

WHEN AMERICAN DEPARTMENT STORE TYCOON WILLIAM DILLARD COINED THE AXIOM 'location, location, location' he might have been speaking about the Inn at Laurel Point, a deliciously sophisticated property perched on a tiny peninsula overlooking Victoria's inner and outer harbours. From the outset the property has offered a view to die for. Now, following a recent refurbishment the Inn has taken itself farther offering a facility that is now even more the icing on a very lovely cake.

According to the Inn's Managing Director, Ian Powell, the hotel's progress to this point has been a steady one. He reports that today's Inn at Laurel Point got its start in the 70s as a 135 room Delta. By 1982, the hotel had been sold to Paul Arsens and family.

"The Arsens had real vision for the hotel and saw right off that it offered a lot of opportunity and potential," he says, reporting that Paul commissioned wunderkinder BC-based architect Arthur Erickson and designer Robert Ledingham to create a new wing. "This new section opened in 1989 and has become known as the Erickson Wing and brought up the room count to 200," says Powell, who remarks that there are 135 rooms in the initial Laurel Wing and 65-stunning suites in the Erickson Wing, a section that offers private balconies and sprawling views.

Modern in its approach with a design that collaborates with the natural environment, the Erickson Wing has stood the test of the past two decades. "The design is still as fresh today as it was the day the section opened 20 years ago. Really, it is a timeless modern classic. Our plan is to keep it that way," says Powell, who came on board in 2006 after returning to Victoria from overseas. Powell is no stranger to Victoria previously having been the General Manager of the city's iconic Empress Hotel.

A Point of Distinction

When Powell entered the scene he suggests that he saw the property as a sleeping beauty. "Mr. Arsens had passed away and his widow was cautious about changes to the hotel that her husband had so lovingly tended. However, this is a hotel that is situated on the most spectacular piece of real estate in Victoria," he says, adding that right off he saw the need to spend money to maximize the tremendous potential of the site and protect the boutique niche it occupied.

With a budget of \$5 million, Powell has worked doggedly to makeover the hotel. "We have been blessed with a property that has good bones. This has meant an ability to make meaningful changes as we undertook a recent refurbishment. All along our goal has been to protect our market niche and develop new business," he says.

For example, this year the hotel changed its name from the Laurel Point Inn to the Inn at Laurel Point in a move that will help make a further distinction between the property of yesterday and the contemporary beauty and ambiance of the current operation. Powell started by looking at the bedroom product in the Erickson Wing.





The property at the hotel has a view to die for.

Luxurious rooms offer state of the art mattresses and duvets in every room.

on

Victoria's Inn at Laurel Point
occupies both a stunning piece of real estate as well as
a place in the hearts of amenity savvy travelers.



The Erikson wing offers 65 stunning suites.

“I was lucky enough to be able to bring original interior designer Robert Ledingham back to assist with the refurbished decor. This has really enabled us to maintain the consistency of the overall design in the wing,” he says.

Last year the property completed work to its Aura Waterfront Restaurant and Patio, a project that ran to more than \$2 million and delivered a cutting-edge restaurant/lounge as well as the only patio on Victoria’s famous, inner harbour. Next will come the public areas such as the lobby.

“The refurbishment has positioned us well to weather the current problems with tourism and occupancies. For instance, we are in a market dominated by the Fairmont Empress, a property that suggests old world Victoria. Our point of difference lies in our ability to offer a hotel that is modern and fresh. We have positioned ourselves as a new world Victoria property with cutting edge decor and amenities, location and a restaurant that specializes in contemporary Pacific Rim cuisine,” says Powell.

Indeed, Executive Chef Brad Horen reports that Aura is all about seasonal dishes, local foods, and modern cooking styles. For example, guests at Aura can side step heavy sauces thanks to a menu that offers things like chestnut or apple foams for fish courses.

“Our goal is to be modern, clean and sleek with contemporary plating. Here change is a



constant,” says Horen remarking that dishes are designed to wow with flavour rather than portion size. He reports that guests might find sour cherry tea soaked scallops or brazed short ribs with pineapple maki in a fusion of western and Japanese styles.

“We are here for those guests who want something beyond the tea and roses they might find in a more traditional Victoria property,” says the hotel’s director, noting that their guests are looking and finding a different experience. Towards this end, the property is designed to offer something for all the senses. Already mentioned is Aura and its contemporary fusion menu. However, like a beautiful Zen koan, the grounds offer much more than the grass and shrubbery that meets the eye. According to Powell, the hotel has long



Ian Powell, Managing Director

been known as the location of gorgeous Japanese gardens that look out to the inner harbour with a setting that is tasteful and contemplative as well as naturally lovely.

“Everyone has a pool and Jacuzzi. We have grounds that offer a natural solace that is just five minutes from the heart of the city,” he says, adding that like so many aspects of the hotel, there is a distinctive difference. For instance, rather than have a

dedicated spa centre, The Inn at Laurel Point has a personalized treatment service that is conducted in-room.

“This is possible because the rooms are large and can easily accommodate something like a massage therapist and related equipment. The tubs are also large enough to allow for therapeutic soaks. The beauty is that guests are left to the privacy of their rooms rather than wander the halls in bathrobes and slippers or have to change in a spa centre. In-room treatments are so



much more relaxing and private,” says Powell, stating that this aspect serves to further reinforce the hotel as a luxurious enclave.

Certainly, the luxury is pervasive at Inn at Laurel Point. Powell reports that rooms and suites are large and dramatically overspecced. This means state of the art mattresses with thick pillow tops, high thread count sheeting, and sumptuous duvets in all guest rooms. As well, the Erickson Wing offers deep soaker tubs and separate glass walk-in showers in a bathroom that features top tier amenities from Molton Brown of London, a UK-based supplier that only positions its products at the world’s top properties.

The hotel does not have a traditional ballroom. Rather, in keeping with its intimate nature, Inn at Laurel Point has created a fabulous glassed roof ballroom where the stars are the chandeliers and the banquet room looks out to the harbour and the Japanese gardens. The Terrace Ballroom seats between 200 and 250 guests and has earned a solid niche among meeting planners for conferences as well as the local wedding and special event scene where the property is much sought after as a location for glamorous starlight receptions.

Closing, Powell suggests that their success lies in their ability to be true to their core values, - Excellence, Respect, Curiosity and Stewardship - and to have loads of fun whilst doing it.