

Vancouver Reflections

by [Bill Corden](#) (February 2021)



Waterfront City, Jack Shadbolt, 1986

Back in early 1974, Vancouver was just a name on a map to me. I had some sort of sense that it was in Canada but I didn't have any idea where it could be found. All I knew was that Canada was supposed to be a nice country, offering a future better than the one on offer in England. England at the time was in the middle of a miner's strike and was also in the middle of the collapse of its industrial cities. Just about everybody of my generation wanted to leave and, in those days, you had a few fairly easy choices. Australia, New Zealand, South Africa and Canada. They were all part of the Commonwealth and it was still quite simple to get in if you were a citizen of the U.K.

The European Union was still a few years away and a passport was required to travel between each of the countries over there. Moving to one of those countries held no particular attraction for anyone in the U.K. as they all seemed to be suffering the same woes as us and, of course, they didn't speak the same language.

I wasn't actually living in mainland UK at the time, I was living in a place called Jersey which is a small island (9x5 ...about 45 Sq miles) in the English Channel about 100 miles south of the coast, closer to France than it is to the homeland, but independently governed. I landed there in late 1969 on my escape route from Liverpool.

Let me paint a picture of Jersey for you.

Jersey was, and still is, a tax haven. It was then a place where expatriates, working as mining and hydrographic engineers and such, in Africa and India, could park their money and keep it at arm's length from the rapacious British Government. The Brits only wanted to tax it but the expats also wanted to keep it out of the hands of murderous governments in Africa and India who wanted to steal it all and

then kill you (which they did with alacrity). Local Jerseymen spoke a form of French called "Jerrais" but the lingua franca of the Island was English.

Life in mostly sun-drenched Jersey was much more pleasant than working in those dour mill cities, those shipyard cities and the mining villages. All it seemed that people did to fill their time was to grow tomatoes and export Jersey cows. The climate was just that few degrees warmer as to allow for hot summers and very mild winters—not quite tropical but close enough. The people who didn't work in the fields and greenhouses were employed in the vacation business or the "financial services" business.

Jersey was a major destination resort for holidaymakers and the population swelled from about 70,000 in the winter to over 2 million in the summer. Yellow sandy beaches, great pubs, lots of Hotels and B&Bs, theatre shows, and top acts made it a very popular place to go. It had the added advantage of being "tax free" so people flocked there to get their duty-free cigarettes and booze.

Me?

I worked in the financial services sector, a bank to be specific and a cheapskate bank at that (but then again, all banks were cheapskates). Nevertheless, it provided a fairly good living and we were able to take vacations, we were able to eat out at the best restaurants on a regular basis and Jersey had some of the best in the world at the time. It also had more than its fair share of tax dodgers and sanction busters who loved its tax, trust and company laws.

The current horror show that we see exposed almost every other week, the show that names all of the villains and megacorporations who've secreted their money there? Well, that was just in its infancy then. We had a few bigshots and despots who had their money there, Idi Amin being one of them.

The famous Durrell family actually lived there and banked with us, they were very, very sweet, and Roger Moore had a house just down the road from us (called Moonrakers). Everything was low key and it didn't explode until long after I'd left the place.

That explosion, caused by the fall of the Soviet Union, the rise of China and the creation of the European Union turned what was once just millions of dollars in tax free hideouts into hundreds of billions of dollars, as so many more crooks had to find a place to stash their loot.

You would think this sudden influx of massive amounts of cash would turn the place into a rival for Monaco but, sadly, hardly any of the ill-gotten gains are spent there, they just bounce on the ground and are gone to New York or London before the local authorities can get their grasping hands on it. The tax dodgers don't usually live on the island, they just have empty homes there to give them legal residence. Consequently, the place has fallen into some disrepair.

Back in 1974, though, it was like a little paradise but, like any paradise, everybody wanted to live there and home prices went crazy. So, the Government introduced residency requirements that had to be met before you could buy a home on the Island. When I first arrived in 1970, that residency requirement was 5 years (if you weren't born on the island) but by 1974 it had been extended to 10 years and, in the meantime, prices had gone up double, triple and double again in the frantic race to get tax free status.

Officials tried to introduce legislation that would curb the price increases but the lawyers were just too clever for them. Profits on the sale of property were limited to certain percentages, depending on how long you had held it, but those crafty legal experts found ways around it by charging a million dollars for a rusty old tractor that was in the front yard or half a million bucks for the wheelbarrow.

There was no stopping them and no stopping the prices from skyrocketing away from our reach. If we wanted to get what we wanted we would have to strike out.

Around this time a friend dropped into our circle of friends; he was a world traveler and he'd just returned from a hike along the Pacific Crest Trail from Vancouver to San Francisco. He came to our beautiful pink granite (rented) farmhouse from where we could see the coast of France, and gave us a slideshow of the trip including beautiful scenes from Vancouver. Forget the pink granite and the coast of France—this was where we wanted to be !

The timing couldn't have been more perfect for us, we were suffering from "island fever" and the desire to get away and carve out a future was overpowering.

Most banks in Canada were recruiting their staff from the UK at the time, they sent out their hiring guys, who advertised in local papers and interviewed you in hotel rooms. My interview was under the dim light of a Coleman Lamp (because of the miner's strike) and the Dickensian omen would surface some years later.

If we made the grade, we would be offered TWICE the money we were making, then and there—and offered to pay our travelling expenses to Canada. On top of that, they would put us up in a hotel for a month until we found our own accommodations.

It was too good to be true (and it was, as it turned out), but it was an escape hatch and we were aware that these hatches were being closed throughout the Commonwealth. South Africa was becoming a wasteland, Australia and New Zealand were imposing stringent immigration criteria and here was this bank helping us to get through that sticky immigration process.

So with their offer in my hand, an offer which would

be paying me much more than my current cadaverish boss was earning, I told the boss where to stuff his hidden trust accounts and we were off to Vancouver.

We decided to go by ship and then by train, thinking we would get to see a lot of Canada before we arrived at the Western end of the railroad, but the magic of that idea soon wore off . Day after day of ocean and what did we see? We saw the sea. The highlight of the voyage across the Atlantic was an Iceberg in the Belle Isle Straits and before we knew it we were unloading everything through customs and immigration at Montreal.

They were a nasty bunch of 'ows yer fathers at Montreal. Nasty because they were right in the heat of a separatist movement and if you didn't speak French then they felt they had the right to abuse you. I had a bit of French from school and quite a lot of French from Jersey but those Quebecois were having none of it and I might just as well have been speaking Greek to them. After a few internal expletives, we were on our way across the great white north.

Welcome to Canada and a whole new set of social rules!

The first thing we discovered was the strict control of alcohol and its consumption on the train, the fabulous Canadian Pacific that they sing about. You weren't allowed to move from one table to another with your drink, people from other cars were not allowed to join you on pain of being thrown off the voyage at the next stop (which was certain to be in the middle of nowhere).

People called you "Sir" which was a moniker that you hated in the UK, and in general the staff were a bunch of uncompromising bullies. They acted as if Canadian Pacific was its own government and at that time that wasn't too far from reality. CP in fact owned great swathes of land on either side of the railroad. Most of those great swathes of land were

through the Canadian wilderness and, as most of the readers will know, it's all trees until you get to the prairies. All you could see out of the windows of the carriage were trees . . . and what did we see? We saw the trees.

The places we did stop at didn't inspire us with confidence as to what we were going to get once we arrived in Vancouver. I can only remember Thunder Bay giving me the impression of a town very aptly named, with huge silos at the Lakehead and huge black clouds behind them. Then it was on to Winnipeg where we were allowed off the train to buy some bread and deli for sandwiches. The guy in the store at Portage and Main couldn't understand ONE word of my English, although he spoke perfect Canadian English back to me! For some reason I had to write down the word "butter" before I got through to him. "Oh . . . *budder?*" he said to me.

I cannot remember any of the other stops and the greatest disappointment was that we went through most of the Rockies at night.

By the time we rolled into Vancouver about 4 days later we were thoroughly fed up with the great adventure and swore never to cross the country by train ever again. That's 2800 miles of tedium interrupted only by a few hundred miles of mountain views. Boy was I glad to get off!

We were supposed to be met by a representative of the bank but in another augury of bad things to come, he didn't show up. Luckily, we had made friends with a girl on the train and her relatives gave us a ride to the Hotel.

My first impressions of the place were mixed, it seemed only half finished, it seemed run down and yet there were quite a few new office buildings just completed, and the old decrepit downtown area, which was on the edge of skid row, was slowly closing and moving towards the new towers.

In the first few weeks I found out that there were no real pubs, only beer parlours (at 10 cents a glass). There were signs that advertised separate entrances for Women and Escorts and the bars had signs that reminded the men to check their knives with the barkeeps. Everything was closed on Sundays, especially the bars. Liquor could only be bought from Government Liquor stores. Very few restaurants, no cyclists, no class barriers . . . if you could pay the bill, you were welcome.

It was, for all intents and purposes, firstly a full-fledged lumber town and secondly a fishing port. The waterfront reflected these industries with countless lumber mills going right down to the waterline and canning factories processing the bumper salmon catches 24 hours a day 7 days a week. The lumber companies were top dogs, with Macmillan Bloedel ruling the roost, the fisheries were famous the world over. It seemed that there was unlimited worldwide demand (and unlimited supply) of wood and fish, and the ports and the railways that served this demand took up residence on the waterfronts to the exclusion of the public.

How young was this city? Well, they had cut the banks of the Thames and the Seine and built promenades and mansions some 500 years earlier; at this end of the world the shorelines were virtually untouched. Shorelines were for business only and the few homes that had been built on the Fraser's riverbanks were mostly shacks, like the ones on the bayous in Louisiana.

Marshalling yards and sidings were cheek-by-jowl with residential areas. There were lumber baron mansions, there were millionaires by the dozen who lived in the exclusive areas, but apart from the cesspool that was skid row, people generally had decent, wooden homes and the politicians established a pretty good culture of listening to what the people wanted. There were no real ghettos as there were in other cities. They preserved areas for parkland, showing

incredible foresight with the 1000-acre Stanley Park smack dab in the middle of the harbour area. Lumber was so plentiful that they actually cut 6" blocks and laid them down as street surfaces, there's still a couple of streets where these blocks are exposed.

The preservation of the parklands was the birth of a very recalcitrant and still, to this day, obstinate population. Any major project that tries to re-design aspects of the City will face step by step protests and it was one of these protests that thankfully stopped a six-lane freeway from going through the heart of downtown in the late 60s. Nowadays a tree has more value than a human life, Greenpeace was founded here in 1971.

Driftwood, tree bark and industrial debris washed up on the few sections of beach that were saved by the Municipality and no real effort was made to keep them groomed. There were a couple of legacy projects from the Commonwealth games in 1954 (The one where Bannister broke the 4-minute mile) but the vibe was definitely one of a mill town trapped in the early fifties, strewn with the debris of the industrial revolution. The waterway that cuts right into the city, False Creek, was a soup of creosote, wood preservatives and washed-up garbage. To swim in it would put yourself at risk of dying from any number of poisons.

The downtown harbour (called Burrard Inlet) was the site where self-tipping log barges were unloaded straight into the water and was also the site where huge piles of sulphur were stored on the shore in the open air. Further up the inlet were more mills and gigantic grain silos, along with the port docking facility itself. By the time I had arrived, the main inner harbour was almost sterile and fished out, marine life was almost destroyed. You couldn't really get close to the waterfront because it was private land owned by industry.

There was a fairly healthy boat and shipbuilding

industry to supply the fishermen, the ferries and the mining enterprises and these operations took up any remaining shoreline space. Pretty well all of them dumped their waste directly into the Inlet.

The city was only about 90 years old but it looked as though it had been badly beaten up and had abandoned its setting to the almighty trade machine. It did though, have a lot of natural beauty; forests that started right at the edge of town and went on for hundreds of miles without a town to interrupt them, raging and rampaging rivers close by, rivers that teemed with salmon and ran unchecked for thousands of miles from the mountains to the sea. Ski hills, lakes, wilderness trails, sweet sweet mountain air, offshore islands that allowed you to live completely off the land, and best of all, not that many people! The metro population at that time was only just over 1 million souls and there was lots and lots of room for them in the undeveloped, fertile, Fraser Valley on the doorstep. Even today you can go 500 miles north on the map and there isn't a settlement you'll find worth a mention.

This was the frame I found myself in about 47 years ago, terribly homesick and wondering what the heck I'd got myself into . . . and in a unhappy marriage to boot, but I won't bore you with those details.

It didn't take long to realize that I was an indentured servant of the Bank, you had to guarantee them two years of labour, else pay them back what they'd spent to get you there. It took even less time to figure out that they had conned you with the mirage of higher wages. Everything here cost twice as much, rent was three times as much and they paid you about 15% less than they paid the locals. Here we were with the sum total of about \$2,000 to our entire name and no chance of getting home.

In 1974, a house here would set you back about \$30,000 for something half decent (that same house now is \$1.5 million!)

but it seemed just as far away for us as home ownership was in Jersey. To the Bank you were so much fodder for the farm, treated just like an enlisted soldier.

The business world was very different from the way things were back home; you called the boss by his first name and yet the entire culture was run on quasi-military lines. Those bosses weren't there because of their aristocratic connections or educational achievements, least of all the class they came from. Quite often they'd got where they were by adopting the ruthless nature of business and most of the ones that I ran into didn't have a cultural or an educated bone in their body (and this from a writer who left school at 15).

Bank Managers were usually rough and ready, practical types who'd been brought up on farms in the prairies or small towns in the interior of the Province, nothing like the bowler-hatted ones in the old country.

Banking itself was considered a good career at the time, although not at all prestigious.

As to the mechanics of working for them? In the UK, if your employer wanted to transfer you, well it might be a question of moving maybe 50 miles or so to your new post and you'd be fairly confident that your new town would have the cinemas, schools and the community centres and supermarkets to make the transition easier. But here in Canada you could be sent anywhere. Employers thought nothing of uprooting you and your family to plonk you into some mosquito infested mining or lumber town 500 miles north (or even further) that was knee deep in snow for more than half a year.

And they didn't look kindly upon you if you didn't want to go, it was a kind of modern day corporate human bondage they had developed, technically you could refuse but in reality, a refusal ended your career. The early promise of a salary that

was twice as much as I was getting back home soon proved as worthless as your autonomy. They knew they had you by the balls and were of no use to other enterprises, so they paid as little as they could get away with

The business environment was balanced (and some said overbalanced) by an incredibly powerful Union presence, a presence so strong that they got a Socialist government elected in the year I arrived. They were soon booted out because they were totally incompetent but they have been in power a few times since. In fact, it's a socialist government that's running things at the moment.

On the streets there was no evidence of a military, no air force planes flying overhead and the police didn't do walkabout patrols, giving a sense of insulation from the world of warring nations and gangster crime. Only skid row was considered dangerous and you never gave thought to any danger when travelling.

Religion and religious ties were hardly ever manifested in the workplace although they did surface lightly with the influx of Ismaili refugees from those African countries mentioned above, where they were being slaughtered without relief. But for the most part nobody cared what religion or what colour you were. It didn't matter what class you came from either, no such thing as upper or middle class in this set up. What mattered was how well you were doing. Tradesmen or mill workers made really good money (about twice what an office worker made) and if they were good with their money, they bought property. It was not unusual for a mechanic or a construction worker or a waitress, to own three or four houses or apartment blocks and there they were on Monday mornings at 7.30 am ready to pick up the tools, nothing really special about having money.

Just about everybody went to University after high school, didn't matter if you were dumb as a post, they had

courses and degree programs tailored for such dumb students. It was really just a right of passage for all but the most ambitious and the joke from the English contingent was that we could nail down a Canadian degree after a weekend's study.

All in all, it was a very secular lifestyle—they had beer in the fridge in the bank branches, they had outrageous parties in the branches on Friday afternoons (because there were no pubs to go to) and young bankers had a reputation that frightened many mothers away from allowing their daughters to work anywhere near them.

There were churches dotted throughout the grid but none of them had the influence of the Church back home.

Back to the settling-in stage.....

You make your bed and so you must lie in it. I knuckled down to my new job and my equally discomfited wife had to look for a job. Back in England and Jersey it had been a badge of honor for a man to say his wife didn't have to work but here everybody worked.

Surprisingly though, in this progressive workplace environment, the financial institutions which gave out loans for such things as cars and boats and mortgages, well, they would not take a woman's earnings into account because that source of income could cease once she got pregnant.

In fact it was only a few years prior to my arrival that men had to ASK the bank for permission to marry—the Bank knowing as they did, that the pittance they paid in wages was barely enough for one person to survive on, never mind two.

The positive side of this new life was that there were lots of other English immigrants and many of them were from my northern home town close to Liverpool. It was easy to make new friends. Because there were no real pubs, everybody did their socialising at home, everybody had a bar in their basement and

people quite often stayed overnight at each other's home. At first we rented a brand new apartment. The complex had a swimming pool, a gym and squash courts (something we could only have dreamed of back home), so the rent by comparison was reasonable.

Just as an aside, the apartment dwellers in Canada were (and still are) generally very inconsiderate of neighbours above and below or either side, and it was nothing for them to blast their stereos at any time of the night or to throw supermarket baskets over their balconies. I've never been able to figure out where this behaviour has its roots but I narrowed it down to the belief in North America that you can do whatever you like whenever you like ('cos that's what freedom means).

Anyways, the influx of immigrants from the UK led to the formation of predominantly English/Scottish neighbourhoods (just as it led to predominantly Polish, Italian, Ukrainian, East Indian and Chinese neighbourhoods) and the edges of these neighbourhoods got along very well together so there was never any real trouble. We were all strangers in a strange land and kids in school made it easier for the different roots to grow together. The schools were undoubtedly the best melting pot for the times.

Looking back, I would say that it was, by nature, very much a small frontier town with the look of a city. It wasn't unusual to bump into people you knew or new friends you had made every time you went out. Because of the "entertainment at home" lifestyle, it was easy to get to know people and one of the really nice aspects of living in this young city was that people were very open and trusting.

That was to change very rapidly in the coming years as the City grew into the sparkling, glittering glass greenhouse that it now is. Jim McKay of ABC Sports referred to it as "The Village of Vancouver" when the Vancouver Whitecaps won the

Soccer Bowl in 1979. Even with all of this change, Vancouver itself remained a very conservative community.

You had to be careful if you were a comedian dropping into town because the press would crucify you if you offended the newly powerful PC class with your rapidly dating material. I can remember when Eric Idle appeared in a local theater and made a joke about AIDS. There was a collective gasp of disapproval from the audience and for a split second it was touch and go as to whether they'd turn full on against him.

The workplace became a minefield for the irreverent types like myself and slowly but inexorably, humour was squeezed out of the world of office desks and paper clips. You would think—when you look at the prevailing office fashion scene, a scene where hardly anyone wears a suit and where short sleeved fleece jackets abound—you think, when you take in the casual tailored look of the women making their way to the office in the morning—you would think that this creates an easy-going culture in this community as a whole, but it's an illusion. It's concrete hierarchical, ambitious and just as merciless as any Capital City (although Vancouver is not the Capital)

To expand on that fashion scene, people turned up to weddings or funerals in track suits. Nobody but nobody wears the same clothes to work each day, whereas in England you wore the same suit every day until it frayed out of existence. Nobody dresses up to go out, it's "come as you are, or don't come at all."

Vancouver also had a credible claim to being the gay capital of Canada in the late 70s and was also considered by some to be "Ground Zero" for the feminist movement, which meant that there were tight parameters on your freedom of expression. Beneath the "West Coast Hippie/Mother Earth" façade, there was quite an uptight society. It's a strange mix that has only become more restrictive as the years roll by.

Now I would say that “wariness of speech” is the predominant culture.

Feminists be damned, Vancouver has a worldwide reputation for holding in its bosom, the most beautiful women in the world. Some say it's because the climate is so moderate, the living is so easy and the rain so emollient on the skin, that that's the recipe for such a prevalence of beauty, but there's no doubt that we hold pride of place. You can see more beautiful women in one afternoon on Robson Street than you can see in a lifetime in other cities.

There wasn't an awful lot of change from 1974 to 1986—a few English-style pubs were allowed to open, Sunday closing was eased and hi-rises started popping up left, right and centre in the downtown core. The age of the property tycoon was upon us and prices started to run away much the same as they had in Jersey. People were flipping land within a month of buying it and pocketing hundreds of thousands of dollars. Normal city growth.

The real fire was started by an idea the Government had to put on a “World's Fair.”

It was first called Transpo '86 to showcase the progress in transportation systems throughout the world but it caught on so completely that it morphed into Expo 86, a true World's Fair and it was a blazing success. Timing and luck once again had a lot to do with the next stage of development for Vancouver. As if it was God's pleasure, it never rained once for the entire fair (at least it seemed that way) and the cityscape was displayed in all of its infant glory.

Now I said at the beginning of this essay that I wasn't sure where Vancouver was, and apparently that wasn't so for much of the population of the rest of the world. They came here in droves, loved what they saw and wanted to live here.

Hong Kong residents saw similarities to their home

town and were antsy about the outcome of the handover, Russians and Persians who saw trouble brewing in their own backyards thought of it as a great place to resettle. East Indians had a readymade family support structure here and they were members of the Commonwealth, too. The new wave brought in their own business practices, the Chinese forced the banks to reduce their service charges and liberalize the lending criteria, the East Indians developed the farming infrastructure in the Fraser Valley, the Persians established their businesses in the North Shore community, and the Russians just folded into the run of things as if they didn't exist. Property prices increased tenfold and most of the existing homeowners became millionaires with the rising tide.

A new three tower hi-rise development in the downtown area sold out within hours and it caused a tremendous outcry because it had been offered for sale in Hong Kong before it was offered in Vancouver!

TV and radio changed with equally rapid pace and before we knew it there were any number of Chinese and Indian channels broadcasting 24/7. All of the feted local TV hosts and radio DJs faded into oblivion as the new media steamrollered in.

Canada's immigration approval system was still quite welcoming, wherever you came from. It had a wonderful reputation for absorption of different cultures and religions, so they applied *en force* just at the time when interest in immigration from Europe took a downward turn.

The European Union had made life better for its members, wages had climbed to equal Canada and the U.S. and now, with the Channel Tunnel, the Alps and the Mediterranean coast were as accessible as Blackpool and Brighton. Suddenly not so many were interested in taking the chance to move to a new country.

The entire face of the city changed in just a few short years after the Fair. Liquor licensing regulations were tossed out the window, Hong Kong financiers jumped in with both feet and started building towers wherever they could get permission. Suburbs which 20 years earlier had been under the jurisdiction of the Forestry Department were suddenly transformed into shopping malls, apartment blocks and new spacious homes, the likes of which until now had only been the privilege of the Lumber Barons and parvenus I mentioned earlier. Every type of restaurant you could imagine opened up and they all landed office business. Entire suburban towns became predominantly Chinese or East Indian almost overnight and there was hardly a blip in racial problems. The biggest problems were bears or cougars in your back yard as we encroached upon the wilderness.

It seemed like most of the newcomers were now from newly rich mainland China and they wasted no time in setting up businesses, malls, supermarkets and services for the booming Chinese market. Before your very eyes, old neighbourhoods were transformed into mini-Hong Kongs, and suburban towns to Chinese cities. Persians congregated in what was previously the English stronghold of North Vancouver and, before too long, all of the signs were in Farsi. The East Indian population settled mainly in the farmland areas along the Fraser River in Surrey and likewise all of the store signs popped up in Hindi.

Amazingly, all of this sea change occurred like adding flavour to a dish, there's been no huge political rallies or unruly mobs, no political carpetbagging—just a lesson for the world on how it can be done. There is no more satisfying sound than a bunch of kids from different races and countries walking through the mall and talking to each other with a Canadian accent; nothing can beat that scene.

Now, as a city, we enter young adulthood, most of the mills have gone, much of the logging has been curtailed, we

have even hosted a winter Olympics. The waterfront has been reclaimed with embankments and walkways and the waters cleaned up to what they were before Europeans almost killed them. Tourism has replaced heavy duty industry and the harbourfront has been developed to accommodate fabulous Cruise ships and Seaplane terminals. The two major complexes at the Harbour, the Convention Centre and Canada Place, are now world famous icons of West Coast splendour and the area heaves with international visitors.

The fisheries still operate but they have been cut back too, none of them run 24/7 anymore and the canneries are now museums and tourist spots. The downtown waterfront is a continuous accessible promenade and the water in the harbor is so clear you can see the seabed. Lumber and logging is now considered what they call a "sunset industry" and barges no longer dump their cargo in the inlet. Scuba divers tell us that rich life is returning underwater. You can walk from the harbour hotels right around Stanley Park along a seawall and, if you're lucky, you'll get to see a Killer Whale or a family of seals pop out of the deep.

But where we make gains on the waterfront, we have lost them on the transportation system because container traffic has replaced the logging traffic by a margin of ten times. There doesn't seem to be a way around the problem and the city is becoming a giant truck stop. Movement of goods by road and rail has the trains and semis moving with dangerous cargos right through the centre of the town and the authorities are at their wit's end trying to figure out a solution.

The Fraser River itself isn't considered a great trading route; it isn't navigable for very far and turns north into the wilderness after about 60 miles (it ain't no Mississippi!) and consequently, all of the incoming baubles we need for 21st century existence are dumped in the docks downtown.

For all of the wealth coming in by way of trade and tourism, the City itself still seems to operate on a shoestring budget (except for the salaries paid to the Decision Makers) because most of the fabulous sums coming in from our seaport and airport goes into Federal coffers—and they don't like to give much of it back. If they did, we could be like Venice or Shanghai but, in reality, we don't want that type of place for our home.

The city still has a very restricted imagination when it comes to public infrastructure and art installations. There was a brief blossoming of ideas in the run up to the Olympics in 2010 but that was quickly snuffed out when they realized they'd have to pay for it. The trams, the zip lines and the steam trains disappeared quicker than they arrived.

Many projects that should have been underway years ago, projects that would improve the transportation bottlenecks and beautify the open squares are bogged down with political fighting. Municipal and Provincial governmental in-fighting is a blood sport in the rainforest.

No one these days would consider honouring a past politician by way of a statue for fear that he or she will be revealed as some sort of evil colonialist some time down the road. Consequently, much of the street artworks and corporate patio installations are like a bowl of blancmange. I guess no one dares to compete with the magnificent natural tableau we have for a back yard.

Whenever you fly back in to Vancouver after a while away, that tableau is laid out before you in a stunning aerial view, snowcapped, forested mountains run straight down into the sparkling sea. The airport itself is now another jewel in the crown, with absolutely beautiful art installations and passenger conveniences. The Haida art sculpture by Bill Reid in the departure lounge is breathtaking to behold.

They say that the ground is permanently wet not from the rain but from residents kissing it upon their return from afar.

The beauty of this city and its backdrop on a crystal-clear day has no equal. No matter where you go in this world nothing compares to the colors and the majesty . . . and I've been to a lot of cities.

As I sit and write this at the beginning of 2021, I have come to love this place, scars and all and believe Vancouver to be a shining example to the rest of the world on the management of growth and integration. Nobody does it better

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