

# Vancouver Sun

## Island resort an oasis of calm; A fractional interest in Galiano Inn buys you a piece of waterfront seclusion that includes a spa and fine dining

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Section: Out Of Town Properties

Byline: Suzanne Morphet

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Illustrations: Colour Photo: Suzanne Morphet, Special to The Vancouver Sun / With stunning views of Active Pass, Galiano Oceanfront Inn and Spa on Galiano Island offers a quiet garden setting that is perfect for an early morning walk with the dogs. Suites at the resort are available under a fractional ownership scheme and several are pet-friendly.

Colour Photo: Suzanne Morphet, Special to The Vancouver Sun / Spa suites at Galiano Oceanfront Inn and Spa face the ocean, with French doors and patios or balconies.

Colour Photo: Kitchens in the one-bedroom villas come with granite countertops, custom cabinetry in an espresso finish and stainless steel appliances, including a wine fridge.

Colour Photo: The bathrooms in the spa suites have a Mediterranean feel, with soft colours and gleaming white tiles. The heated floors feature tile as well.

Colour Photo: Owners Conny Nordin and Mel Gibb have developed Galiano Oceanfront Inn and Spa resort from an old fishing lodge next to the BC Ferries dock on Galiano Island, providing 20 suites in two separate buildings.

Colour Photo: The lounge, which features a stylized carving of Luna the whale, is a comfortable place to chat with fellow guests, curl up and read a book or play a game.

Colour Photo: A PLACE TO WINE AND DINE: If you're a wine connoisseur, the Galiano Inn and Spa will not disappoint. In 2007 and 2008, the Atrevida restaurant (above) won awards at the Vancouver Playhouse International Wine Festival for its wine selection. "We have over 200 wines on our wine list from B.C.," explains Richard Massey, restaurant manager and sommelier. "We really focused on them." Many of the B.C. wines are from small estates with limited production, which can't be found in liquor stores. If you want to take a bottle home, visit the Inn's boutique wine cellar.

**When Conny Nordin and Mel Gibb bought a run-down resort on Galiano Island in 2000, they weren't sure what to do with it. Developing a new high-end bed and breakfast was one possibility; keeping it just for themselves was another.**

Ultimately, the Vancouver couple did neither with the former fishing lodge located next to Active Pass. Instead, they rescued it.

Today they are selling fractional interests in 10 newly built suites and 10 newly renovated suites in Galiano Oceanfront Inn and Spa resort.

"There's a real history to this property and not a lot of places can say that," says Conny, referring to its early beginnings in the 1930s when an English seaman purchased the property, built a Tudor-style house for fishing guests and planted some exotic trees.

The house burned down in the 1950s, but the trees - including a London plane tree and sequoias - are now beautiful, mature specimens and added to the property's appeal when Conny and Mel first started coming to the island.

"We used to be boaters," explains Conny. "Every weekend we'd go out exploring and we loved the Gulf Islands. Galiano was our favourite ... we would always come back to this island, to this particular property."

On a perfect summer day, it's easy to see why. River otters are frolicking in the sheltered bay fronting the sun-drenched three-acre property, while a Great Blue heron grooms itself on a rock next to the sandy beach. A long, white pier draws your eye out to a dock where ferries from Vancouver and other southern Gulf Islands regularly pull in, and cars and people load and unload. Galiano is the first stop from Tsawwassen, which makes it a popular destination.

Considering all the activity within sight, the resort itself is an oasis of calm and quiet. Hummingbirds silently sip nectar from honeysuckle rambling along one side of the spa. At the back of the property, the London plane tree shades an elevated, formal garden where bees move busily between purple lavender and orange calendula. A waterfall tumbles into a pond, ear balm for those having their bodies massaged in the little cedar cottage overlooking it.

Because the Gulf Islands are notoriously short of fresh water, Conny and Mel made sure the garden wouldn't draw on precious well water. "We have an underground water cistern," notes Conny. "It used to be a swimming pool, but we dug it up and created a water cistern for watering the garden."

The accommodation - 20 suites in two separate buildings - is just as restful and welcoming as the garden, with soft Mediterranean colours, gleaming white tiles and comfortable furnishings.

Conny doesn't like the clutter found in many hotel rooms, where "the first things I see are a coffee maker and a teapot and television, all this mechanical stuff." When you enter any of the spa suites at the Galiano Inn and Spa, those necessities are all tucked away, in wood cabinets or drawers.

Even more ingeniously, the 10 spa suites each have a hidden dining table and massage table. "Touch a button on the wall and a dining table comes out with service for two, or you pull a lever and a massage table comes out of the wall," says Conny, demonstrating how fluidly the unit works.

The product is not on the market; Mel and Conny worked with a wallbed manufacturer in Richmond, who designed it to their specifications.

"It had to be easy for guests and therapists so there would be no strain on anyone in pulling it out."

A table for eating-in occasionally is understandable - though the on-site Atrevida restaurant offers fine dining and an award-winning wine list - but why would guests want a massage in their room when they can have one in the delightful garden cottage or in the spa?

"If you've had a massage, you really just want to relax and doze off afterwards, but you really can't because you have to get up and get dressed or put on your robe and slippers and go back to your room," explains Conny. "When you have a massage in your room, the massage therapist tiptoes out, and you can roll over and go to sleep. It's heavenly."

French doors that open to the ocean in summer, and heat from a wood-burning fireplace in winter make the rooms appealing if you simply feel like staying put. For people who have trouble with gadgetry, Conny has compiled instructions for everything, from how to light the fire to where to find the tea and coffee.

At the other end of the property, and also facing the ocean, the ten villas are getting their finishing touches. Bigger than the spa suites and with full kitchens, these units will appeal to those who like living outdoors in comfort. Each boasts an outdoor fireplace, barbecue and hydrotherapy tub. A privacy screen ensures your outdoor bath doesn't become a public spectacle.

In between the spa suites and the villas is the heart of the resort - a cedar shake clad building where guests check in, dine, enjoy spa treatments, or simply relax in the lounge with its wicker chairs, stone fireplace, beam-and-plaster ceiling, and stylized carving of Luna the whale.

Conny and Mel are avid art collectors and promoters; throughout the resort you'll find paintings and glasswork by local artists, but it's Luna who really captures your attention. A few years ago, Mel bought an old-growth log that had been retrieved from a lake bottom in the Queen Charlotte Islands. He commissioned an aboriginal artist to create a model of Luna - the whale that became famous by befriending boaters in Gold River - from part of the log. Today, the wooden Luna appears to welcome guests with a wide grin and mischievous eyes.

If it is pampering you're after, guests can purchase packages which include use of the steam room and mineral floatation pool, or opt for single treatments such as the blueberry smoothie body wrap, made from organic B.C. blueberries, milk and honey, or the hemp seed sugar scrub - "the only hemp treatment in Canada and North America as far as we know," says spa manager Linda Epstein. It's taken eight years, but the transformation from an old motel to a new resort, complete with garden, spa and dining room, is virtually complete. Most of that time was spent waiting for approvals. Even though the property was

zoned commercial - and a previous owner had been granted a development permit for 60 units - it took six years to get approval from the local Island Trust to build 10 suites.

"We did not understand how local government works in the Gulf Islands," says Conny, who, for many years was the executive director of human resources for BC Liquor Stores, while Mel was a builder and more recently a manufacturer of plumbing parts.

Now the outgoing couple are looking forward to the arrival of more guests. Both the spa suites and the villas are available to book as you would a hotel, or can be purchased as fractional properties. One-eighth ownership of a spa suite, which gives you use of the property for six weeks a year, costs from \$33,900 to \$44,900. A villa goes for \$89,900 to \$98,900.

Unlike many new resorts offering fractional ownership, the amenities at Galiano Inn and Spa are already in place. The spa and dining room have been operating for three years. "Right now, people can come, stay, have dinner any night of the week and have spa treatments that are some of the best in Canada," says Conny. "It's not something that's going to happen next year, or maybe down the road."

The resort's realtor, Ian Watts, says another advantage to buying into a place that has been operating for a while is that the monthly maintenance fees are more likely to be accurate because the cost of upkeep is known. By comparison, Watts points out that fees "have more than doubled" in five years at a fractional ownership property he sold in Whistler.

Sales at the Galiano Oceanfront Inn and Spa officially began with a grand opening a few weeks ago; about 25 per cent of the fractions in both the spa suites and the villas at the Galiano Inn have been sold.

One of the first people to buy were Carol and Ronald Elloway from Coquitlam. The couple were searching for a waterfront getaway close to home, but didn't want to spend a million dollars on a place.

"We don't have the time - we're not retired - so we don't have the time to put into maintaining a place all year round when we can only go and really stay there a certain amount of time during the year," says Carol, just returned from a weekend in the new suite with her husband. "We're totally thrilled with it. We left Saturday morning and came back Sunday and I felt like I'd been gone for a week."

The Elloways are so satisfied they're thinking of buying a second suite so they can take friends or family with them when they visit.

Getting people to come to the Galiano Inn and Spa has not been a problem - the suites are booked for most of the summer; getting them to leave it might be. Mel noticed that in the first year or so of operation.

"We had a 32-foot whale watching boat but I sold it. People didn't want to leave the property. They just

wanted to stay here."

Suzanne Morphet is a photojournalist in Victoria and contributor to a new book, The Vancouver Island Book of Everything.

**GALIANO OCEANFRONT INN AND SPA  
RESORT**

Location: Galiano Island

Project size: 20 suites, one-eighth ownership

Suite sizes: Villa suites from 667 sq. ft., spasuites from 350 to 450 sq. ft.

Prices: \$33,900 -- \$98,900/fraction

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Developer: Galiano Enterprises

Occupancy: Immediate