

# Melbourne Observer Travellers' Good Buys

with  
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## Canadian Inn will blow you away

Some of the less-charitable on Canada's Vancouver Island were little backward in suggesting that one of their local doctors, Howard McDiarmid would do better sticking to medicine than dreaming about one day becoming an hotelier.

Because 'Howie,' as he was better known, talked about his dream hotel for close on thirty years, and walked kilometre upon kilometre of coastline seeking just the site he had in mind on the island's rugged west coast.

And when he finally settled on his "dream location" it was anything but bathed in sunshine, or caressed by balmy sea breezes. Nor did it show much prospects for guests taking colourful cocktails by the pool year-round, or moonlight rambles along tranquil pathways.

Rather it was on the wildest and most rocky headland Dr McDiarmid could find, and the adjacent beach, instead of a strip of golden sand on which guests could cavort and sunbathe, was a graveyard of ancient logs and 20-metre trees torn from forests by despicable winds and angry seas. And there was not a neighbour in sight.

Worse, in winter, those gale-force winds could howl in off the North Pacific at 130kph, with locals warning Dr McDiarmid that ten-metre high waves would crash over the rocks and plaster sea-salt across the windows of his resort and obscure the distant view – which would be mostly



● The Wickaninnish Inn, seen from the air

unrecognisable anyway, because the area was also famous for its pea-souper fogs.

"Perfect," said Dr McDiarmid. "I have found my Paradise. Here I will build my hotel – a hotel from which to watch the famous North Pacific storms."

And in August 1996 his dream came to reality with the opening of his Wickaninnish Inn – a Native American word meaning 'Rushing Waters,' and once adopted by a revered local chief.

And contrary to those few early sceptics the Wickaninnish Inn has never looked back, particularly in winter when ferocious gales and boisterous seas can hurl every fury Mother Nature can amass at the Inn. But do guests cringe from it all?

Not at all. They rug-up and head off into it, taking walks in rain that's measured annually in metres and blows in horizontal sheets, turning their shoulders into those 130kph winds and licking the salt-spray from their lips.

Or watch it all from behind floor-to-ceiling toughened-glass windows, while dining grandly before raging log fires on local Tofino oysters and Dungeness crab cakes, grilled wild salmon, rack of lamb, Arctic char (a species of trout,) fruits and vegetables from local organic farms and orchids, and desserts that Mother simply never made...

And when there are particularly boisterous attacks from wind and sea, the barman turns up the appropriately-thunderous 1812 Overture on the stereo...

While Howard McDiarmid, who practiced in nearby Tofino ("it's the end of the road on Vancouver Island," the jovial locals will tell you,) was chucked in a friendly kind of way by many for his plans, he had just as many supporters for his idea for a "storm watcher's hotel."

Not the least were his sons Charles, who was already in the hotel industry in Banff Springs, Bruce in real estate, and Jim who had business interests in Vancouver on the mainland opposite the island.

"Business just gets better," says Charles who is now Managing Director. "Particularly during the 'storm season' from November to February when guests enjoy the most dramatic encounters with wind, waves, rain, fog and sea-spray."

And indulge such touches of luxury as individual fireplaces in all 75 rooms and suites, and laze back in hot baths with a glass of chilled bubbly and watch Mother Nature unleashing her wildest anger outside through more floor-to-ceiling glass walls that offer these grand views, yet total privacy.

The Wickaninnish Inn is above the isolated Chesterman Beach and is surrounded by the sea on three sides – with the nearest landmass to the west being Japan.

The Inn is also close to the Pacific Rim National Park that in summer offers exceptional walking trails amid 500 year old rainforests, and opportunities to fish, shop the local stores for handicrafts, and golf on a 9-hole course nearby.

No wonder readers of Conde Nast Traveler magazine this year voted it "the most excellent romantic hide-away in North America." For full details and prices phone Canada & Alaska Specialist Holidays on 1300 79 49 59.

# Melbourne Observer Wines & Liqueurs

with  
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## Poor man's Grange, a real treat



For true believers, March 1 is a day that is looked forward to each year with an anticipation that goes well beyond the norm.

Because it's the day that Penfolds release their Bin range of wines, a collection of just a half-dozen or so labels that for a half century now have rewarded enthusiasts with a extra little something both in multi-regional blends, and in highly-stylised wines from individual regions.

And importantly, priced to be enjoyed at a luncheon or dinner that doesn't have to be a particularly noteworthy occasion to seek reason to pull one of these out of the cellar: the 2008 Bin 138 Barossa Valley Shiraz Mourvedre Grenache, for instance, is just \$29.99.

Even the grand-daddy of this year's releases, the 2007 Bin 389 Cabernet Shiraz (often referred to as "Poor Man's Grange" because it was first made in 1960 by Max Schubert who created Grange, and components are matured today in the same barrels as the previous vintage of Grange,) is well-priced for its quality at \$64.99.

(This 2007 Bin 389 was sourced entirely from South Australia's Coonawarra, McLaren Vale, Langhorne Creek, Padthaway and the Barossa. Nicely balanced full-fruit and



oak flavours make it enjoyable drinking now, but you'd do well cellaring a few to truly enjoy in another five or so years.)

This year's Penfolds Bin releases also include two new wines, a 2009 Bin 23 Adelaide Hills Pinot Noir, and a 2005 Reserve Bin Aged Release Eden Valley Riesling – each priced at \$39.99.

Others in the 2010 release are the 2007 Bin 28 Kalimna Shiraz (\$33.99,) the 2008 Bin 128 Coonawarra Shiraz (\$33.99,) 2009 Bin 311 Tumberumba Chardonnay (\$39.99) and the 2007 Bin 407 Cabernet Sauvignon (\$54.99.)

### Pictured

■ Nicely priced: Penfolds' Bin Releases for 2010 include this Bin 28 Kalimna Shiraz at just \$33.99.

■ Grand-daddy of this year's releases, the classic 2007 Bin 389.

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