



Fifteen years ago, a music executive moved his family to a remote corner of Vancouver Island, trading the stress of corporate life for salmon fishing, horseback riding and luxurious camping. And now Clayoquot, the resort he built, allows you to do the same.

WHERE THE THINGS ARE... WILD

BY SOPHY ROBERTS
PHOTOGRAPHS BY MICHAEL TUREK

The floatplane approach, after which a horse-drawn wagon delivers guests to Clayoquot



It was Chris Blackwell, founder of Island Records, who tipped me off about Clayoquot. He'd come across the resort's creator, John Caton, in the late 1980s,

when Caton was running an independent record management company out of Toronto. In 1994, Caton threw in the towel. "I was using drugs to stay awake, drugs to go to bed and at 39 had a heart attack," Caton tells me. The experience propelled him into the Canadian wilderness with his wife, Adele, and two sons. "My friends took their money and went to the Caribbean," Caton says. "I came here."

Caton and his wife live year-round in a one-bedroom cabin at Clayoquot, the resort tucked into a glacial sound on Vancouver Island's western edge. The modesty of their dwelling is surprising. Caton is a big fish up here; he's well known in Canada's green circles and also helps piece together the shared interests of various First Nation communities in this wild outpost of British Columbia. But then it takes a certain type to make life work in a place without a single road. The weather here is so rough that the entire camp is taken down each fall and packed into the Cookhouse, one of Clayoquot's few permanent structures. Supplies are brought in on a flat-bottomed LCM-8 landing craft, the same tank carrier used for the Normandy landings in World War II.

The daunting logistics were not enough to hinder Caton's vision: a dramatic restoration of a 500-acre site formerly used for logging and gold mining, conceived with help from his wife and a third partner, Richard Genovese. The idea was to create a tented lodge in the tradition of the "great camps" of the Adirondacks.

Clayoquot sits at the mouth of the Bedwell River, where the glacial waters blend into the Pacific. The resort is a 30-minute speedboat ride away from Tofino, the most westerly town on Vancouver Island. Guests arrive by floatplane, a 45-minute flight from Vancouver, and disembark onto a horse-drawn wagon that takes them deep inside this UNESCO-protected biosphere, which is just under a million acres and is considered one of the world's best remaining examples of temperate rainforest. In the echoing river valley, there are very few signs of human habitation aside from a few floating fish farms, owned by the

Norwegians, and a handful of draft dodgers toward Tofino. Yet there is life everywhere, emanating from the deep green of the old-growth forest that dates back more than a millennium, lurking in the bull kelp where the spawn of coho and chinook salmon dart about in lazy pools the color of coffee. In still water beneath the pier are scores of white starfish loitering among anemones that wave with the ebb and flow of the tide. The surroundings look like a forgotten world, like Eden on steroids.

In the 13 years since it opened, Clayoquot has emerged as one of the most exceptional lodges of its kind—a smooth, professional wilderness resort where everything but some spa treatments, helicopters and reserve wines are included. Activities range from horseback riding to mountain biking to fishing the rivers and the ocean. At first glance the resort, like the Catons' private cabin, seems relatively simple: a camp made up of 16 canvas tents atop stilted platforms on the banks of the Bedwell River, and another four tents set back in the woods, where fir trees burst up like giant shuttlecocks from the forest floor.

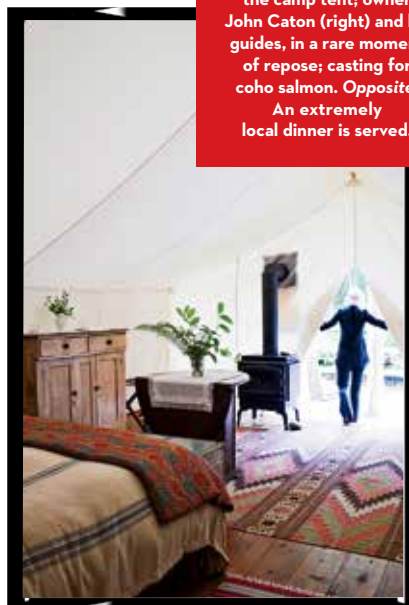
But within a few hours of arrival—the long journey washed away by fresh oysters and sommelier Tereza Roux's eye-opening British Columbian wines—it becomes clear this is camping refined to a degree that merits the price tag.

The best lodgings have ensuite bathrooms with elegant outdoor rain-head showers. There are cedarwood-lined dressing rooms and bedrooms furnished with fireplaces, tasteful Victorian antiques, cut crystal stemware and beds decked in sheets so soft that the Catons recently caved to popular demand and began

selling their prized linens. The Catons appear to have left their high-flying entertainment-industry past behind—John goes about his day in a wide-brimmed cowboy hat and riding gear, Adele in jeans and a fleece—but there's an enduring sophistication about them that plays perfectly in the woods. John Caton is ever the urbane raconteur; Adele is the kind of artful hostess who plumps cushions while she surveys the proceedings with a ruthless eye for detail, ensuring that



Clockwise from top left: Walking a portion of the Class I rapids; whale-watching on the sound; guests are not the only ones who enjoy the local seafood; a balcony view of the Bedwell River; the Clayoquot take on the camp tent; owner John Caton (right) and his guides, in a rare moment of repose; casting for coho salmon. **Opposite:** An extremely local dinner is served.



Forging the Bedwell River on horseback. Clayoquot offers guided trail rides for riders of all abilities. Opposite: A quiet moment between target shooting and kayaking.



the fires in the rooms are lit before the guests retreat to bed, that the cut flowers are as fresh as the sashimi that's served at the bar by way of an afternoon snack.

The Catons describe themselves as hippies, but they're a far cry from the artists we meet who live year-round in a floating house, where they also grow their own vegetables. And it's the couple's personal history that allows them to connect so easily with the prominent guests who come to the resort with their children to decompress. One in five guests has visited Clayoquot before. Some are three generations of the same family; others are couples. While I'm staying, there's a model from Russia, a fashion designer from New York, a horse trainer from Kentucky and a banker from Dubai. "As long as they have a California king, an en-suite and a flush loo, it's irrelevant how rich and privileged the client is," says Caton. "They all lose their egos out here."

In our third day, we take out a boat—this, along with climbing, white-water rafting and far more besides, is how days are passed here—and head for the Pacific. We watch a pair of bald eagles hovering between islands misted in blue streaks of low-lying cloud. Then there are the bears: They graze along the sound's lichen-covered rim as the tide pulls back over rocks to reveal a larder of crabs. A trio of cubs—triplets, born in April—gorge freely, their black snouts dripping with juice as their jaws crack through the shells. We observe them from a rigid-hull inflatable, edging to within a few meters of the mother. The bears won't harm us, says Caton, who sleeps with a rifle under his bed. But no food is to be taken back into our tents. Each evening before we turn in, I frisk my son for candy from the jars of jellies, chocolates and lollipops stacked up on the bar in the dining room for the children to raid.

The Pacific is flat and still in the midday light when we finally make open water. We float near a school of pilchards, our engine off, the fish forming a vast bait ball that ruffles the sea. We hope to find whales. Our chances are good, says the skipper; they almost always are in "Orca Alley."

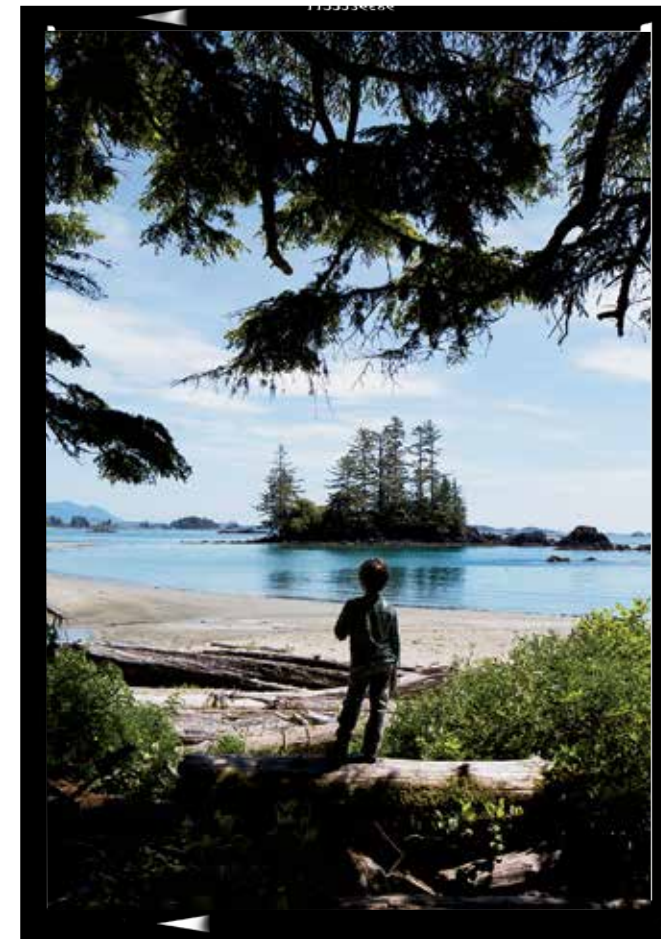
We wait, the sound of water sloshing gently below our feet. We listen to the skipper's stories. The last time he came out here, he saw killer

whales feeding on the sea lions. He describes a basketball that had recently washed up, the rubber inscribed with the name of a child who survived the 2011 tsunami in Japan. In winter, he says, this stretch of water can be ferocious, with the yawn and breach of the ocean surge carrying 100-foot tree trunks up onto beaches as if they were twigs. Today the sky is clear except for the vapor trails of airliners.

Then comes the smell—the pungent whiff of fish breath that has festered too long in a body. A whale burp, as my son calls it. A moment later the whale breaches off our bow to show its pewter body to the sky. I follow the arc of its back and watch the slow, measured way it curls its tail before making its deep dive into the blackness. Soon it's passing beneath us, reminding me that we've slipped off the map, that the wild things are all around us.

Hence the compulsion I feel each morning to get up, get out and explore the landscape more deeply, by boat, horse, kayak and mountain bike. A massage, relaxing though it is, feels inappropriate unless it's preceded by a four-hour hike. Daily scheduling is entirely flexible. Each evening I go by the activities center to discuss the next day's adventures. Sometimes I team up with other guests; sometimes I'm accompanied by my own private guide; sometimes my seven-year-old son joins me; sometimes he goes paintballing with the other kids. Thus the week takes on a rhythm of its own, with three-hour trail rides—forging rivers, winding through forest—followed by an afternoon of target shooting, first with a .22, then with a bow and arrow. We go fishing and catch a 12-pound

coho salmon. We watch chef Ryan Orr bone it and pin the pink fillets above a fire, where they are hot-smoked for hours. We watch the same chef pull up crabs from pots in front of the dining room, and we start to understand why the food tastes this good: Nearly all of it is harvested within yards of the kitchen, including the honey. This is gastronomy of the first order, but without any unnecessary froths and foams—luxury but appropriate luxury. It's this illusion of simplicity that gives Clayoquot its status, the way it lets boys be boys and allows adults a taste of childhood as they sit around a campfire eating s'mores before turning down those famous sheets. ♦



the DETAILS

A three-night all-inclusive package starts at \$4,625 for an adult, and \$2,315 for children under age 12. The resort is open from May 19 to September 29, 2013, with the busiest months for families being July and August. The staff will arrange seaplane transfers between Vancouver's Seair Terminal and the property, and all activity gear, including wet-weather clothes and riding and mountain-biking helmets, is provided. At Clayoquot Sound, Tofino; 888-333-5405; wildretreat.com.