



Photo: David Morrison

The Whitehouse on Longlake: When I Win the Lottery...

By David Morrison

On so many occasions when hitting Long Lake while traveling southbound on the Island Highway, the same question popped into my head: “What is that building?” Partially hidden by trees, the tall, white lakeside structure is teasingly too distant to clearly discern, yet an obvious focal point of the far shore. I’m sure you’ll have seen it, in line with the beach area, just before the lake disappears from view.

When I found out my mystery edifice was a B&B—appropriately named The Whitehouse on Longlake (sic)—I bounced in glee at the professional opportunity to investigate. I’m ever seeking this region’s more interesting accommodations to report upon, so the fact that

unaware of its function I’d long admired this one from afar naturally added a nice twist to the assignment. And I’m happy to say it did not disappoint!

While The Whitehouse (as I’ll abbreviate it from here) boasts a beautiful littoral frontage—somehow evoking a wedding cake—the street entrance is a modest façade in Ferntree Place. Despite the welcoming flags of various nations at the front door, it gives absolutely no clue as to the grandeur lying beyond.

The lobby of this colonial-style classic opens into a balcony overlooking a beautifully designed and appointed living room two floors down. Light pours in through lakeside windows the full height of the room, configured as fourteen panels and two central French doors. They in turn open onto to a white,

semicircular deck the width of the room, providing gorgeous views of the lake and Mt. Benson. It’s visually arresting from the off, and a powerful introduction to this plush accommodation.

There are three suites. At 1000 sq. ft. the stunning Presidential Suite is essentially a self-contained family apartment containing most everything needed for independent vacationing—or living, for that matter. With each room offering the same wowing views, it must be difficult for guests to tear themselves away from the windows or deck!

The Safari Room, as its name clearly implies, is an African-themed family suite. The theme is consistent throughout and boasts some charming touches. I loved the menagerie of African animal cuddly toys to keep the little ones (and



The Whitehouse's jetties.

softies) amused. And the cool retro design leopard head and zebra print cushion covers also turned my head.

Our suite—described as “the honeymooner’s choice”—was The First Lady’s Quarters. Opening out to the left from its door on the lobby balcony, this lovely room’s focus is an extremely comfortable king-size bed, adorned with a nest of cushions and pillows. Lush cream carpet runs throughout, floor tiles giving way at the bathroom transition. To the left of the bed there’s a three-seat black couch with its own nest of scatter cushions. Other features include glass-topped coffee and dining tables; a walk-in wardrobe large enough to create another room, and a TV/DVD/VCR combo cabinet of adequate spaciousness to also accommodate a microwave oven, refrigerator, toaster and everything needed to make hot beverages. The walls are jollied up by paintings, prints,



The Whitehouse's amazing main room windows from the lobby balcony.

mirrors and masks, and plenty of dinky ornaments keep the eye wandering. The bathroom is also a treat, containing a soaker tub offering the opportunity for romantic ablutions under a red ceiling lamp and/or candlelight glow.

As with the other two suites, The First Lady’s Quarter’s has its own private balcony. Looking out across Long Lake at a moody Mt. Benson, I



Photos: David Morrison

Marlene McIntosh, Jazzy, and Abigail

couldn’t help but smile, wondering as vehicles slid by on the Island Highway if any of their occupants were pondering: “What is that building?”

Owned by Marlene McIntosh and two partners, this elegant B&B is run by Marlene with assistance from Barry and Faye Gordon. Furry companionship and guest supervision is provided by the adorable Lhasa Apsos, Jazzy and Abigail.

The Gordon’s were amongst the first guests to stay in The First Lady’s Quarters after Marlene bought the property,

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Above: First Lady's Quarter's bedroom.

Right, clockwise from top: Living room from the lobby balcony; Flags at the entrance; The First Lady's Quarters' romantic balcony.

using it as a base while they sought the ideal home for their relocation from Calgary. They were and remain smitten with the B&B, its location, and Marlene. Indeed, dated September 13th, 2004, the first page of the suite's visitors' book bears their satisfied comment: "An excellent place with a fantastic view and the most charming hostess..." And now, delightfully, they work here.

The laidback Marlene is indeed a charming hostess. It comes easily to her, but then she has spent many years dealing directly with the public in her varied working life. As well as being a fully qualified and licensed financial services representative, she has owned and run two restaurants in the South of France — often serving Hollywood elite during the Cannes Film Festival. Her main gig, however, has been in high-pressure positions within the fashion industry.

"Everyone thought it was so glamorous," says Marlene, as dry as a bone, "but they never saw me schlepping garment bags through Rio airport at 6:00am with four spoiled rotten, gaunt-looking, irritable models!"

This work took her from Toronto to New York to Paris, where she lived for a year. Then after four-and-a-half more restauranting on the Côte d'Azur, Marlene returned to Canada in 1993, settling in Vancouver. Just over a decade later, her colourful life brought her to Nanaimo and The Whitehouse.

"It was July 1st long weekend, 2004," Marlene begins, explaining how

she came to purchase this remarkable property. "We walked in the front door and it was one of those pristine days with a perfect blue sky. Every room was lit up with sunshine. People were water-skiing on the lake...I thought I'd died and gone to heaven!"

One of Marlene's business partners — a friend—had taken her to the house, but she didn't know why or what he was up to. He just said: "Take a look around, Marlene." As they were leaving, the friend asked what she thought and Marlene replied: "Oh my God, I could just move in there!" Later, at dinner, he revealed that it was for sale. The rest, as the old adage says, is history. By September, Marlene was in The Whitehouse and about to embark on a new career running a spectacular B&B.

'Spectacular' is an apt adjective for this accommodation. As if the chic interior doesn't lend enough dazzle, the small garden's facilities at the lake's edge provides the icing. The property even boasts two floatplane-accessible jetties from which guests can swim or take out kayaks or a pedalo. If that's not their thing, they may enjoy a soak in the outdoor hot tub or a swing into Long Lake's clear waters from the Tarzan rope.

But considering the remarkable coincidence about the house that Marlene revealed as our relaxing overnigher came to an end, an alternative word to

describe it might be ‘charmed.’

“It was built in 1993 as an executive home for a fellow who I hear won a lottery,” she says. “The second owner saw the house and really wanted it, but her husband kept saying they couldn’t afford it. Anyway, he bought a lottery ticket through work... and won! So, they bought the house and now I’ve been buying lottery tickets every single week!”

Isn’t that amazing? Perhaps magic is at work within its walls? It’s certainly a magical place to stay, and provided a genuine getaway for my wife and I in the heart of our own city. Marlene is keen for more local residents to recognise this potential and sample her unique accommodation.

“It’s wonderful that we get guests from all over the world staying here, but I absolutely love the opportunity to host local people,” she enthuses. “Whether it’s a couple after a quick romantic getaway or the family needing a couple of days out, I can offer a wonderful experience.”

We’d certainly heartily recommend Marlene’s wonderful experience to locals or visitors alike – even, if push came to shove, to spoiled rotten, gaunt-looking, irritable models!

The Whitehouse on Longlake is at 231, Ferntree Place, Nanaimo, BC, and open year-round. Further information can be found at nanaimobandb.com. For booking contact Marlene McIntosh on (250) 756-1185, toll free on 1-877-956-1185, or by email at whitehouse@nanaimobandb.com.



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