

NOW AND ZEN

Time slows at Takahashi Gardens, a tranquil waterfront retreat on Porpoise Bay

STORY AND
PHOTOS BY
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Arriving at Takahashi Gardens at early dusk, the bamboo fences and cedar shakes glowing by majestic stone garden lights, is a suitably tranquil way to experience this secluded property.

Just two minutes from downtown Sechelt, Porpoise Bay and its mountainous surround are sweetly outlined in deep shades of blue, green and grey and there is a layer of mist quietly settling over the water. Birds rest on the docks while looking up from the cove, past the

terraced gardens and paths leading from beach to lodgings, as though promising further adventure tomorrow. Framing the scene, a small bonsai tree beckons prettily, atop the patio railing.

Retreat keeper Elaine Easton greets me warmly and we set off on a little tour. She's still putting the finishing touches on her retreat and there's been a whirlwind of activity lately.

"I bought this place almost nine years ago and it was in such a sad place, the realtor didn't even want to show it to me,"



Opening page, top:
Takahashi Gardens Waterfront Retreat.
Opening page, left: The retreat is named
after Elaine's mother Yasuko Takahashi.

Left: Owner Elaine Easton and
pals Buster and Jack.
Above: The views from the
waterfront suites' terraces
overlook Porpoise Bay.

she reflects. "It needed a lot of repair and a lot of love."

A self-employed graphic artist, the idea to turn her personal sanctuary into a place to share with guests occurred to Elaine in 2008, during the economic downturn, a "wake up call" as she describes it, a reminder to ponder possibilities for her future retirement on the property. In order to be able to afford to care for and live on the estate, Elaine felt she may need to supplement her income by sharing it with guests.

"It was always something I knew I could do here," she says. "My friends wanted to come and just chill out for a few days, then five days goes by and they're still here." Opening a guest retreat was simply an evolution of her hospitable tendencies.

Named after her late mother Yasuko Takahashi, the waterfront accommodations have been open since late last summer. Desiring a retreat that could help her balance the craziness of day-to-day work and life, Elaine's goal was to create a place where stress just dissolved the minute you step onto the property.

"Like starting anything new, I wondered am I going to love it or am I going to hate it," Elaine notes, when she originally con-

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sidered the aspect of hosting guests more formally. She needn't have wondered.

"I love it!" she says today, enthusiastically.

There are three self-contained deluxe suites in the grand plan, with two completed now and one on the way. Nikko Cottage (means sunshine) is set higher on the waterfront property but still boasts a view; Umi Suite (ocean) overlooks the garden and water, while the adjacent Yama Suite (mountain) currently under construction also faces Porpoise Bay.

The two existing suites have private entrances and patios, plus inviting private hot tubs. Inside the units are immaculate, with clean lines and contemporary, richly toned Asian-inspired décor. Amenities include flat screen televisions, reliable wireless Internet and iPod music docking stations. Sumptuous king or queen size beds are kitted out in Egyptian cotton sheets. Elaine also stocks each suite with cozy Japanese kimonos and slippers for each guest.

While not a bed and breakfast, per se, Elaine ensures guests have everything they need to self-cater along with gour-



Top: Interiors are minimal, restful and Zen-like.

Above: Asian accents punctuate the décor.

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The standalone cottage was once an artist's studio.

met coffee and teas, hot chocolate, butter, cream and condiments. She also leaves a selection of sweet treats to tide guests over in the morning.

"The self-catering aspect makes it that much easier for me," she notes.

Everywhere there are special little touches to make guests feel away from it all, such as the lovely soaps, handmade locally by Sunshine Coast Natural Soap Co. and specially wrapped for Takahashi Garden, and the Asian artworks throughout the suites and in the gardens. The winding stone paths, meticulously restored and maintained are flanked by evergreen, deciduous and to a lesser degree flowering plants and shrubs along with tranquil statues and focal points.

In the evening after sunset, the silence and the beauty envelops guests as they unwind in the steamy hot tub outlined in twinkling mini-lights, privacy secured by the elegant arrangement of bamboo reeds, fences and screens. Although everything is set just so, Elaine sees lots of areas she can work even more magic on.

"When you are creating something like this, often all you can see is what you haven't done, or what you need to do," she contends, laughing.

But despite her ambitions to improve, the ambiance at Takahashi couldn't be more perfect or serene.

For more info, go to takahashi-gardens.com. **CL**