

BRITISH COLUMBIA

Haida Gwaii B & B a Haven for Storytellers

BY JOANNE SASVARI
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MASSET, B.C.—Margaret Atwood slept here. Douglas Coupland, did, too. So did Pierre Trudeau. And, of course, the poet Susan Musgrave, who just happens to own the place, and might end up catching your dinner for you.

Tiny and remote as it is, Copper Beech Guest House is a haven for the storytellers among us, be they poets, novelists, essayists or just those who enjoy a good yarn. Of course, the best story of all might just be the one about the house itself, and all the people who've lived and stayed in it.

Copper Beech Guest House is a bed-and-breakfast in the fishing town of Masset on Haida Gwaii, an archipelago off the coast of British Columbia. When it was built in 1914, though, the islands were known as the Queen Charlottes, and the house was erected for a cannery manager at George Point, on the north coast, just a stone's throw from the tip of Alaska.

The cannery closed in 1921, and the house was placed on a log raft and floated through storm-tossed Dixon Entrance to a rustic location in Masset Sound. Eleven years later, it was on the move again, hauled by a pair of oxen through Masset Inlet to its current location near the government docks in the town of Masset.

Its owners set about transforming it into the most unusual building in town, with chic plywood panelling, a convenient in-house well and a windmill for electricity. It remained virtually unchanged for the next four decades. By the time Toronto antiques dealer David Phillips bought it in 1971, though, that well was a hazard and the house needed serious work. He upgraded the plumbing and electricity, added a room or two, and started renting out

ACCESS

For more information about Copper Beech Guest House, visit www.copperbeechhouse.com.

For information on travel within British Columbia, including Haida Gwaii, go to the Tourism British Columbia website at www.hellobc.com.



The living room at Copper Beech Guest House, a B & B in Masset on Haida Gwaii. A haven for novelists, essayists and those who enjoy a good yarn, it's run by poet Susan Musgrave.

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accommodation at \$1 a night, offering a simple breakfast of a boiled egg.

Phillips played host to many guests, including some of Canada's greatest literary lights, who enjoyed the eclectic space stuffed with books, crafts and antiques, as well as the refuge it offered from the world. The legendary novelist Margaret Atwood stayed here; so did former Canadian Prime Minister Trudeau and his wife Margaret, who snuggled in the romantic Harbour Master's Keep; meanwhile Musgrave, who moved to Haida Gwaii in the early 1970s, rented The Secret's room upstairs, where the writer Douglas Coupland would later hole up to finish his book *Generation A*.

Over the years, Musgrave and Phillips became close friends, and in 2010, Phillips passed the inn on to her. Since then, she's updated the linens, hired hospitable caretakers and improved the menu—breakfast now features hearty local fare and guests can also expect dinner, usually a seafood feast of Dungeness crab, oysters, halibut or salmon.

The inn provides a convenient base for visiting First Nations art galleries in Masset, hiking up nearby Tow Hill or beachcombing along Graham Island's sandy shores.

Then, after a day out, it's a lovely refuge to come home to. As night falls softly around this quirky little inn, strangers gather to share their stories, just as they always have.