

Parkside Victoria Resort and Spa: all local and green to its roots

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(pictured fr. left) Former Victoria Mayor Alan Lowe, former MP David Anderson, Aviawest Resort Group founder and President Andrew Pearson and architect Richard Hulbert cut the green ribbon at the resort's grand opening on June 25th.

The fact that a new urban resort was built and opened in Victoria, a veritable sea of luxury hotels, during an economic downturn is amazing enough. The fact that it was built to Platinum [LEED](#) standards is even more astonishing, especially since building *that* green costs a lot of, er, green.

So, I arrived at the Parkside Victoria Resort and Spa to cover its grand opening with a great deal of excitement and just a bit of healthy inquiry. Would the Parkside live up to the green hype? Or was it just another corporate hotel financed by anonymous investment firms pretending to be something other than it was?

What I found at the Parkside was the future of the urban resort: a socially and environmentally responsible good neighbour.



photo courtesy Aviawest

A home base

Whether you are in Victoria for personal or business travel, the Parkside is conveniently located near the myriad of venues, activities and attractions of the Inner Harbour. Explaining and describing all that there is to see and do here could be the subject of many more articles. But what you do need when exploring this lovely city is a good home base and the Parkside is that place.

I made the quick walk from the bus terminal up to 810 Humboldt Street, to find the 126-room resort sitting comfortably between its regal and historic neighbours. Its award-winning design compliments the graceful beauty of the established neighbourhood, and sitelines, old trees, and architecture are honoured not obliterated by this new building.

My suite was maximized for space with a small but sophisticated kitchen and eating area—perfect for dining in—and a cozy seating room with gas fireplace and large windows that opened at top and bottom. A small balcony had doors from both the seating area and bedroom allowing for the 'green' air conditioning mandated in the building of Parkside, a delightful natural ventilation system that I call "fresh air." My view looked west out to the old Anglican Church of Our Lord, and over to the Empress Hotel.



The decadent king-sized bedroom was easily closed off from the seating area by French doors, a welcome option for someone wanting to sleep while others watched the flat screen TV in the seating area. The bathroom was accessible from bedroom and hall and had Aveda bath products, and rich, soft towels. Having it all to myself: priceless.

Fractional ownership with full benefits

The Parkside Victoria is a hotel and resort, and you can stay and use the services like any hotel at competitive rates. But you can also become an owner at Parkside. Shared ownership is the foundational business model of Aviawest and, similar to other fractional ownership companies, members buy portions of a specific resort unit and request the weeks when they want to use their space. The remaining time is put into a rental pool, which Aviawest manages.

Owners can also trade their time for time in a similar unit at another Aviawest property or for access to vacations around the world through Aviawest's affiliates. In fact, one man I spoke with bought a fractional unit at Parkside but has never stayed there. Instead he's traded his time for vacations in Belize, Hawaii, and the Phillipines. "Shared ownership at the Parkside is reimagining how we use the city, and reimagining how we use our travel investment," said Aviawest CEO Jim Pearson. Former Environment Minister and MP David Anderson, speaking at Parkside's grand opening, agreed. "Urban land utilization is a high priority and shared ownership addresses that."



Aviawest CEO Jim Pearson stands in one of Parkside's several rooftop gardens

Enter the Humboldt Valley

The Parkside is conveniently situated in the Humboldt Valley, an area of downtown Victoria directly behind the Empress Hotel that has recently undergone a development renaissance transforming the former site of parking lots and an old hospital into a unique streetscape of resort hotels, boutiques, cafes and parks. The area is bordered by Beacon Hill Park and contains many of Victoria's most historic buildings and green spaces, including the lovely St. Ann's Academy whose large lawns, beautiful gardens and historic Humboldt Gates are directly across the street from the Parkside's entrance.



a Parkside view from St. Ann's Academy

It is the newest member of the Aviawest family of resorts whose properties include the Pacific Shores in Parksville, Water's Edge in Ucluelet, and the Pinnacle Lodge at Sun Peaks. You could also say that the Parkside is the newest member of another family, the Pearson family. The Vancouver Island-based Pearsons developed their first resort at Pacific Shores and have grown it and the Aviawest company to exceptional success by extending that family feeling and their passion for environmental responsibility throughout their resorts and their business.

LEEDing the way

The internationally accepted [LEED Green Building Rating System](#) helped to guide developers in the building's sustainable design, development, construction, operations and maintenance. Jim Pearson said that building to Platinum LEED standards was challenging and required a lot of commitment from everyone involved in the project including architects, Richard Hulbert and Micheal Wong of the Hulbert Group. "But," he said, "It was the right thing to do."



The three-story entrance "brings the outside in and inside out."

The buildings are mainly constructed of durable materials like brick, glass, concrete, stone and steel, much of which was extracted and manufactured regionally. Natural ventilation reduces the need for air conditioning, and the areas that do use air conditioning use a heat rejection system that sends excess heat into the landscaped ponds. A storm retention tank collects rainwater and uses it for further irrigation of the building's multiple green roofs.

Although there is underground parking, including electrical charging stations designated for alternative fuel vehicles, the building's convenient access to land, air, and water transportation makes a car unnecessary and reduces the impact of pollution and land development from vehicle use.

A spectacular three-story glass wall is the resort's entrance and opens into a lush atrium filled with exotic plants and trees, many of them rescued from the storied [Crystal Garden](#) by Aviawest's founder and passionate ecologist, Andy Pearson.



green is beautiful: the ozonated pool and hot tub

The atrium separates the nine-floor Fairfield tower, which is mainly suites, from the 10-floor Rockland tower, which contains the 25-metre indoor ozonated pool, a private high definition movie theatre, a state-of-the-art fitness centre and the full-service AquaTerre Spa.

Rooftop views

As the long opening day came to end, the full-mooned evening brought a warm glow through the floor to ceiling windows of the resort's rooftop Penthouse City Club Lounge where I spoke with Susan Pearson, Aviawest's President. She talked about her and husband Andy's business adventures and her confidence in now leaving it in sons Jim and Laurence's capable hands as she and Andy try to gradually retire.

There is something about being on a roof that is reminiscent of childhood adventure, of finding a secret spot, of escaping, of reaching a peak. I think all that can be said about the Parkside can be felt on that rooftop.

It's an escape but it's real, it's in the city yet transcends it, it's big, but it's small, it's gracious but its real beauty is in its connection to its community, its environment and its family and friends.

For more on Parkside visit [their website](#)

For more on LEED standards and certification visit [Canada Green Building Council](#)