



Steamworks brewmaster
Tony Gratel hard at work
making fresh beer

A Taste of Gastown's Past

STORY & IMAGES BY MARI KANE

A Vancouver Food Tour with a Side of History

IN ALL THE TIMES I'VE PASSED THROUGH VANCOUVER'S Waterfront Station, I'd never noticed that half of the side pillars are flat. Nor did I know why: the Canadian Pacific Railway ran out of money for round pillars when they built the terminal back in 1914.

These factoids were entertainingly illuminated on a recent **Taste Vancouver Food Tour** of Gastown, the city's oldest neighbourhood. Our guide Brent began the tour in the Waterfront terminal in front of **Starbucks**, one of a hundred such coffee shops in Vancouver. This Starbucks is notable, however, as the chain's first establishment outside of the United States. It opened during Expo '86, and before

its business licence was finalized, the owners had to smuggle their coffee beans over the border.

Brent tells us about Project 200, a late-1960s plan to tear down Gastown, Chinatown, and part of Strathcona to connect downtown's core with the Trans-Canada Highway. Fortunately, the plan was scuttled due to local protests and lack of financing. Still, it breaks my heart to imagine Vancouver without this iconic old-timey neighbourhood.

Our next stop on the food tour is **Steamworks Brewery**, on the northern edge of Gastown. We settle into seats on the lower level where brewmaster Tony Gratel is making beer. Over four-ounce pours of a





Opposite page: the antique-looking Gastown Steam Clock was built in 1977; fresh pulled-pork sandwiches from Peckinpah; reused antique bricks add to the charm of Bao Down.

This page: flat pillars outside the oldest Starbucks in Canada; precursor to Hudson's Bay stores, Hudson House originally opened as an outlet selling basic goods for nineteenth-century working men; a Baozi, simply known as bao, is a type of steamed bun with many possible fillings.



German sour wheat beer called Gose, we learn that Steamworks sits on a six-mile system of steam piping installed in the late nineteenth century to provide heat to the neighbourhood. The steam came in handy when the building became a microbrewery in 1995, and today it's the only brewery in Canada powered by steam.

The heavy brick building is framed with Douglas fir from Stanley Park and was originally used as a warehouse to supply the shipping, mining, and logging industries. Under Project 200, Brent says, "This would have been the first building torn down."

Across the street, at the triangular corner of Water and Cordova Streets, we stop to appreciate the architecture and gas lights inspired by late nineteenth-century San Francisco. Farther down, at Water and Cambie we gather in front of the **Water St. Cafe** to imagine its predecessor, the Regina Hotel, being the only structure in Gastown to survive the Great Fire of 1886. That fire started as a controlled burn to clear land, but strong winds blew it out of control; it went on to destroy the entire city, with a few exceptions. The wood-framed Regina was replaced in 1907 with the brick structure we are now admiring, which was the Edward Hotel until its current rein-

carnation as an office building. Across the street, the steam clock announces it's three o'clock; since its installation in 1977, it has piped every hour on the hour.

Next we pause at 321 Water Street, what was once the Hudson's Bay Company's first store, built in 1894 to cater to the needs of loggers and miners, with basic stock such as canvas, tools, rope, and Levi's. Now it's called **Hudson House**, and sells all the Canadian kitsch you could want: tiny bottles of maple syrup, RCMP-uniformed black bears, First Nations art pillows, and maple leaf wallets.

At the corner of Water and Carrall, we pay homage to John "Gassy Jack" Deighton, for whom Gastown is named. The name "Gassy" came from his talkativeness, and "Jack" from his work as a river pilot, since all hands are called Jack. Gassy Jack opened the first bar in town, which started as two barrels topped with a plank situated in the middle of Water Street. When pressured by city government to open a real saloon, he built the Deighton Hotel. Sadly, the Deighton Hotel burned down in the Great Fire. On the site where it used to stand is the Byrnes Block, now one of the oldest buildings in the city.

Just as Brent is gassing about Gassy Jack, the door to **Peckinpah** opens. Conor, the general manager, serves us Carolina-style pulled-pork sandwiches and deep-fried pickles, and explains that his locally raised pork is smoked for 16 hours. Its taste pairs well with our imaginings of a city on fire.

From there we head across Maple Square to **Bao Down** and, seated in an upstairs loft, are served Chinese baos, or baozi—steamed buns filled with, in this case, chicken, carrots, onions, nuts, and cilantro. While we chow down, Brent tells us the most intriguing fact about Gastown's history.

Prior to the Great Fire, Gastown was composed of wood buildings supplied by the area's prolific logging industry. After the fire, contractors discovered an alternative building material in the cheaply made bricks from Asia and Portugal that were used as ballast on ships returning to BC carrying lightweight goods. "These bricks were wastefully dumped on shore, but reusing them to rebuild Gastown became Vancouver's very first act of environmental sustainability, however inadvertent," says Brent.

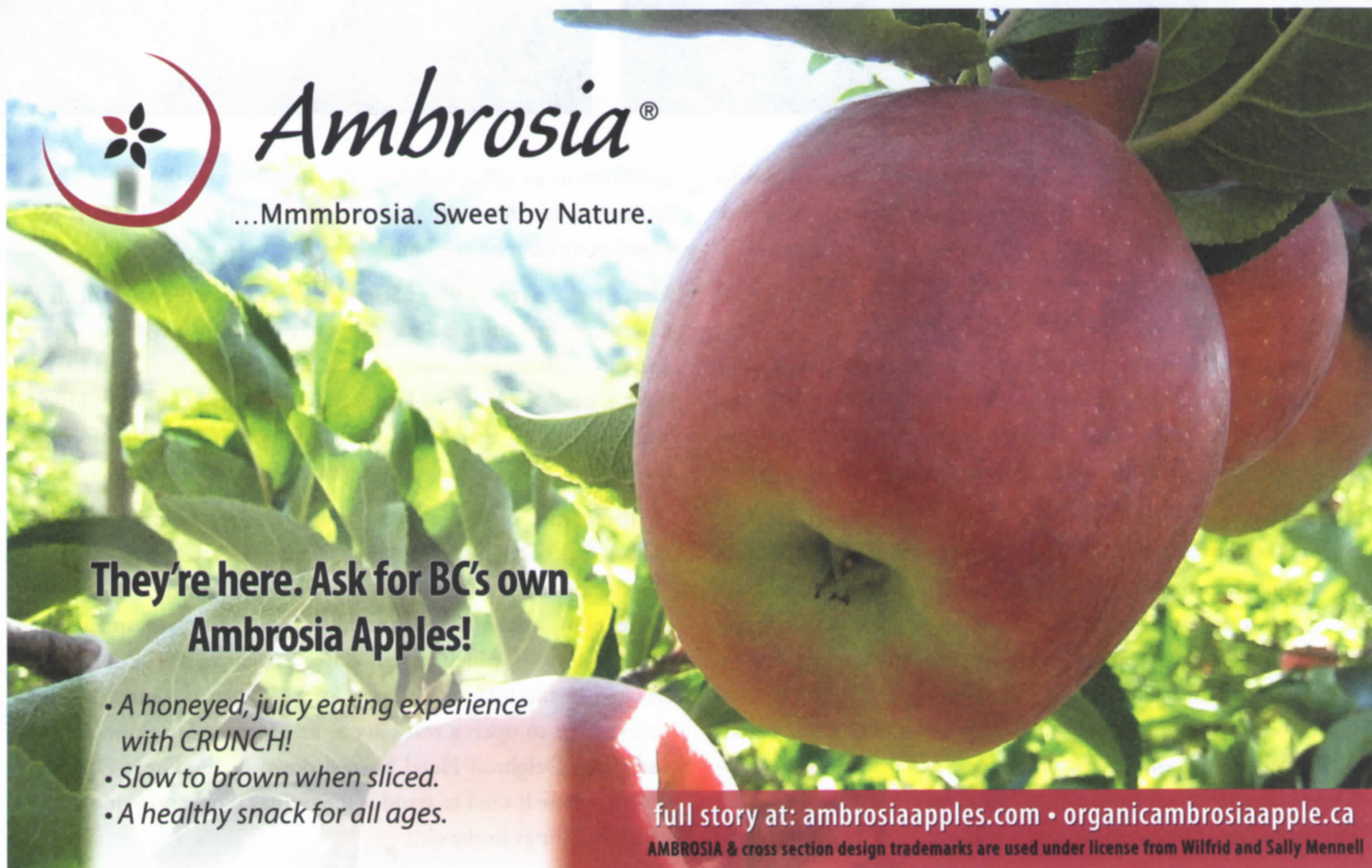
Inside Bao Down, we see many flavours of antique bricks. Some red, some deeply blackened. According to Brent, those charred bricks had been piled too close to where the fire raged.


Other stops on our tour include **Brioche** for tortellini and crostini, **131 Water Kitchen and Bar** for fish and chips, **Soft Peaks** for organic ice cream sundaes, **Trees Organic** for the best cheesecake I've ever tasted, and **Canadian Maple Delights** for a maple syrup and cookie tasting—a smorgasbord of the city's multiculti food scene.

Finally, having backtracked down Water Street near to where we started, we arrive at **Rogers' Chocolates** for truffles. Rogers' is Canada's oldest chocolatier, founded in 1885 in Victoria by Charles Roger, and is still privately owned. The company currently buys only sustainably grown cocoa for their goodies, a concept Mr. Rogers probably would have never considered in his time.

By the time I head back through Waterfront Station toward the Canada Line train, I feel like I've eaten on four continents and travelled 150 years. There's nothing like consuming a side of history while touring a world of food.

*Mari Kane is a writer from Sonoma County, California, and now lives in Vancouver and blogs about wine at tastingroomconfidential.com. Excerpts from her soon-to-be-published wine memoir, *Mouthfeel: Confessions of a Wine Slut*, can be read at mouthfeelbook.com. Follow her on Twitter @marikane*



 **Ambrosia[®]**
...Mmbrosia. Sweet by Nature.

**They're here. Ask for BC's own
Ambrosia Apples!**

- A honeyed, juicy eating experience with **CRUNCH!**
- Slow to brown when sliced.
- A healthy snack for all ages.

full story at: ambrosiaapples.com • organicambrosiaapple.ca
AMBROSIA & cross section design trademarks are used under license from Wilfrid and Sally Mennell