



Nomads Essentials

A VISIT TO THE PLANT WIZARD OF MAYNE ISLAND

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Above, from left: Nomads Essentials store display; Barbara McIntyre filling a bottle; All Natural Anti Moth Closet Freshener.
Page 36: Essential oils.

“Essential oils are basically the essence of the plants. Herbs especially have amazing healing qualities to them.” Barbara McIntyre is showing me around her airy and aromatic shop, tucked into a corner of what used to be the old Root Seller Inn B&B in Miners Bay on Mayne Island.

Organic chocolate bars coated in vibrantly coloured food-grade wax flirt with the eye at Nomads Essentials. Soaps, body butters, bath salts, muscle balms, massage oils and aromatics for the home all catch the eye or the nose. She even makes her own laundry soap and anti-moth sachets that smell like heaven. (What’s wrong with those moths if they flee this scent?)

The grand chef of potions, lotions and unguents even shows me an essence of grand and Douglas fir infused in olive oil, which is edible! It’s primarily sold for chest congestion or used as a perfume, but also being able to taste the product brings up all sorts of possibilities.

For a year she has been sharing the historic old building with the Mayne Island Conservancy Association, Dragonfly Gallery, Toby Snelgrove’s photography studio and Full Circle Clothing.

“I’ve been interested in plants and their healing properties for over 25 years. Richard and I used

I wasn’t able to identify, out would come the books and I’d look it up.”

Photographs of the Oregon Coast, New Zealand’s South Island, Nepal’s 20,000-foot-high Ama Dablam and the West Coast Trail hang on the walls and attest to those earlier guiding times. On top of being a guide, an adventurer and a plant alchemist, McIntyre is also an accomplished photographer.

After 35 years in Calgary, she and her partner, Richard de Armond, left for Mayne nine years ago, drawn to its natural, quieter lifestyle. It was an island they were very familiar with.

“Our company, Nomadic Routes Inc., used Mayne as our ‘base camp’ and we would organize day trips to other islands. We started out only offering cycle tours, but for the last eight years we offered multi adventures and hiking, sea kayaking and cycling tours to the Gulf Islands. We liked to stay at the Blue Vista Resort because they allowed us to do the cooking and we wanted to feed guests nutritious meals.”

to be accredited adventure travel guides and when I was leading hikes I always carried three to five books in my backpack to do with plants and their healing properties. Any time I saw a plant that

SNAPSHOTS OF THE GULF ISLANDS

- from *The Gulf Islander* visitors' magazine



SALT SPRING ISLAND

It's Saturday afternoon on Salt Spring Island and it looks like there's a party going on. At the island's Centennial Park, fiddlers strike up a tune while shoppers browse the wares: everything from delicate silver jewellery and hand-painted ceramics to organic veggies and fresh-baked bread look tempting under multi-hued umbrellas.



MAYNE ISLAND

This is an island of surprises. Who would have thought that quiet little Mayne Island could ever have been labelled "Little Hell," for example? Blame the gold rush for that 150-year old label. It was the miners who gave their name to Miners Bay, a jostling halfway stop between Vancouver Island and the Fraser River, en route to the Cariboo. Back then, Mayne was the commercial and social centre of the Gulf Islands.



SATURNA ISLAND

How can an island so close to the mainland be so quiet? The answer lies in the getting there. It's only 14 nautical miles from the Tsawwassen terminal as the crow flies, but the trip involves two ferries, and can take over three hours. The journey is so scenic, however, that most visitors consider this a bonus — two ferries for the price of one.



PENDER ISLAND

Where can you get free killer whale shows with a sunset thrown in? Try Thieves Bay on North Pender. The orcas are a big island summer draw as they feed and frolic almost daily in the rich tidal waters here. These islands have the balance just right, just developed enough to have many amenities, and just natural enough to offer secluded beaches and lonely forest treks, especially on the more undeveloped South Pender.



GALIANO ISLAND

When thinking Galiano, superlatives come to mind. It seems to have more of everything, except crowds. That's surprising, really, given that it's the first stop on the Tsawwassen-Gulf Islands ferry, a trip of under an hour. The lanky island seems to have more sunsets, more oceanfront, more spectacular hikes, more beautiful drives, more stunning views, more range of places to stay and eat, and more things to do.

Nomadic Routes would certainly have benefitted from McIntyre's physical education degree from the University of Calgary. She even majored in "outdoor pursuits." However, at a much earlier age, her other interest also revealed itself when she trained as a registered nursing assistant.

"It gave me lots of understanding about the body and sickness as well as knowledge on how the body performs and functions in a healthy state. I also learned that I did not want to work in a large hospital."

You know how when you make the right decision, often things just seem to work out perfectly? That's how it was with this plant whisperer. Initially she worked as a gardener, but then, encouraged by Marlyn Turner, who had an outlet called Coastal Creations, she began to supply soaps and bath salts and to sell her products at the weekly farmers' market where no one could pass up her chocolate or her beguiling soaps.

"And it kept going from there. Everything kept falling into place. In the city I might have just blended in with The Body Shop or Lush, but here I am very blessed to have the support of the locals and the visitors in season."

Pointing to the scant offerings on the soap displays, she apologizes for the low stock, explaining that she was almost cleaned out at Christmas and her new batches, which have to cure for at least a month, are not quite ready.

"I make 80 per cent of the products myself using as many natural local sources as I can: juniper berries, fir, resin. Someone I know in Vancouver has bees so I've asked him if I could have some propolis to make incense." (Propolis is a resinous mixture honeybees collect from buds or sap.)

And when BC Hydro cuts back the trees, guess who is there to gather up the branches? She uses the needles and sometimes even the buds of certain trees.

"Before they bloom, the buds of cottonwood are an excellent source of acetylsalicylic acid. The indigenous peoples used them for healing and reducing pain."

What do you call someone who researches diligently, sustainably harvests from nature, reincarnates her harvest into healing and soothing products, and then packages, labels and markets them? "Small business owner" doesn't say it. Part formulator, part self-educated herbalist and definitely a passionate believer in the importance of nature in healing and health, McIntyre brings passion, dedication and life experience into her magical space. ✨

NOMADS ESSENTIALS: For ordering online and info: www.nomadsessentials.com. (Also check the website for Barbara McIntyre's new cookbook called *Nomadic Routes Kitchen, Healthy Recipes for Active Adventures.*)

Getting to Mayne Island: BC Ferries - www.bcferrries.com

