

CULTURE

Victoria's Castles

BY JANE MUNDY

THINK ABOUT CASTLES

and maybe fairy tales come to mind. Or perhaps you dream of exploring an ancient Scottish fortress or an opulent Bavarian palace. But you don't have to travel far to visit castles: Victoria is home to three grand buildings, rich with history and architecture, thanks to a 19th century mania for castle-building that captured Canada's affluent elite. They are all open to the public and are a fascinating glimpse into Canadian history, particularly with a guided tour.

Craigdarroch Castle

Built as a comfy, albeit extravagant home for the Dunsmuir family, Craigdarroch towers over Rockland, a residential neighbourhood in Victoria. Just a 30-minute walk (some of it uphill) from Victoria's Inner Harbour will transport you back in time to the late 1800s, when coal baron Robert Dunsmuir built this massive estate.

Most of the estate was sold in 1908 but some furnishings and knick-knacks (many bought back via auction records) and windows are original, as is the exterior. Before starting the guided tour, we were instructed to scrape our shoes on the carpet next to the antique shoe cleaner and warned not to touch anything, including original oak walls and staircase.

There's a button under the

Location
 Craigdarroch Castle, 1050 Joan Crescent (named after Joan Dunsmuir).
thecastle.ca



dining room carpet to press with your foot to call servants, or yell orders from one of 12 speaking tubes throughout the house—a step up from Downton Abbey's bells. Other labour-saving devices include a laundry chute and dumb-waiter (note to self, is that PC?) More obvious signs of wealth are mounted elk, goat and deer heads throughout the castle, and PETA would not approve of the taxidermy squirrel perched above a bed. Creepy. And the massive English billiards table on the fourth floor must have cost a pretty penny. Here too is the dance hall: perhaps because guests had to walk through the house to get way up here, Joan Dunsmuir had an opportunity to show off all their stuff.

During the Victorian era it was believed that home interiors could "exert moral influences on the inhabitants," and Joan was likely a believer: the library speaks volumes, and the fireplace in the entry hall has a quote carved into it: "Reading maketh a full man."

Well, maybe not the smoking room, featuring Sir Walter Raleigh in stained glass. Each room is staged with Victorian accessories and a few mannequins—it's like Scottish Baronial style meets Gothic Revival architecture—think Harry Potter.

The castle was later converted into a military hospital, college and music conservatory before being restored to what it is today—a National Historic Site of Canada. What isn't on display is how the Dunsmuir fortune was built on deadly mine conditions and racist fearmongering. It was the miners who called Robert the "robber baron."

★ ★ ★

Hatley Castle

James Dunsmuir tended the fortune amassed by his father. He was BC's premier (1900-1902) and lieutenant governor (1906-1909) and spared no expense building the lavish Hatley Castle. A combina-



Location
 Hatley Castle,
 2005 Sooke Road.
hatleycastle.com


tion of Norman and Renaissance styles, this 15th-century Edwardian manor designed by Victorian architect Samuel Maclure comprises 40 rooms with views of Esquimalt's sea-side lagoon, old growth forests and palatial gardens—565 acres in total.

In 1995 the entire mansion was designated a National

Historic Site of Canada. These days, Hatley Park (named in the tradition of the private estates of Britain and Europe) is associated with Royal Roads University, so it doesn't get as many visitors as Craigdarroch, but you may have seen it on the silver screen. Hatley Castle made its film debut over 80 years ago and was featured in


"The X-Men" movie series, as Professor Xavier's School for Gifted Youngsters.

Hatley Castle offers guided tours of just a few rooms on the first floor, but ghosts have a free pass everywhere: A strong smell of cigar smoke can be sensed while inside, according to Erin Limacher, Royal Roads University spokesperson. According to reviews on




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Location

The Empress Hotel,
721 Government
Street. [fairmont.com/
empress-victoria](http://fairmont.com/empress-victoria)

Tripadvisor, the tour isn't worth the price of admission, but you can view the exterior's ornate stone masonry work, extensive use of battlements and elaborate gardens from 10:00 a.m. to dusk. And like Craigdarroch's dining room, a tiny little metal lever on the dining room floor was used by Laura Dunsmuir to summon kitchen help. There is also a secret passage in the castle, which husband James purportedly used to escape his guests.

Time it right and you could stroll parts of the grounds surrounding Hatley Castle without a soul in sight, even though these fine Edwardian gardens have been around for almost a century. While most visitors come to see the castle and maybe stroll the Italian and Rose Gardens, venture further to the Japanese Garden, the woodland garden and down a path flanked by 26 elms to the lower lake and the bog garden. The gardens remain largely intact since designed in 1913. "I don't care what it costs, just build it," said James, referring to his gardens and Hatley Castle.

Location

Government House,
1401 Rockland
Avenue.
ltagov.bc.ca

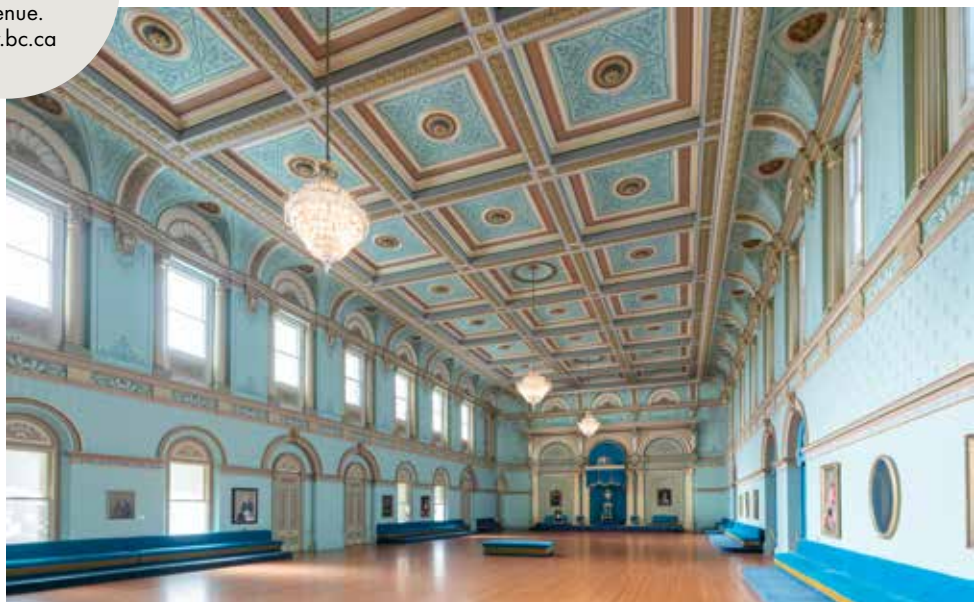
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The Empress Hotel

Designed by architect Francis Rattenbury and built by a division of the Canadian Pacific Railway, the Empress Hotel opened her doors in 1908 as a "luxury castle on the coast." Now, the chateau-style Fairmont Empress—in recognition of her architectural and historical importance—is a designated National Historic Site. Named after Queen Victoria, as the 'Empress of India,' her Edwardian-era exterior boasts intricate stonework, decorative moldings and beautiful



Empress in 1910.



stained-glass windows.

Inside, start at the reception lobby. In 2017, the hotel underwent a \$60-million-dollar renovation including a chandelier comprising 250,000 crystal beads finely woven together to refract light in rainbow colours. It makes for a grand entrance. Ask the concierge for directions to the “Heritage Hall,” which is

reminiscent of a train caboose. Its walls are lined with vintage photographs capturing the hotel’s early days and a timeline of construction. Back upstairs, check out the magnificent stained-glass ceiling dome in the Palm Court and next door, the ladies at the little Fairmont store will gladly share stories about famous events held

there. Not to be missed are the huge pop art-style portraits of Queen Victoria in the Q Bar. Its makeover in 2017 perfectly balances Edwardian architecture with modern design and best viewed with a Martini Royale made with Empress 1908 gin.

Government House

The official residence of the Lieutenant Governor and the ceremonial home of all British Columbians, the third Government House opened in 1959—the two previous buildings were destroyed by fire. Cary Castle, the first official residence, was built in 1859 but only stood for 40 years. Architects Francis Rattenbury and Samuel Maclure were hired to design a new house on the same site and it opened in 1903. The only remaining structure after it too succumbed to fire is the stone porte-co-

chere at the front entrance. The latest home has an interesting architectural style, fondly described as “Mad Men meets Downton Abbey” with Victorian décor and 1950s style bathrooms complete with ballerina wallpaper (most popular for selfies) in the basement.

The building is huge: 55,000 square feet spread over four stories and an attic. Sign up for a free tour beforehand as guides ask that you please don’t just show up. There’s a lot to see, including the dining room, ballroom, drawing room and a French drawing room, hallway and foyer. You’ll learn a smattering about history and architecture, art and artists, including a collection of First Nations art and other BC artists, such as Bill Reid. The grounds and gardens are open from dawn to dusk, 365 days a year. Be sure to visit the rose garden and when combined with Rudi’s tea room, you’ll be transported back in time to Victorian England. ■



Cary Castle was destroyed by fire in 1899.



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