rims

of his spectacles while he shares his passion for the grape.

Their combined efforts result in pairings like a luscious chunk of sablefish wrapped in basil and set in duck essence with roasted pearl onions, enoki and shitake mushrooms, and baby bok choy served with a glass of Domaine Combret Chardonnay; grilled lamb chops and braised lamb cheeks served with parsnip puree and roasted fall root vegetables, served with a Kettle Valley Malbec in the Naramata Valley. Storen's wine knowledge is encyclopedic, though soft-spoken he's clearly enthusiastic, especially about the many notable bottles being produced on Vancouver Island.

Nothing is missed: from inventive menu and wine matches, to seamless service, even unique dinnerware that displays the food to be consumed.

The Arbutus Grille is also open for lunch and serves a complimentary three-course breakfast for resort guests. Or if it's more casual fare you're after, the resort is also home to the Marine Pub.

Take a break from eating (or sightseeing, kayaking, hiking or any of the other activities available) and relax in the Essence of Life Spa, where signature treatments even include "vino-therapy," using red wine.

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