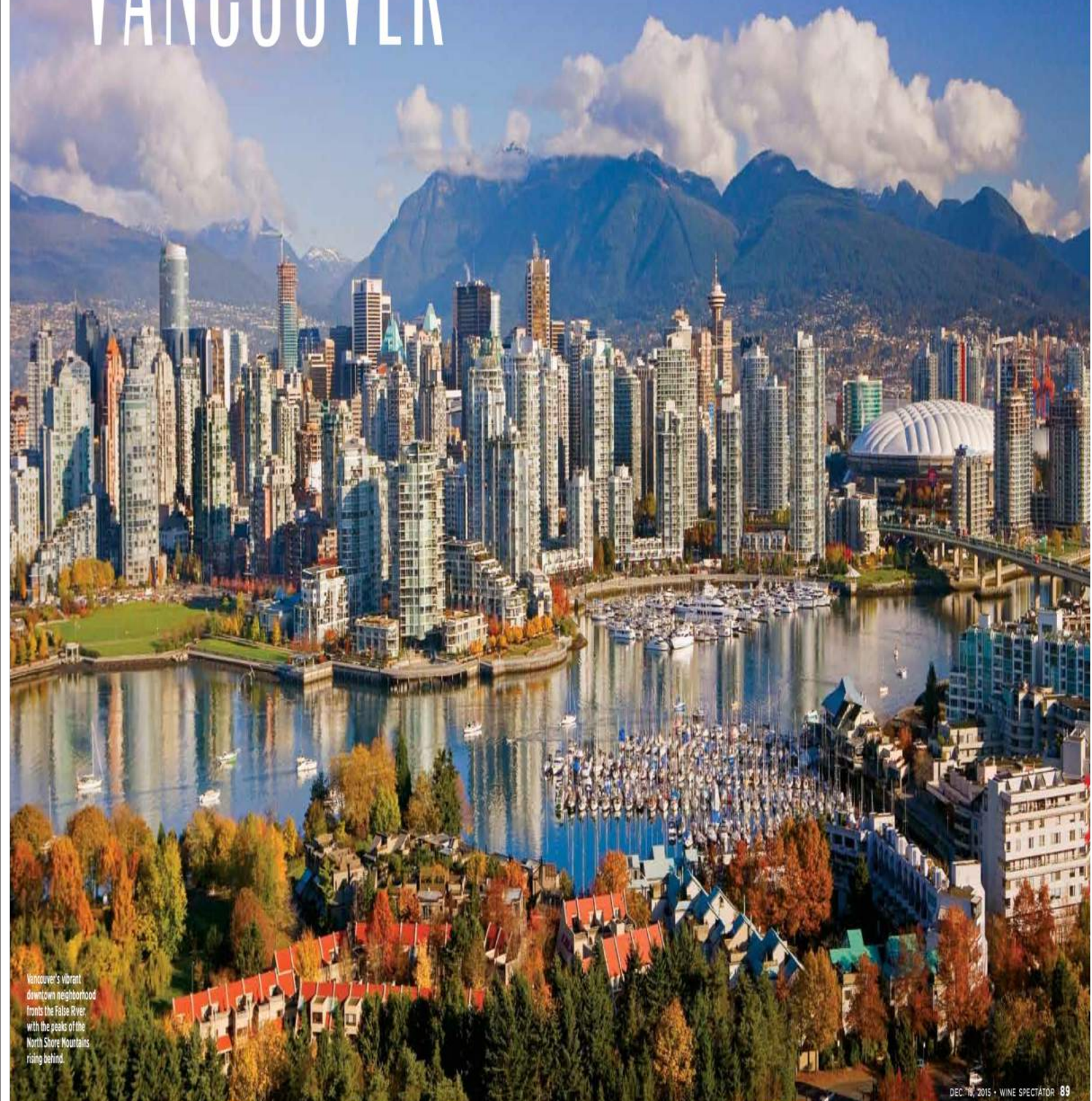


Wine Spectator

DESTINATION VANCOUVER

THE BRITISH COLUMBIA CITY OFFERS A THRIVING FOOD
AND WINE SCENE AGAINST A BACKDROP OF NATURAL BEAUTY

BY TIM FISH



Vancouver's vibrant downtown neighborhood fronts the False River, with the peaks of the North Shore Mountains rising behind.



Gotham wine director Christopher McFadden recently expanded the restaurant's wine list, with noteworthy offerings from California, France and Italy.

Tell someone who's been there that you're planning a trip to Vancouver, B.C., and the response will likely be: "I love that town." Once you're there, that sentiment is easy to understand. Vancouver has a vibrant downtown area, stunning views of mountains and Pacific waterways, bountiful recreation opportunities, rich culture and history, and an increasingly sophisticated food and wine scene. It's a destination that seems to have it all, akin to cities like Seattle and San Francisco.

Yet Vancouver is distinctly its own. Located in the southwestern corner of Canada, Vancouver is a wedge of skyscrapers in the otherwise bucolic scenery of British Columbia. Many will remember it as the home of the 2010 Winter Olympics, and according to census data, the metro area has grown by as much as 25 percent in the past decade, with a population now approaching 2.5 million.

Because of its proximity to the Pacific, Vancouver is one of the warmest cities in Canada, but much like Seattle, 150 miles to the south, it has more than its share of rain and clouds. The location has also created a melting pot of ethnicities; the Asian population rivals that of San Francisco. City data shows that 48 percent of residents speak a first language other than English. Sushi and other Asian restaurants abound.

Like many appealing destinations, Vancouver is a city of neighborhoods, each with a distinct personality. Downtown is the center of culture and shopping. The waterfront

is home to tourism and to Canada Place, a dramatic structure with a striking, saillike roofline that's home to the city's convention center and cruise port. Gastown contains Vancouver's original main street and is now a blend of historic architecture, nightlife and hipster boutiques. Yaletown is the old warehouse and railroad district, reborn as an enclave of popular restaurants and upscale condos.

Granville Island offers a vital public market where more than 100 vendors sell everything from produce to soap to jewelry. The crown jewel of Vancouver is Stanley Park, one of the largest urban parks in Canada, populated by towering cedar trees and bounded on three sides by waterfront walkways.

Downtown makes the best home base for travelers, and there is a range of hotels from which to choose, depending on your taste and pocketbook. The city has excellent public transportation, and recent expansions of the SkyTrain make the trip from the airport to a downtown hotel relatively easy and cheap. And once you're here, Vancouver is a town worth exploring.

Two recent additions to the hotel scene are worthy considerations. Historic Rosewood Hotel Georgia finished a \$120 million revamp four years ago, and the results are impressive. The hotel is home to one of the city's top dining rooms, Hawksworth Restaurant, and is located in the heart of things, a short walk from Vancouver's fashion district, on Robson Street.

Situated on the waterfront, Fairmont Pacific Rim offers splendid views of the harbor and has a sleek, modern vibe. Wine



The menu at Blue Water Cafe features uni with ponzu.

director Jill Spoor maintains a strong wine list for the hotel and showcases it well at ORU restaurant. The Fairmont's location is ideal for taking in the town and is an easy stroll to the popular Gastown district.

Restaurants seem to be everywhere in this city, with a particularly strong representation in Yaletown, Gastown and Granville Island. One local food and wine veteran is Pino Posteraro, who opened Cioppino's Mediterranean Grill in Yaletown in 1999. Cioppino's holds a *Wine Spectator* Best of Award of Excellence and offers one of the largest wine lists in Canada. Wine, in fact, is the backbone of the business. "Forty percent of our sales come from wine," says Posteraro, who has five sommeliers on staff.

Hawksworth wine director Bryant Mao echoes the importance of wine on Vancouver's tables, estimating that about 75 percent of his guests order wine. He and his nine sommeliers are on hand to assist. The Hawksworth list includes about 1,000 bottles and represents a cross section of the world. "We like to have different and interesting wines on the list and also a lot of diversity," Mao says.

Hawksworth has an enviable wine budget, and about 25 percent of Mao's purchases are celledared and allowed to mature for several years before they're added to the list. That's exceptionally important, because British Columbia levies a 117 percent tax on imported wines, which means that buying older wines can be cost-prohibitive.

This is also the reason why wines from California, Oregon, Washington, Europe and beyond carry a steep price tag on Vancouver lists. If there's a silver lining, it's the strong presence of Canadian wines in restaurants, particularly bottlings from Okanagan Valley.



Hawksworth wine director Bryant Mao emphasizes global diversity on the wine list.

Locals are committed to the region's wines, and many wine tourists visiting Okanagan stop here too. It's a young wine region where crisp whites such as Riesling, Pinot Blanc and Pinot Gris thrive. "The British Columbian wines are starting to show a lot stronger," says Christopher McFadden, sommelier at Gotham Steakhouse.

That sentiment mirrors the evolution of Vancouver itself: It's already an impressive food and wine destination, and once you spend time there and take in its energy, you realize things are really just getting started.

Note: Prices in this story have been converted to U.S. dollars using the exchange rate at press time (\$1 equals CAN\$1.30) and rounded to the nearest dollar. In the listings below, restaurants accept all major credit cards.



The Fairmont Pacific Rim boasts floor-to-ceiling views of the harbor.

WHERE TO STAY

Fairmont Pacific Rim

1038 Canada Place **Telephone** (877) 900-5350 **Website** www.fairmont.com/pacificrim **Rooms** 340 **Suites** 37 **Rates** \$329-\$11,500

Finished just in time for the XXI Olympic Winter Games, in 2010, the Fairmont Pacific Rim is an impressive addition to downtown Vancouver. Located in the heart of the waterfront area, it offers striking views of the harbor. The lobby sets the stage with a sleek and polished design that mixes modern style with a touch of retro chic. Sushi is the main attraction in the airy lobby lounge. Guest rooms are spacious, with the smallest accommodations measuring 400 square feet, and are decorated in soothing tones, evoking a sophisticated, unfussy elegance. The baths have large soaking tubs and white marble accents. A rooftop pool is complete with private cabanas and swaying palm trees.



Cioppino chef Pino Posteraro has long been a pioneer in the city's fine-dining scene.

Rosewood Hotel Georgia

801 W. Georgia St. **Telephone** (888) 767-3966 **Website** www.rosewoodhotels.com/en/hotel-georgia-vancouver **Rooms** 134 **Suites** 22 **Rates** \$250–\$3,450

Opened during the height of the Jazz Age, in 1927, Hotel Georgia has since played host to the likes of Elvis Presley, John Wayne and the Beatles. After a \$120 million renovation that finished in 2011, the hotel was reborn. The lobby retains its stately art deco charm, but gone are the tiny guest rooms common to most historic hotels. The original 320 rooms have been replaced with 156 accommodations that include luxurious bathrooms with heated granite floors. Guestroom decor has a timeless grace, with tones of pale blue, ivory and chocolate. The health spa and a dramatic 52-foot saltwater pool are located in an adjacent skyscraper of private residences that were added during the retrofit.

WHERE TO EAT

Blue Water Cafe

1095 Hamilton St. **Telephone** (604) 688-8078 **Website** www.bluewatercafe.net
Open Dinner, daily **Cost** Entrées \$19–\$34
Corkage \$29

One of the most popular spots in booming Yaletown is Blue Water Cafe, a large, vibrant dining hall with a towering beamed ceiling, red brick walls and an open kitchen and sushi bar. As the name suggests,



Cioppino offers pan-seared scallops with roasted mushrooms, fingerling potato chips and black truffle spuma.

it's all about the seafood here, and executive chef Frank Pabst focuses on using sustainable fish. His dishes are artfully crafted and delicately complex. A Dungeness crab salad is a tower stacked with layers of jicama, baby shrimp and mango, and a fleshy sablefish is luxuriously prepared with a miso sake glaze. The wine list is impressive, featuring about 1,000 selections, with strong showings from California, France and Italy. Options range from a lively 50th Parallel Pinot Gris Okanagan Valley 2014 (\$38) to collector's items such as Château Ausone St.-Emilion 2005 (\$3,066).

Cioppino's Mediterranean Grill

1133 Hamilton St. **Telephone** (604) 688-7466
Website www.cioppinosyaletown.com **Open** Dinner, Monday to Saturday **Cost** Entrées \$19–\$37 **Best of Award of Excellence**

Chef-owner Pino Posteraro was an early advocate of good food and wine in Vancouver, and Cioppino's remains a destination. The scene is classically old-school, with formally dressed waiters, low lighting and the hushed strains of Sinatra in the background. Posteraro's menu takes inspiration from all around the Mediterranean, but mostly from his native southern Italy. Fresh pappardelle is mingled with decadent braised veal cheek and porcini mushrooms, and the eponymous cioppino is rich and spicy, served in a bouillabaisse broth. The wine list is an impressive collection of about 3,000 selections, emphasizing Italy, France and

California. Posteraro oversees the list, and his servers are polished in their wine knowledge. Offerings range from Mission Hill Pinot Blanc Okanagan Valley Reserve 2013 (\$38) to Tenuta San Guido Sassicaia 1985 (\$3,068).



Hawksworth serves a starter of foie gras torchon with granola, fruit and tapioca.

Gotham Steakhouse & Bar

615 Seymour St. **Telephone** (604) 605-8282 **Website** www.gothamsteakhouse.com **Open** Dinner, daily; lunch, Monday to Friday **Cost** Entrées \$26–\$60 **Corkage** \$23 **Best of Award of Excellence**

The art deco atmosphere of Gotham is the first thing that grabs you: boldly colored murals, dark wood, plush seating and the sound of a martini shaking in the background—an ideal setting for a good steak. The menu has all the familiar comforts: a wedge of iceberg with blue cheese, oysters Rockefeller, creamed spinach, lobster, pork chops and blackened ahi tuna. The beef hails from Alberta and is all prime and dry-aged for 28 days. Go for the porterhouse if you're really hungry, but the 16-ounce bone-in rib eye is packed with flavor. Christopher McFadden has been busily expanding the wine list, which this year earned a *Wine Spectator* Best of Award of Excellence. There are more than 500 selections, of which California Cabernet and Italian reds are the big sellers. Selections range from Cliff Lede Sauvignon Blanc Napa Valley 2013 (\$61) to Gaja Langhe Sperss 2004 (\$671).

Hawksworth Restaurant

801 W. Georgia St. **Telephone** (604) 673-7000 **Website** www.hawksworthrestaurant.com **Open** Breakfast, daily; brunch, Saturday and Sunday; lunch, Monday to Friday; dinner, daily **Cost** Entrées \$30–\$43 **Corkage** \$27

In a city with lots of competition, Hawksworth is arguably the top food and wine experience: It gets everything right. Located inside Rosewood Hotel Georgia, the restaurant is strikingly styled, with elegant tones of pearl white and beige, framed in glass and dark wood and



Chef Lee Cooper of L'Abattoir blends regional and French influences.

accented by modern art and a massive crystal chandelier. Chef David Hawksworth calls his cuisine “contemporary Canadian,” relying on local ingredients and his classic training in Europe to create distinctive flavors and artful plates. Shaved foie gras torchon served with savory granola, exotic fruit and coconut tapioca is delightful. Parmesan-crusted chicken is an inspiration, with potato gnocchi, morel mushroom and black truffle. Wine director Bryant Mao has a staff of first-rate sommeliers, and his list of about 1,000 bottles is as impressive as it is eclectic, with selections from around the globe ranging from M. Chapoutier Côtes du Roussillon-Villages Les Vignes de Bila-Haut 2013 (\$40) to Penfolds Shiraz South Australia Grange 1991 (\$1,356).

L'Abattoir

217 Carrall St. **Telephone** (604) 568-1701 **Website** www.labattoir.ca **Open** Brunch, Saturday and Sunday; lunch, daily, by reservation only; dinner, daily **Cost** Entrées \$24–\$28 **Corkage** \$23

Located in the heart of Gastown, L'Abattoir has a sleek, urban vibe with a spirited bar, exposed-brick walls, French tiles and mason jar light fixtures. But chef Lee Cooper has serious intentions, with a menu that blends French influence with regional B.C. cuisine. Seafood dominates the menu, with starters such as a fiery grilled octopus with fennel and red pepper, and entrées such as richly smoky medallions of salmon wrapped in bacon and then roasted. Sommelier Robert Herman has a list of 75 wines, and it's an intriguing if eclectic collection. Italy and France dominate, but there is a handful of Canadian and California wines, with selections that range from Matteo Correggia Roero Arneis 2012 (\$48) to Heitz Cabernet Sauvignon Napa Valley Martha's Vineyard 2005 (\$298).

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