

Finding a new vibe at the Village on False Creek

by [Gail Johnson](#) on Oct 22, 2014 at 11:31 am



When Vancouver native Emily McLean had the chance to work and live in London, England, more than a decade ago, she jumped at it. She initially planned on staying just a year but found it hard to resist the lure of such a vibrant place, with its galleries, museums, and markets. After 13 years overseas, she returned and began researching different areas of the city to call home. She decided on the Village on False Creek.

“After living in the U.K., to have access to the water and yet still be really central really appealed to me,” McLean tells the *Georgia Straight*. “It seemed like there were lots of exciting things happening. You can walk along the seawall; you can take the little boat across the water to downtown; you can walk across Cambie [Bridge] and be at B.C. Place in 15 minutes. Then there’s Main Street close by and lots of stuff popping up just south of 2nd [Avenue], on 3rd up to 7th.

“I walk to work,” adds McLean, the manager of World Mosaic Tiles, a business she runs with her mom. “I see the mountains every day and have the seawall on my doorstep. About once a week, I see seal pups from the seawall. You don’t get that in London.”

What was known as Athlete's Village during the 2010 Olympic and Paralympic Games—and before that was an industrial area that started out as a shipyard—has lately become a thriving community in its own right. The neighbourhood has come to life with green space, public art, outdoor play structures, dog parks, craft breweries, cafés, restaurants, shops, services, condos, and nonmarket rental housing. The Creekside Community Recreation Centre offers a fitness centre, dance studio, and boating centre for dragon boating and kayaking, among other amenities, and the thriving 'hood also has bike and walking trails. It's close to public transit and it's kid-friendly.

The village has finally gotten over its Olympics hangover.

Not that long ago, the area's future didn't seem so promising. Named False Creek by Capt. George Richards, who, in 1859, discovered a dead end instead of a passage to Burrard Inlet, the former industrial site (once also home to sawmills, a salt refinery, and a steel-fabrication plant) hit a low point around the time of the Games.

People worried the community would never take off after the City of Vancouver placed the project in receivership in November 2010, coming to a “negotiated settlement” with developer Millennium Southeast False Creek Properties Ltd.



Tower Green at West in False Creek is one of the many new condo developments in the neighbourhood that benefits from a relaxed community feel and easy access to recreation, transit, shops, and restaurants.

The Aquilini Group bought the project's remaining 67 condo units for \$91 million this past April, when Mayor Gregor Robertson announced the city had paid off its \$630-million debt. Aquilini has gone on to sell or continue renting the units, with 30 remaining, according to Kevin Hoffman, vice-president of development and construction.

“We see it as an excellent neighbourhood. Olympic Village is the hub of that area,” Hoffman says. “The condos were exceptional quality in a great location. We felt we’d take the risk, and it’s been quite successful.

“You’ve got grocery shopping and restaurants and coffee shops at your doorstep,” he adds. “It’s

Vancouver living at its finest. You've got a waterfront seawall location on the edge of the downtown core. You've got water views and you're close to the SkyTrain, Canada Line, and the Millennium Line. It's got so much going for it."

Count the striking public art as a distinguishing feature. American artist Jonathan Borofsky picked the village for the latest sculpture in his "Human Structure" series. The Vancouver Biennale piece features brightly coloured figures hoisting each other up in a vision of humankind working. Then there's Vancouver artist Myfanwy MacLeod's *The Birds*, which consists of two larger-than-life sparrows, a male and a female, in the neighbourhood's now-buzzing central plaza.

Soon, the village will also have a new 18,000-square-foot, 69-spot indoor-outdoor daycare in Tower Green at West in False Creek, as well as a new school and new restaurants.

The City of Vancouver describes the Village on False Creek as one of the "greenest communities in the world", designed with solar heating, green roofs, and other sustainability-driven systems. The community centre, for instance, is a LEED-platinum building that harvests rainwater for irrigation and toilet-flushing.

Southeast False Creek's parks and waterfront even landed an Urban Land Institute award last year that recognizes "outstanding examples of transformative and vibrant public open space... that have spurred economic and social regeneration of their adjacent communities".



With anchors like Urban Fare, the Craft Beer Market (in the restored 1930s Salt Building), Tap and Barrel, the summertime food-truck festival just west of the village itself, and more condominiums and other residential units coming onboard—Bosa Properties has opened a rental building—the area surrounding the Village on False Creek is enlivening too.

Artist Sandra Forzani and her daughter, Lauren, run Vinci's Caffe and aRT Gallery just south of the village on West 3rd Avenue. The two opened the coffee shop and gallery, which recently began offering live music on Thursday nights, three years ago, and they say they've seen the neighbourhood evolve. There are other coffee shops nearby, as well as a sushi restaurant and an organic-juice bar. Passersby are becoming more commonplace.

“More and more people are wandering off from the seawall, coming from the village, and discovering places in this area,” Sandra says in her café, which is adorned with her large, colourful paintings. “We have a real mix of customers. There are a lot of people from the film industry here; there’s car dealerships and acting studios. There are photographers and mechanics and IT people and business owners. We get construction workers and artists. There’s a lot of curiosity about the area.”

When buildings first started going up, many purchasers were from the West Side, says Grace Kwok, vice president of Anson Realty, which is marketing Pinnacle Living False Creek and The One—Pinnacle Living at False Creek. That’s changed.

“People from other locations around the Lower Mainland are starting to notice this area,” Kwok says. “We’ve seen people from West and North Vancouver, Richmond, Surrey, and Coquitlam. It’s like when Yaletown was discovered several years ago. But this is a well-planned community; it’s a bit more organized than Yaletown.”

Plus, it won’t have any downtown-style towers, because of height restrictions.

“There’s a real vibrancy here; it’s become a gathering place,” Kwok says.

Resident Michelle Lloyd has noticed that the place really does have a village feel. In a city that has a reputation as being a hard place to meet people, she says, the community feels different.

“Some of the buildings I’ve lived in in Vancouver, everybody kept to themselves,” says Lloyd, who moved to the city from Penticton five years ago, first living in Yaletown. “Here I’m finding everybody’s friendly. Everybody’s really happy. The stratas in a couple of buildings do a lot of events [for residents]; they’ll put on barbecues once a month or they’ll have Christmas parties. It’s just a really chilled, laid-back neighbourhood.”

The area’s proximity to the Canada Line also appealed to Lloyd, who travels regularly for work. She began renting in the Village on False Creek nearly two years ago and has since purchased a condo.

“I love the village,” she says. “It’s so convenient for me to get to the airport. But I also love the diversity of the neighbourhood. It feels like such a great mix of ethnicities and age groups. It doesn’t really feel like a party neighbourhood or neighbourhood where your grandparents are living. It’s so close to downtown but it’s quieter.

“I’m on the seawall every day. I’ll grab a tea at Terra Breads and go for a walk. I have everything I need: a grocery store, a bank, London Drugs. I can walk downtown. And we have the best liquor store in the city [Legacy Liquor Store],” she adds with a laugh. “It’s quite convenient living right upstairs.”

It’s also handy for people who work downtown, and a UBC bus goes right by. As well, the village is close to hospitals and several schools.

“About 50 percent of the demographics here are families,” says Ann Lok, project manager of Tower Green at West in False Creek. “It offers a quality of life for all ages; it encourages recreation and a healthy lifestyle.”

Aside from the Flying Pig and a new Thai restaurant opening soon, another as-yet-undisclosed big-name restaurant will be launching in the area as well.

“It’s the ultimate in convenience,” Lok says. “It really is its own little independent village.”

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