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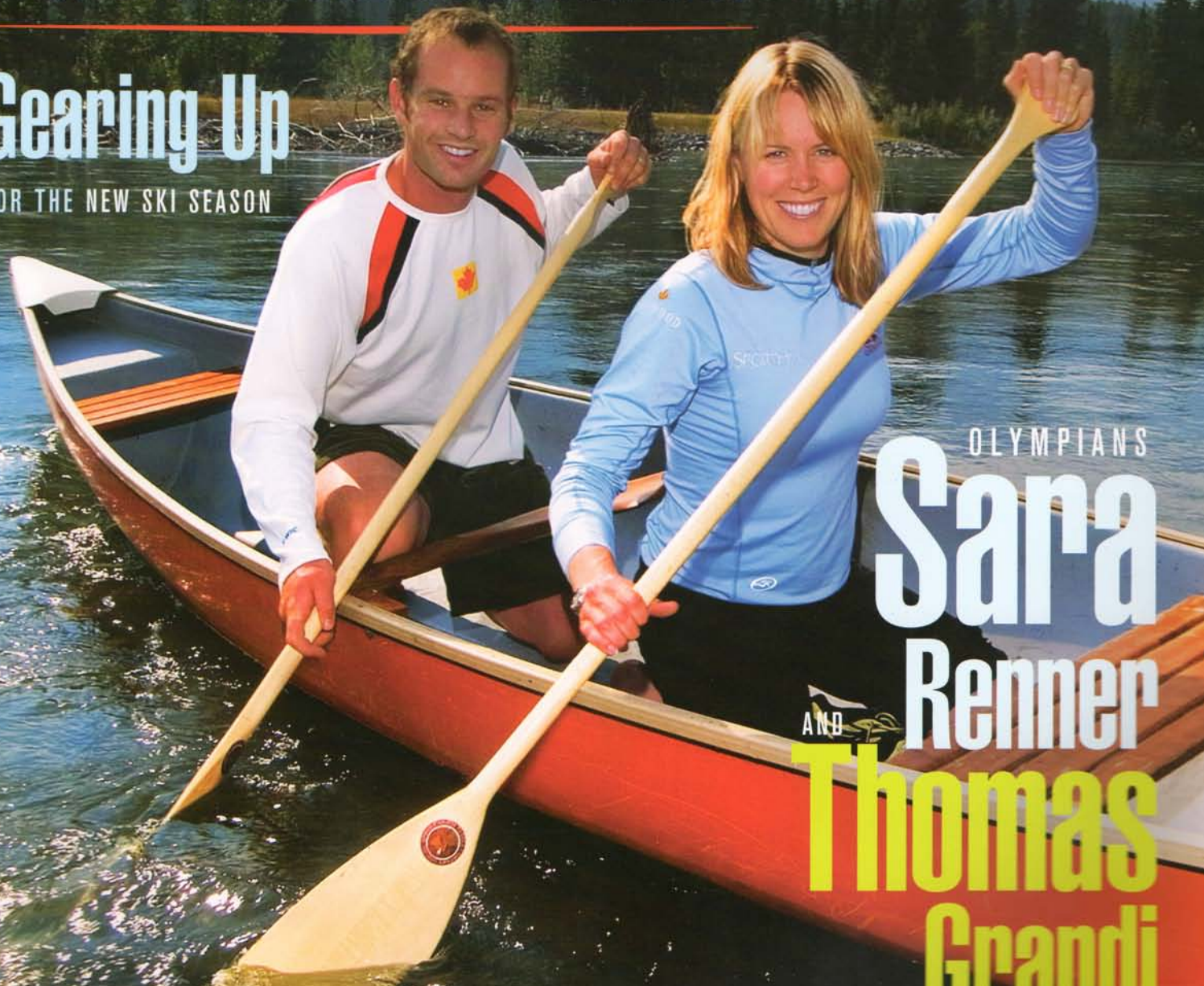
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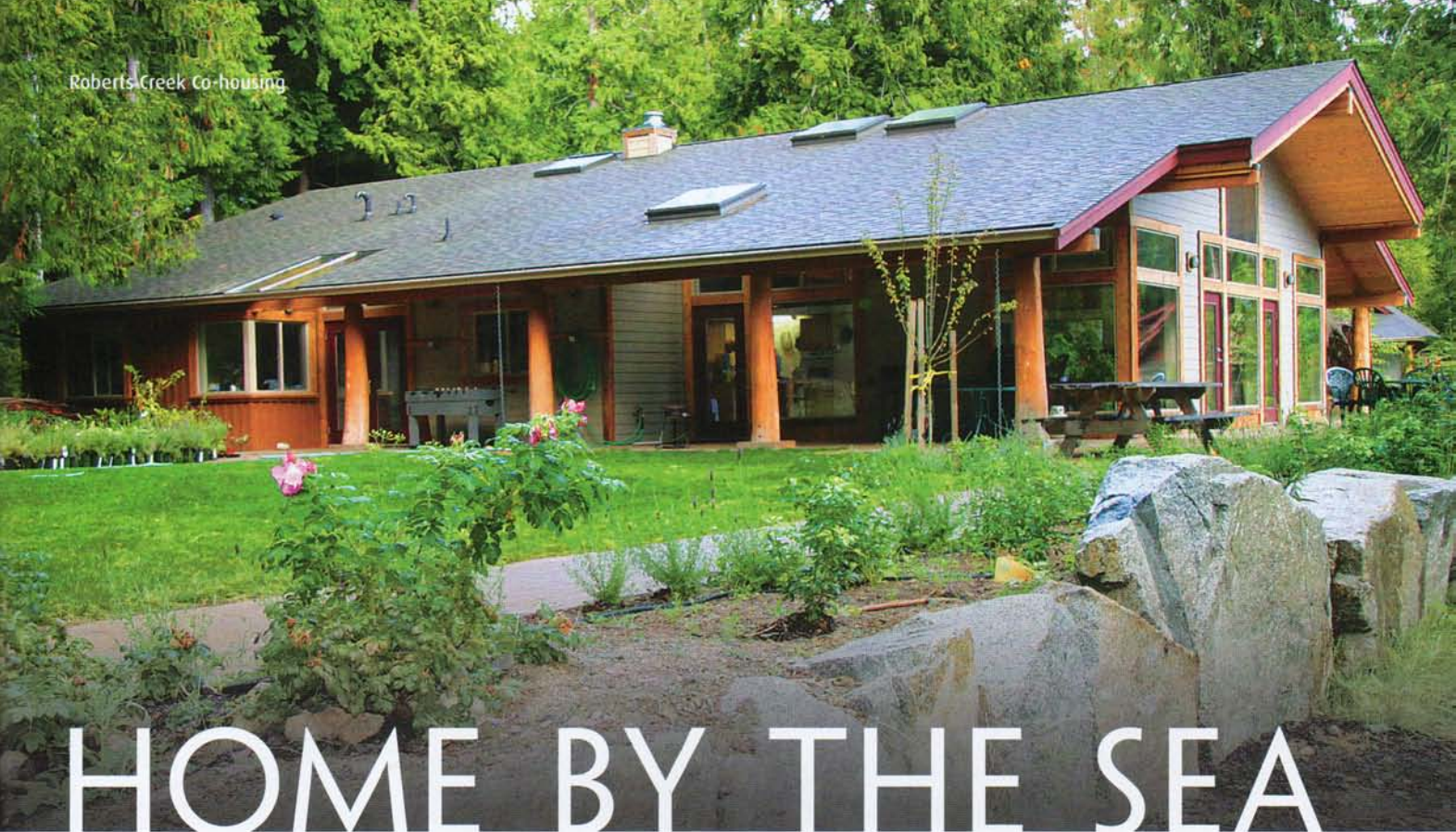
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HOME BY THE SEA

ROBERTS CREEK HOME TO CANADA'S FIRST RURAL CO-HOUSING COMMUNITY

By Heather Conn

Some British Columbians might dismiss this rare intentional neighbourhood as a mere commune in the country. Yet, amidst the flurry of new condo and housing developments on B.C.'s Lower Sunshine Coast, this unique forest sanctuary of 31 dwellings in Roberts Creek stands as a testament to sustainability, community identity, and cooperative spirit. (A heavily-wooded rural jewel of 3,000+, Roberts Creek lies between Gibsons and Sechelt on the Sunshine Coast. Northwest of Vancouver, this mainland region is accessible only by boat, plane or a 40-minute public ferry.)

Roberts Creek Co-housing is Canada's first rural co-housing community, completed in December 2004. With residents from across B.C.'s Lower Mainland, eastern Canada and the U.S., Europe, and Vietnam, this values-based stronghold now has a waiting list. Community-dwellers range from artists to academics to a Coquitlam, B.C. engineer who quit his job to join the settlement. All residents, who own their houses privately in a bare-land strata, fee-simple arrangement, make decisions by consensus.

(The co-housing model, which began in Denmark more than 30 years ago, strives to prevent the isolation and sprawl of single-family housing. It clusters homes – in this case, on 35- by 98-foot lots – around shared gathering places. The concept includes a strong eco-ethic: use less land and resources (save on sewage, water and underground phone infrastructure) and promote more village-like interaction. Co-housing came to North America, which now has about 40 such communities, in 1988, thanks to architects and authors Kathryn McCamant and Charles Durrett.)

"I fell in love with the creek and I love the forest and trees," says

resident Sally Abraham, who learned of the co-housing plan while on a visit from England. "The main thing is that we want to steward the land." The community includes two hectares (five acres) of forest preserved in a land trust. The co-housing community's eight-hectare (20-acre) site, nestled around a salmon-spawning creek, offers two

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duplexes and one- to four-bedroom homes that surround a 2,900-square-foot main common house. The latter contains an office, guest suite, children's room, laundry, film screening room, and kitchen, where resident teams of self-appointed cooks prepare shared meals once or twice a week.

"I loved the multi-age concept, having children, families, and elders together," adds Abraham, a Reiki master and mother with grown children who have left home. She camped on the grounds in the summer of 2003 before her two-bedroom home, now augmented to four bedrooms with an attic renovation, was built.



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Roberts Creek, which covers 3,000 hectares (7,413 acres), has little commercial development and most residents like it that way. Its downtown core comprises a post office, library, general store, two restaurants, an international woodworking school called Inside Passage, and a cobble of shops that sell services and products from hemp to health food. However, the Creek’s population is expected to double within the next 20 years, according to the community website www.bigpacific.com.

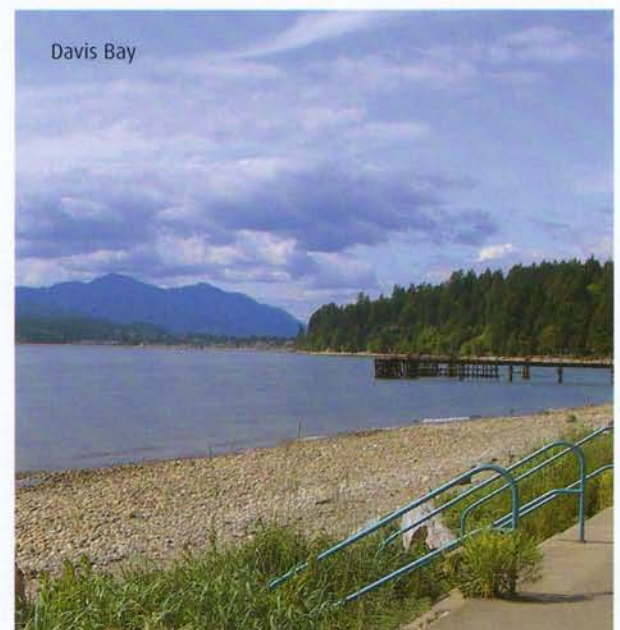
Currently, Roberts Creek has no new condo or housing developments. Most of its properties have a five-acre (two-hectare) limit and any proposed zoning changes require multiple meetings with the commission, says committee member-at-large Jim Budd. (Final approval rests with the Sunshine Coast Regional District.) Other zoning and housing options are under discussion, he says, particularly since little affordable housing is available for young, first-time buyers or low-income seniors.

However, new high-end developments abound further north on the Sunshine Coast. Within a five-minute drive, the 12-hectare (30-acre) Eco Village (www.ecovillagesechelt.com) is under construction in Wilson Creek. It will have two-level, live/work spaces of up to 4,000 square feet, including six-metre (20-foot) vaulted ceilings and a 512-square-foot loft. All units have individual zoning and will meet LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) certification level.

Within another short drive north, the three-storey luxury condo

The West, under construction in Davis Bay, still had five units left, as of September. These range from a 887-square-foot, one-bedroom to 1,404-square-foot, two-bedrooms. Prices vary from \$289,900 to \$499,000 (see www.thedoylebros.com). Occupancy is expected by mid-November.

Just north of Davis Bay lies the 10.5-hectare (26-acre) Davis Lookout (www.davislookout.com), which offers 29 home sites starting at \$144,900. The lots, which range from 9,515 to 12,992 square feet, are close to Chapman Creek trail and Davis Bay beach. Slightly north again, and five minutes from Sechelt, SilverStone (www.



silverstoneliving.com) has 30 oceanview and oceanfront home sites from \$349,000 and oceanfront home sites from \$699,000.

Also near Sechelt, the Wakefield Beach development (www.wakefieldbeach.com) has mostly sold out its 31 oceanview, oceanside and oceanfront homes, priced from \$585,000 to \$895,000+. On a bluff above Sechelt is The Trails (www.trailsliving.com), a community plan of two to four-bedroom, single-family craftsman homes and townhomes in the mid \$400,000s; they access seven kilometres of hiking trails.

In West Sechelt, you'll find Seaview Villa Estates, an ocean-view development (www.seaviewvillaestates.com) with 22 strata townhomes on 1.2 hectares (three acres). Now in phase two, these 2,509-to-2,842-square-foot homes range in price from \$529,000 to \$549,000.

Overall, the area's resale market remains very strong in recreational properties and higher-end waterfront homes, says Brent Bartley, a Sechelt-based RE/MAX realtor, with a temporary sales dip in "working-class homes."

Meanwhile, developers are targeting the Sechelt area for ever-more significant changes. One proposal is the 162-hectare (400-acre) Silverback residential/golf resort at Porpoise Bay. It would include an 18-hole golf course, 1,600 single and multiple-family units, a shopping facility, artist live/work studios, a 120-room lodge and conference centre, and a waterfront park. Go-ahead for the project is pending approval by the District of Sechelt. **R**



WITHIN BRITISH COLUMBIA, ROBERTS CREEK IS THE ONLY COMMUNITY WITH A VOLUNTEER COMMISSION FOR ITS OFFICIAL COMMUNITY PLAN...

The West in Davis Bay

