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ROWENA'S INN ON THE RIVER FROM TIME TO TIME

HARRISON MILLS, B.C. — Not many inn owners can say they once played cops-and-robbers on the grounds they run, but Betty-Anne Faulkner of Rowena's Inn on the River in Harrison Mills sure can. The lady of the manor is a storyteller, a true gem. Into her eighties (though she'd never admit it), Faulkner has turned her family's lavish 1920s home into a luxurious retreat. The property wasn't always so opulent, Faulkner is quick to explain, which only adds to its historic charm. "When my parents bought this place, there were no roads," she says. "They travelled by train then paddled up by canoe to work on this little tiny house that it was." Her parents, Charles and Rowena Pretty, were pioneers in the region with ambitious ideas for the site. Queen Victoria herself knew of the plans and granted them the land before they purchased it in January of 1924. The entire family chipped in to build, adding onto the design and importing ornate furniture and artwork over time. With a few exceptions, "how it used to be and how it is now is fairly similar," says Faulkner.

The towering Douglas firs, swooping sparrows, and eagle nests remain, but today they also share the grounds with the Sandpiper Golf Course. There are no televisions, but there is high-speed Internet for shutterbugs who need to post their latest escapade. The resort's restaurant, River's Edge, serves up world-class West Coast cuisine, with escargot good enough to order two rounds.

There are stories at every turn. The copper handrail in the drawing room once belonged to the original Hotel Vancouver, when it was located on the corner of Georgia and Granville streets. The chandelier in the piano room was purchased in England in the 1920s; each piece was individually wrapped for shipping. Famed American entertainer Jimmy Durante once played in this room on the 1912 Steinway. Velvety chairs and a gold-rimmed side table stocked with the full collection of Edgar Allan Poe complete the charm.

Each of the nine guestrooms holds meaning, too. Choose from five within the inn itself, or four private cabins, all named after a beloved family member. The bed in Betty-Anne's Room, for example, was handmade for Dame Nellie Melba, one of the world's greatest opera singers of the late Victorian era and early 20th century. Faulkner says she often sits in her old quarters to reminisce about her cops-and-robbers days. The winter months hold some of her fondest memories. "This place really lent itself to Christmas time," she says. "I always went out with my dad and cut down a wonderful big tree." Long before she ran the show, Faulkner knew her family had something extraordinary here. "I always knew this place was special, even as a child. There's a presence here. Some people find it spiritual, some find it relaxing," she says. "Others say it's like your cares melt away when you come down the driveway." Certainly, problems fade, and—even if just for a moment—time stands still.

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