



Photo: David Morrison

It's a new life, and they're feeling good...

David Morrison

As if it occurred only hours ago, I vividly recall that nervy day we arrived permanently on Canadian soil from England, knowing there was no going back, that Vancouver Island would be home for the foreseeable future. Upon landing, our knowledge of the area was embarrassingly scant and we knew nobody in it beyond my wife's parents. But how things have changed! Our situation is now settled and happy, enhanced by geographical confidence and a circle of wonderful friends. And how curious it is that we now find ourselves relatively authoritative "locals," greeting newcomers with tips and tricks, just as we were welcomed ourselves not so long back.

The Hardie family have immigrated to Nanaimo from Preston in northern England, arriving in February to begin their new life. I learned of their presence in our midst through a mutual acquaintance, so thought it only proper to go say hello, to see how they were getting on. Besides, I was curious as to how they ended up in this particular location. What I found was a family utterly in thrall to their new surroundings, humbled by the overwhelming welcome they've received, but intently focused on a clear vision for their future.

Peter Hardie is one of those lucky individuals possessed of an instinctive entrepreneurial flair, one that actively seeks and pounces upon viable opportunities to forge ahead. This has seen him spend many years in the entertainment business

as a nightclub owner and DJ, though his last UK employ was within the real estate profession. Sue Hardie comes to Canada as a greatly experienced and highly qualified travel industry professional. Having made the decision some years ago to strive for a situation where they could work together, and at home, Peter and Sue concluded that running a B&B seemed the ideal scenario. So began the search for a suitable property.

There were no initial designs to pursue their grand plan overseas, until mortgage and taxation restrictions in the UK made it obvious there was no way they could achieve their dream there in respect of the high level of service they were determined to offer. Then researching businesses for sale online, they came upon a B&B on the market just outside Victoria. Canada had not for one second previously entered the equation, but this discovery piqued their curiosity enough for Peter, Sue, and their children Laura, now 19, and Kieran, 13, to attend an immigration fair in October 2004.

"We came away from that show enthused by what we found out and decided to come out for an exploratory visit," Sue explains. The Hardies visited Vancouver Island for the first time in February 2005, their agenda straightforward. They were looking for an area that felt like "home," and a property that could satisfy their plans for a dream home and business in one. They explored Victoria, Courtenay and the Comox Valley, but found themselves utterly seduced by Nanaimo.



“Initially, you’re in awe of its beauty,” Sue gushes, “as it’s jaw-droppingly gorgeous! I’ve traveled to many places in the world—Australia, Cambodia, Taiwan, Malaysia, Florida, the Caribbean, so many places—but nowhere comes anywhere close to Nanaimo, as its natural beauty is phenomenal.”

The visit was a resounding success in that they had found both the area and house they considered perfect. The pre-visit criteria was that the ideal property had to have land, not be too isolated, and be such in layout that it could be configured to ensure clear demarcation between family life and the B&B business. In Jingle Pot, they found exactly what they’d been looking for.

“Prior to flying out here we’d short-listed thirty-five properties,” Peter says, “but twenty of them sold in a week! We felt our backs against the wall slightly, but this place had only just come on the market.” Sue excitedly interjects: “I walked into this house and just went ‘Wow!’” The emotion of that moment is recalled by Peter, who found himself equally impressed with a stunning piece of real estate boasting 2.87 acres in a glorious rural location: “Yes, we walked in here and thought it was absolutely ideal—without even really looking around outside!”

Fast-forward three years of considerable stress, intense preparations, immigration red tape and endlessly on, and the Hardies have joined our fast-growing community. They arrived as wide-eyed and excited about the future as my wife and I did just fourteen months before them. But then the hard work started immediately with the employment of local companies and tradesmen to transform their new six-bedroom home into Maple View B&B, a luxury accommodation the Hardies hope will ultimately earn them five-star status.

Since their relocation, it’s been absolutely non-stop for the whole family – but, so far, they’re enjoying every minute of their new life. Particularly grateful for the welcome they’ve received, the Hardies are eager to voice how enamoured they already are with the citizens of Nanaimo.

“The beauty of Nanaimo is supported by the warmth and friendliness of its people,” states Sue. “They just welcome you with open arms. It doesn’t matter that you’re a stranger from

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somewhere different, as people here can't go out of their way enough to help you. There's a real community spirit, with everyone pulling together."

Of understandable great relief to Peter and Sue is how well the kids have adapted to their new environment. Both children naturally harboured concerns about the big move, but all worries have rapidly dissipated as they've eased into a new rhythm of life somewhere they see as something of an island paradise.

Kieran, still of high school age, of course, says: "Coming from one school to another the other side of the world is quite tough to do, but after a couple of days I got settled in, started making new friends, inviting people round here and going to the movies. Now I've got quite a lot of friends!"

Crazy for horses and cars, Laura has found a great job working with the latter, and seems as absolute in her happiness as young Kieran. "I love Canada," she proudly proclaims. "I love where we live. I love my friends and the people I work with. I've never regretted moving here and I've never been homesick at all. It's just amazing here. This is my new home, my new life, and I think it's awesome!"

The Maple View B&B officially opened for business on May 10th, so we thought we'd put the Hardies' claims of luxurious accommodation and the pinnacle of service to the test. Considering the luxury angle, there is no disputing that the property is immaculate, classily furnished and fitted, and very attractive in so many ways. It's a house that's obviously been subject to a deeply thoughtful approach in respect of every last detail. To this end it boasts a show home quality, yet still retains the soul of a lived-in family residence.

There are two very different guest rooms: The Cottam Suite—named after the Preston suburb the Hardies once called home—and The Rosebury Room, for the Cottam avenue in which they lived. We occupied the former, a stunning accommodation where it seems all that's missing is the ability to control what music emanates from the radio alarm clock. Sweet though she seems, Kelly Clarkson has never been and will never be the soundtrack to which I wish to start my day.



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Otherwise, there was simply nothing we could fault. We were provided with the height of overnight comfort, with natural focus falling on the incredible bathroom featuring slate flooring and shower cubicle with a rainforest showerhead. It's an experience worth leaping out of bed for – as are the breakfasts! We opted on this occasion for the nostalgic Hardie's Hearty English Breakfast: bacon, sausages, fried tomato, sautéed mushrooms, hash browns and two eggs your style, with toast, coffee or tea, fruit, granola, preserves and most everything else you could name as a feasible breakfast food. It was great, and served by naturals for the hospitality industry.

We could have dined al fresco on the

newly constructed 32' wide deck, in the elegant dining room, or in the handily sited "nook" next to the kitchen—hence close to the food supply. Needless to say, we owned the nook that morning.

The first entry in the Maple View B&B visitors' book is from the first guests, by coincidence an English couple checking out the island with a view to possible relocation. "First class accommodation wanting for nothing," it says, and we concur. The exemplary personal service, cozy family atmosphere, peaceful location and plush rooms are a winning combination that the Hardies' should rest assured meets their vision of that extra mile.

My wife is Canadian, but I am not. Upon moving to Nanaimo I was obviously

aware of the need to begin using new terminology and pronouncing certain words in different ways. Listening to the Hardies attempting to switch to alien pronunciations of such as "garage" endeared them to us more than they can imagine. It was delightful how they unselfconsciously corrected old habits when slipping up, the point being how enthusiastic they are to "become Canadian" and the zesty way in which they are embracing life here. Why, before much longer they'll be those locals greeting new settlers with a whole sack of tips and tricks of their own ... ■

To reach the Hardies, call 250.751.8675 or visit the website: www.mapleviewbandb.com

