



Photo: Mike Keelan

# APPLEWOOD COTTAGE

## *The Little House in the Valley*

*By David Morrison*

So, as the old skiing joke goes, the season of “the art of catching cold and going broke while rapidly heading nowhere at great personal risk” is with us once again! Seriously, though, skiing and snowboarding being undeniably pricey pursuits, the going broke part can only be exacerbated if one insists upon slope side accommodation. Depending on the resort there are sometimes bargains to be had, but it is perfectly understandable that the convenience and desirability of off-dramatically located lodgings force

rates way up. It’s the way of the world and business. Yet for those for whom resort rates may be out of reach, a skiing holiday can be just as enjoyable staying in considerably cheaper off-hill accommodations. Take our own Mt. Washington, for example, close to which skiers are blessed with a wealth of budget conscious options in the Comox Valley.

Occupying up to six people, one such fabulous place for rent is Applewood Cottage, a little way southwest of downtown Courtenay on Lake Trail Road. A mere 25-minute drive from Mt. Washington, this snug converted

barn is handily situated for easy access to the city’s shopping, nightlife and restaurants, yet also offers an idyllic and tranquil rural setting.

Cradled by trees at the edge of the woods, behind owner Suzanne Page’s home, Applewood Cottage shares the same address as her other business, Courtenay Costume Rentals. Not only is it the perfect accommodation for a skiing party, but a peaceful getaway, period. In respect of the quietude available here, Page considers it an ‘artistic retreat.’ Indeed, entries in the guest book reveal that writers have rented the



**THE FRESH DÉCOR OF THE APPLEWOOD WASHROOM**

cottage to complete work. And considering the focal point of the living room is a beautiful upright piano, I cannot help but wonder how many songs have been written in this calm environment.

Looking at it literally, Page travelled a long way in life before open-

ing Applewood Cottage as a B&B two years ago. Born and raised in Victoria, she spent a year at high school in Mexico. This experience filled her with a longing to travel, so she set off to discover South America where, as she puts it, “you can’t help but have adventures!” When the funds dried

up she found work teaching English in Brazil, eventually returning to Vancouver Island two years later.

A stint working on commercial fishing boats off the West Coast was followed by a spell in the tourism industry, taking vacationers sports fishing and scuba/wreck diving in Barkley Sound. Then after six years in Port Hardy, Page moved to the Comox Valley in 1988 to bring up her children and finally put down roots.

Despite her adventurous spirit and life to that point, she had harboured a longstanding desire to settle in an area she held in awe. “It’s a wonderful community that I’m proud to call home,” she says. “The valley offers endless opportunities to residents and visitors: the mountains and sea at our door; a vibrant arts community; weather with a taste of all seasons! And it’s small enough to become involved, but large enough to maintain your privacy.”

Page’s love of and connection to her community is in abundant evidence throughout Applewood Cottage. For sale are locally made jams and preserves by ‘Marina’; knitted goods—ideal for winter guests, of course—by Comox “fibre artist,” Judy McClaren, and CDs by local singer-songwriters such as Sue Pyper and Helen Austin. On the stairwell wall there is a work by local mixed media artist, Rhonda Burden, and in the dining area a noticeboard



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Photo: Jeannie Page

**THE OLD BARN AS CONVERSION BEGAN IN THE SUMMER OF 1989**



Photo: David Morrison

**LOCAL PRODUCTS FOR SALE**

displaying a calendar of local events and other useful information. All guests receive some complimentary foodstuffs, including the fixings for the first morning's continental-style breakfast. There are delicious muffins baked by Page; freshly pressed apple juice from trees on the property, and Amsterdammer cheese from the Natural Pastures Cheese Company in Courtenay. For later in the day the refrigerator holds two bottles of Steam Donkey Lager by the Surgeon Brewing Company of Comox. Add to this a bowl of juicy (and obviously seasonal) local cherries awaiting guests on the dining table, and an introduction to the Comox Valley via Page's thoughtful touches is both



Photo: Mike Keelan



**SUZANNE PAGE,  
BEEKEEPER &  
APPLEWOOD COTTAGE  
PROPRIETOR**

complete and greatly appreciated.

This year-round accommodation is one of those carefully considered spaces where a pleasing balance of the rustic and the contemporary has been beautifully realised. There are antique features, old wooden beams and gorgeous, natural wood flooring, as well as elegant modern furniture and fresh pastels in the décor. It really works, and is complimented by so many nice, simple distractions in the form of attractive vases, lamps, framed prints and photographs dotted about the place.

It has taken time to fashion this nest, and keen backyard beekeeper Page is keen to point out that getting the barn to the stage where it became possible to create the cottage was in itself a huge collaborative project involving many family members and friends. In particular her sister, Jeannie, receives kudos for the original renovations, but the stunning result of two years' toil on everyone's part was well worth it.

From the first sight of the cottage at the rear of Page's property, it is visually appealing. Virginia creeper spills from the right side of the roof, giving the impression the building



Photo: David Morrison

**APPLEWOOD'S ELEGANT BEDROOM**

is being organically embraced by its verdant setting. Inside is an open plan ground floor with the dining area immediately to the left. The fully fitted and equipped kitchen with its lovely Maple work surfaces, slots in behind.

The living room opens out to the

right and is dominated by a comfortable, 3-seat leather sofa and the aforementioned piano. It was manufactured by Gerhard Heintzman & Co., whose instruments are so high in quality they have been termed "the Steinways of Canadian pianos." (For the record, this company was respon-

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sible for the design and build of the most expensive piano ever sold. A 9' Crystal Grand Piano created specifically for the 2008 Beijing Olympics, it sold at auction to a private buyer for US\$3.22 million!) But if composing a concerto is not your idea of relaxation, tucked away in a neat space-saving cabinet (of which there are several) is a TV, VCR and DVD player with a library of movies and games.

A wood-burning stove separates the kitchen from the bathroom, which features pastel green décor and cool pink and turquoise tiling. Such is the feeling of freshness generated by this colour scheme that we felt cleaner by just walking in! In this bathroom, like any bathroom, it could be all too easy to ignore the functional fittings, but here they hold historical interest. The corner sink once served the ablutions of nuns in a long since demolished Victoria convent, while the claw foot tub is from one of the CPR's Victoria-Vancouver 'Princess' steamers, though which one is teasingly unknown. In addition to these features, the cottage's windows are reclaimed, many from an old Victoria machine shop.

Upstairs, the main bedroom is a picture of elegant simplicity. A very comfortable double bed is flanked by two rich red nightstands, the arrangement positioned for maximum visual impact as soon as guests reach the top of the stairs. A sitting room leading into it boasts a double futon, small library of books and a desk, the two areas separated by drapes. Again, the colours are crisp and bright, subtly accentuating the plentiful natural light that streams into the cottage.

So, as far as comfort, classiness and all mod cons go, this is an excellent accommodation—but for somewhere this stylish it is also very good value. To this end, as another old skiing joke goes, it may be “the only sport where you pay an arm and a leg to break an arm and a leg,” but in this instance the gag is not referring to the accommodation!

*For rates and information about Applewood Cottage, please visit <http://web.mac/applewoodcottage>*

*For availability please contact Suzanne Page on (250) 465 9663 or at [Applewood\\_Cottage@yahoo.ca](mailto:Applewood_Cottage@yahoo.ca)*