

With new options for food, wine and walks on the Columbia, the Vancouver waterfront is buzzing

April 8, 2022 at 6:00 am



The Grant Street Pier is the focal point of redevelopment on the Vancouver, Washington, waterfront on the north shore of the Columbia River. Often mentioned in... (Gramor Development Inc.)

By

[Carol Pucci](#)

Special to The Seattle Times

VANCOUVER, WASH. — Sawmills, shipyards, breweries and a paper mill once lined the north bank of the Columbia River in the “Other Vancouver,” the Washington town across the water from Portland that thrived with industry in the late 1800s.

Fast-forward to a post-pandemic 2022. People walk their dogs and kids play in a waterfront park flanked by restaurants, wine tasting rooms, a gourmet coffee “gastro” cafe, and, coming later this year: two hotels; an El Gaucho and 13 Coins restaurant; a brewery; and another taproom.

“It intrigued me from the beginning,” said developer Barry Cain, who spearheaded [Waterfront Vancouver](#), a mixed-use project with office buildings and residences, for the Gramor Development company. When Boise Cascade decided to close its paper mill in 2006, leaving dormant 35 acres of prime waterfront property just south of downtown Vancouver, Cain saw the opportunity “to take a situation like that, and do something that could change the face of the city.”

Tying everything together is a 7-acre city-owned park connecting to the 5-mile [Columbia River Renaissance Trail](#), popular for jogging and biking. Open-air patios stand on the half-mile paved path at Waterfront Park, lined with granite benches, play areas and water features, separated by the Grant Street Pier, an overlook suspended 90 feet over the river.



The Grant Street Pier on the Vancouver waterfront overlooks the Columbia River. Often mentioned in Portland's shadow, Vancouver's revamped waterfront is drawing visitors and praise from travel... (Carol Pucci / Special to The Seattle Times)More

“Vancouver has always lived in the shadow of Portland,” says Seidy Selivanow, owner of [Kaflex Roasters' Gastro Café](#), which opened on the waterfront last April. “Now it's taking on an identity of its own.”

Fodor's Travel took note, naming the Vancouver waterfront to its [2021 list of the nation's 15 best river walks](#).

What's new in Vancouver, Washington

The waterfront promenade in the “other” Vancouver has travel experts like Fodor’s taking notice. Here’s a snapshot of the scene on the Columbia River’s north shore.



Source: Esri

THE SEATTLE TIMES

Pastries baked in-house fill a glass case in the airy Kafiex cafe, with outdoor tables overlooking the river and a cheery interior set off with a mural evoking the landscape of a Mexican coffee farm.

Beans are sourced from Vancouver-based Café Femenino, which supports female coffee growers around the world. On the menu are coffee-infused cocktails, and, from the “slow bar,” coffee brewed siphon-style in glass pots heated by glowing red halogen lights.

Around the corner is [Pop-Local](#), the waterfront’s newest tenant. When the COVID-19 pandemic forced the temporary closure of entrepreneur Jessica Chan’s popular [Night Market Vancouver](#), she brought the concept indoors, transitioning to a brick-and-mortar, farmers-market-style outlet for her vendors.



Teas sold by veteran-owned Valhalla Tea are for sale at Pop-Local, an indoor, farmers market-style shop on the Vancouver waterfront. (Carol Pucci / Special to The Seattle Times)

More than 80 Washington and Oregon makers supply crafts and foods that are produced no more than an hour's drive from Vancouver.

For sale are items such as small-batch apple, maple and bourbon soy wax candles by Naty's Candles; warrior-themed teas by veteran-owned Valhalla Tea; and Mission Citizen coffee, featuring beans sold by local high school students to fund citizenship classes for immigrants.

A taste of the Northwest

With work progressing on the two hotels and other buildings, visitors will find themselves sidestepping construction and "opening soon" signs.

Don't be discouraged: Scattered throughout the development are nine tasting rooms owned by Washington and Oregon wineries. You'll find your way.

"We went over to Walla Walla and said to ourselves, 'We really should be thinking about having these guys come over here,'" Cain said. "Shortly after, we were contacted by [Maryhill \[Winery\]](#), and it kind of went on from there."

The winery, located just west of the Maryhill Museum of Art in Goldendale, Klickitat County, opened the waterfront's first, largest and most elaborate tasting room, a 5,000-square-foot space with indoor seating and a patio overlooking the river.



This is the antique back bar at Maryhill Winery's tasting room on the Vancouver, Washington, waterfront. (Carol Pucci / Special to The Seattle Times)

The steep tasting fee (\$25, waived with a \$30 bottle purchase) and pricey menu of small plates is a splurge, but the location on

the river's edge attracts crowds even on cloudy weekdays. Coming later this year on the second floor of same building is a [Willamette Valley Vineyards](#) tasting room.

Popular with flight attendants staying at nearby hotels is the smaller [Airfield Estates](#), operated by the fourth-generation Washington farming family of the Millers, whose Yakima Valley ranch was used as a training school for World War II pilots. Old photos of the flight crews decorate the restroom walls. Hanging above a table in the tasting room is a vintage highway sign advertising the farm's sugar beets, corn and peppermint.

Woodinville's [Brian Carter Cellars](#) puts together a tempting snack and wine pairing menu served at little tables in a cheery tasting room decorated in blues and yellows. Top choices are the pear and blue cheese flatbread matched with Carter's Byzance red; polenta fries washed down with an Italian-style Tutturosso; and chai bread pudding paired with the Opulento dessert wine.

Dinner with a view

The Grant Street Pier, designed by artist [Larry Kirkland](#) to evoke the billow of a passing sailboat, is the focal point for several flagship restaurants with sweeping river views.

Tables fill up after sunset when the pier's lights are switched on. Afternoon happy hours are less busy, and easier on the wallet.



A slow happy hour at the bar at Dosalas Latin Kitchen on the Vancouver waterfront. (Carol Pucci / Special to The Seattle Times)

My favorite spot was the second-floor bar at [Dosalas Latin Kitchen](#), where my husband and I snacked on red wine and

Cuban sandwiches at a window table while listening to fog horns and watching the barge traffic.

Those with a sweet tooth might want to head to another type of bar, this one serving milkshakes. Using investment funds won on the ABC show “Shark Tank,” Chelsea and Logan Green opened the [Yard Milkshake Bar](#) here last August.

The house specialty is a \$19.67 confection packed in a pint jar (you get to keep the jar), piled high with toppings such as gold sprinkles, peanut butter drizzle and crushed Oreos.

I had a hard time believing anyone would pay \$20 for a milkshake, but general manager Erek Watson took orders for six in 20 minutes during the afternoon we dropped by.

“In the warm weather, the line stretches out to the sidewalk,” he said while crafting the shop’s Old School Banana Split, a pound and a half of strawberry and banana pudding ice cream and other goodies topped off with a whole banana.

All the more reason to end a visit with a walk along the Columbia River Renaissance Trail. Note that the connection between Waterfront Park and the trail is broken temporarily by construction. Reaching it requires a short sidewalk detour past the weathered sign for an old Red Lion Inn.

On the waterfront, enjoy views of the Interstate 5 and I-205 bridges to Oregon and Mount Hood, with lots of scenic stops along the way as well as a connection to the [Fort Vancouver National Historic Site](#). Take it all in, then head home happy you finally took the time to stop in Vancouver.



A vintage highway sign advertising the Miller family farm in Yakima hangs in the Airfield Estates tasting room on the Vancouver waterfront. (Carol Pucci / Special to The Seattle Times)



Seidy Selivanow of Kafix Roasters Gastro Café on the Vancouver waterfront brews coffee siphon-style in a glass pot heated by a halogen light. (Carol Pucci / Special to The Seattle Times)



The Yard Milkshake Bar on the Vancouver waterfront draws a crowd with its giant ice cream confections. (Carol Pucci / Special to The Seattle Times)



A slow happy hour at the bar at Dosalas Latin Kitchen on the Vancouver waterfront. (Carol Pucci / Special to The Seattle Times)

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