





*"I had the impression of being in the presence of a private man, a man who had a Buddha-like quality and who made a house speak the way a Dylan Thomas poem makes a grown man weep or a Lawren Harris painting, with its clean lines, evokes Canada's grandeur."*

—BRUCE FRASER, MAY 4, 2012

MUSEUM OF VANCOUVER architectural exhibition, Play House:  
The architecture of Daniel Evan White

Lynne Connell's voice over the phone was warm and direct, as if she was not altogether surprised to hear from a writer. The cabin she and her husband, Gavin, owned had attracted attention in the past and it was to be featured in an exhibition of the work of architect-friend Dan White at the Museum of Vancouver. Gavin and Dan had become friends many years earlier (for a short time they worked together) during their student days at the University of British Columbia. After Dan died in 2012, the ties with his family remained close. Key chapters in the intriguing story of one of Canada's most gifted, but least well-known, architects were written within the cabin's walls.

A place of intergenerational memories, the Gulf Islands, BC, retreat is co-owned with Lynne and Gavin's daughter, Jennifer, and her husband, Kip Fotheringham, son of prominent columnist Alan Fotheringham. Jennifer and her sister, Mary, grew up "going to the island," and Lynne and Gavin's three grandchildren are doing the same. By some alignment of the stars, though they did not know each other while their children were young, both the Connells' and Fotheringhams' former Vancouver residences were redesigned by Dan White. >>

# *in the* Round

Story and photos Stephanie Gould





Previous page: The cabin's curved walls and upright logs were a departure for friend and architect Dan White. Top: The various living areas flow into one another and allow owners Gavin and Lynne Connell (right) both private and open spaces. The unique floating roof (opposite, top) allows the logs to move and expand naturally. The circular chimney (opposite, bottom) appears to hang from the roof.

Jennifer Fotheringham speaks of these connections matter-of-factly. "My parents bought the Galiano property before I was born, and we camped there until the house was finished," she recalls. "I was about seven years old when Dan White designed it, so I knew him and his family."

Becoming co-owners with her parents was a way to preserve one of her favorite places on earth. "I've spent a lot of time on Galiano. I'd rather be there than almost anywhere else. I love it," Jennifer says. "There came a time when my parents were thinking of selling it, so we said to them, what if we co-owned it? Properties take a lot of maintenance, time, and money. We've loved the arrangement. We spend a lot of time there together as well as on our own."

When I first saw the Connells' retreat one summer day many years ago, it took hold in my imagination. The three huddled circles of upright logs were both extraordinary and memorable. At the time, international influences—from

American to Japanese, Chinese, and Indian—were showing up in the designs of everything from clothing to houses. Open to the elements as it was, the cabin spoke to me of new, perhaps romantic, ways of living close to the land and sea. This was not a cabin or a cottage or even a fort, as I understood those words, but something altogether new: a dare-to-dream departure from convention. I imagined the owners to be people with a desire to live differently.

Those naive early impressions now seem not only justified but prescient. Daniel Evan White was not a familiar name to me, though his colleagues and contemporaries, such as Arthur Erickson, Geoffrey Massey, and Ian Davidson are a who's who of postwar West Coast modernism. Thinking back to my first encounter with his work on Galiano Island, the Museum of Vancouver's first-ever architectural exhibition, *Play House: The Architecture of Daniel Evan White*, needed little explanation. I was intrigued by the mission to bring him and his work to public attention.







Examples of the desire to live differently pepper BC's history. Hand in hand with these experiments in living goes unique rural and urban residential architecture. As travellers who venture off the beaten track are aware, exceptionally original residences can be found, especially in waterfront locations, up and down the coast from BC to California. Architects like Dan White may become stars in professional circles, but their work, hidden away on private property, rarely receives the kind of celebration given to public buildings such as art galleries, universities, or theatres.

The first stop on the Vancouver-to-Victoria ferry route through the Gulf Islands, Galiano has long been on the map as a home to self-reliant as well as gifted writers and artists. As the ferry nears the dock, colourfully dressed island residents and luggage-toting visitors gather to disembark on foot, crowding their way up the ramp and along the narrow walkway, and dispersing on the uphill climb toward a collection of friends, families, and parked cars.

Waiting in her car, Lynne Connell has the look of someone whose days are often ruled by ferry schedules. Retired, but still juggling many commitments, she and Gavin spend as much time on the island as they can. Driving along the main road past a small cluster of shops, she conveys a strong attachment to the community, her sense of belonging having deepened over decades. Her conversation is that of an insider who loves to entertain visitors to her island paradise; her love





for the place is infectious; her many happy stories of island life openly affectionate with the odd bit of political intrigue creeping in like a reality check for the uninitiated.

Stepping into the hall through the recessed front entrance, my eyes are immediately drawn toward the view out the window across the long, narrow bay. Meanwhile, the interior feels spacious and welcoming. From around a corner appears a tall man with a gentle smile who falls in with the conversation as if it had begun before I arrived. As we tour the 1,700-square-foot cabin, I am struck by how the various living areas, including the three upper sleeping lofts connected by a roof deck, seem to flow into and through one another, creating an appealing paradox of privacy and openness, intimacy and roominess. How like, and yet very unlike, an iconic Canadian log cabin in the woods, I think to myself, with its rounded rooms, walls, and surfaces.

Later, Jennifer describes the cabin's design magic: "Because of all the windows and the way the logs are placed, you feel like you are in the outdoors. It almost takes you outside, the way it is designed.

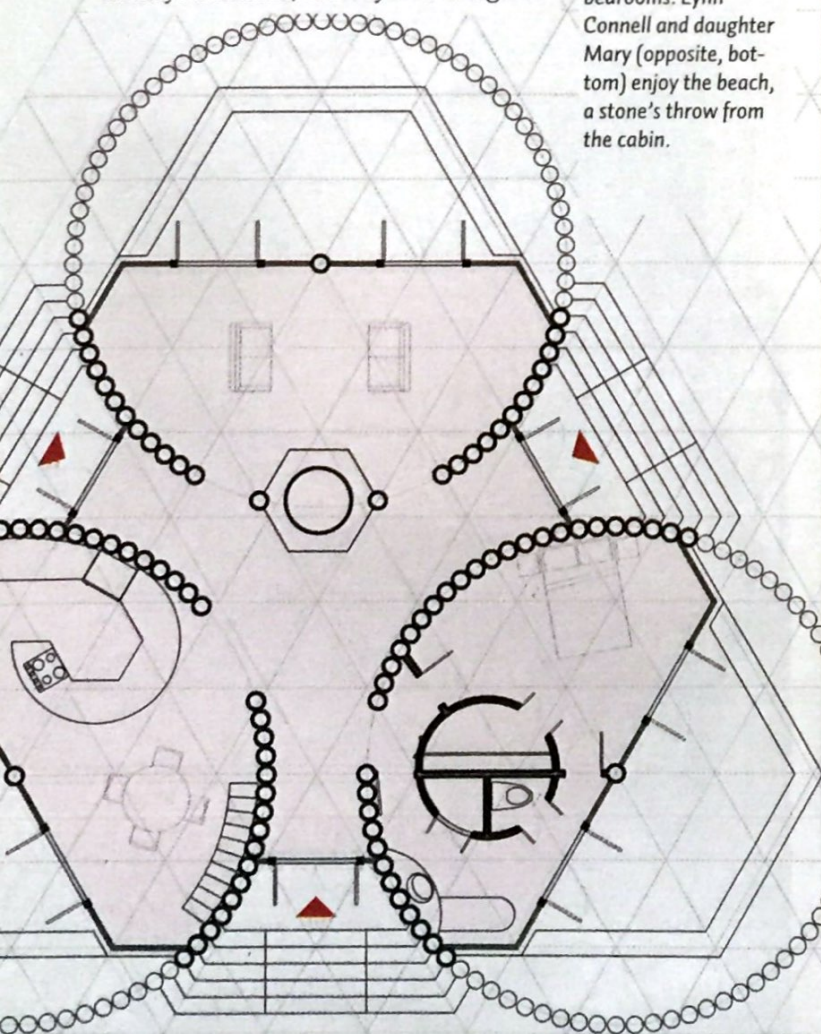
Walls of glass (this page) separate the interior and exterior spaces. Around the corner and past the claw foot bathtub (opposite page) are an old-fashioned water closet and a "monkey ladder" to the upstairs bedrooms. Lynn Connell and daughter Mary (opposite, bottom) enjoy the beach, a stone's throw from the cabin.

It has small, open but also private spaces. We can have people in different spaces doing art or reading, sometimes nine, ten family members in the house, and you can still have a little bit of your own space."

Though somewhat distracted on a blustery day with the cool air coming into the cabin under its floating roof, Lynne and Gavin tell me stories of their first experiences on the island. Gavin was drawn to the Gulf Islands during his childhood, when Union Steamships carried travellers from Victoria and Vancouver along the same route through Active Pass that the BC Ferries take today. "There's a little light on Galiano as you go by. I have a vivid recollection of the Mary Anne Point light, so I always had an interest in the Gulf Islands," he says. As soon as we were married, before we had a house or anything, we started looking for property." They put an ad in the paper, Gavin recalls with a nostalgia-tinged smile, and finally bought the densely forested, waterfront lot in 1964.

They camped by the beach, summer after summer, traveling there from their home in Vancouver, and all the while dreaming—and talking with Dan—about the cabin they would one day build. One particular summer day in about 1971, some three years into his architectural career, Dan and his wife, Donna, were tenting with them and their two small children. It was a day that was to mark a turning point in Lynne and Gavin's lives.

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## Daniel Evan White (1933-2012)

As students, Dan White and Gavin Connell worked for a company that designed and built prefab summer homes for "people on islands where there was no road access," explains Gavin. "We would take these, prefabricated, out by barge." The designing and building of summer homes was to become a defining experience of their lifelong

friendship, though they also shared an interest in art. Dan found his potential for architecture while at the Vancouver School of Art.

In 1962, fresh from UBC's School of Architecture, he became the first employee of architects Arthur Erickson and Geoff Massey's firm. By 1969, he was designing single-family homes in his own studio for friends and colleagues like Gavin Connell, and other clients who often became friends, like Bruce Fraser, or for international destina-

tions. "Given his talent, he was humble and unassuming, gentlemanly and soft-spoken. Almost anyone who met him found him charming and likeable," says architect Russell Cammarasana, whose Dan White Studio is named in memory of his colleague and mentor. "He was a genius. He had a remarkable ability to give form to an architectural problem that was not only exciting in itself as sculptural form, but the siting in the landscape was just as remarkable."



A 1970s photo reveals the cabin's "radical" design taking shape. The builders used trees cut from the property.

