


A Bow to Bowen

A well-focused vision for this uniquely located community keeps “islanders” moving in within an easy commute to Vancouver.

By Kirsten Rodenhizer

Bowen Island used to just be a holiday haven. Its secluded coves and winding, forested roads were dotted with tiny summer cottages owned by mainlanders who spent summer weekends hiking the trails and  quing at the beaches. But over the past decade, people have started to wake up to Bowen’s potential – as a place to build a home, raise a family and be a part of a community.

Bowen Island Realtor Hal Barber, of Angell Hasman & Associates, moved to Bowen, a 12-by-six-kilometre island located just off West Vancouver’s coast in Howe Sound, in 1989. He recalls at first there were few lights shining on winter nights.

“It seemed like there would be more and more lights on every year, to the point where nothing was ‘just a summer home,’” he says.

The number of permanent homes increased gradually but steadily through the 1990s, spurred on by property values, then lower than other mainland burghs. However, in 2001, values started to increase dramatically. By 2006, they had more than doubled, with the average price of a home rising to \$635,000. This was a result of rising prices throughout the region, but also the general realization that Bowen Island was a perfect place to build a home, or more accurately, a dream home.

“There was definitely a transition,” says Barber. “The island was attracting people from far and wide, many of whom were looking for a higher-end home. If it had waterfront, that was even better.”

David Sorensen, co-owner of Sorensen Fine Homes, the company behind King Edward Bay, a new 135-acre, 41-lot residential development on the





island's southwest side, is no stranger to Bowen's appeal. Nor are his buyers. The development offers waterfront parcels, views of the Strait of Georgia and a promise of Upper Caulfield-calibre homes in an island setting, and it's selling fast. Construction is due to begin this summer.

Sorensen attributes the island's desirability to its tight-knit community, friendly people and relaxed rural lifestyle, not to mention 360-degree ocean views, all in close proximity to the city.

"That kind of vibrancy is hard to replicate. It's what interests our buyers," he says. "People are actually moving from West Vancouver to King Edward Bay. They want to have the island lifestyle and be close to Vancouver."

And where once the obligatory 20-minute ferry ride might have been off-putting for buyers, it's downright pleasant compared to a gruelling commute on a jammed freeway. Add a virtually crime-free community and a temperate climate, and the island practically sells itself.

Wolfgang Duntz, a long-time Bowen resident and developer, has witnessed and precipitated many changes on the island since he moved from Germany in 1980. His development company, Bowen Island Properties, has several major projects in the works, including a 170-lot development under construction at Cowan Point on the southeast corner of the island. When built, Cowan Point homes will be in the \$600,000 to \$1.5-million range and offer beautiful views of the Strait of Georgia, Vancouver and West Vancouver.

"Twenty-five years ago it was an oddity to move to Bowen Island, and now you're almost envied if you can," says Duntz.

The Cowan Point site includes a popular golf course, opened last year and rumoured to be the most challenging nine holes in British Columbia.

Other commercial ventures are also thriving. Where once Bowen's main road inland from the ferry had only a scattering of stores to buy necessities like milk and hardware, now there are clusters of shops, cafes, restaurants and businesses. Artisan Square, a vibrant arts-and-crafts village just west of Snug Cove, draws both visitors and residents to its galleries, studios and shops.

"The calibre of the commercial built environment on Bowen Island is absolutely first class,"

says Sorensen. "It really has an impact in the perception of value as people come off the ferry."

As much as new development has been changing the face of Bowen, Bowen has been shaping the form of the development. At King Edward Bay, for example, Sorensen allowed the landscape to dictate the site's layout, mapping a route through the forest that preserved as much of the landscape as possible. The result is tastefully integrated into the natural landscape and virtually undetectable from main roads.

"I spent eight months myself with a trestle table, a laptop computer and a laser gun, just satisfying myself that I had a reasonable 3-D map," says Sorensen, adding his efforts have gotten a positive reception from islanders.

In addition to environmental sustainability, development on Bowen seems to be moving toward creation of a cultured and self-sustaining community, which will no doubt increase its appeal in the long term. According to the island's Chamber of Commerce, a performing arts centre may be on the horizon, as well as a recreation centre and a seniors' facility. Transportation is also likely to improve, with a redeveloped ferry terminal and passenger-only ferry service in the pipeline.

"My vision is less about homes and more about community," says Duntz, who has been one of Bowen's loudest voices in favour of developing a sustainable island economy. "We want to attract people with a deep-rooted commitment to the community." 