



The welcome room of the Skwachays Lodge and Gallery in Vancouver, British Columbia, bears colorful First Nations artwork. Photo by Gale Horton Gay

Artists front and center at Vancouver boutique hotel

by Gale Horton Gay

Aboriginal art is at the heart of one of Vancouver's newest hotels.

Skwachays Lodge Hotel and Gallery is a boutique hotel where the art and culture of British Columbia's indigenous people is infused in the property and experiences. Skwachays is the traditional name of the area at the head of False Creek and refers to the spring waters that once covered the area. A distinctive totem sits atop the hotel's façade.

The boutique hotel is unique in many ways—each of the 18 rooms has a different design since different designers and artists worked on specific rooms. Hand-painted murals grace the walls of guest rooms. (The room I stayed in was the “Collage Suite” and had a blue, green

and red painting of birds, horses and vines stretching from floor to ceiling. While the space was somewhat small, it had everything necessary and was inventively designed. Even the ultra-compact bathroom has all that one really needs despite its small size. Furnishings and fixtures are stylish, colorful and contemporary.

Other rooms also have a strong visual presence as well such as the Northern Lights Suite with two art installations—one with a black bear and the other a procession of pow wow dancers under the Northern Lights. Other spaces are creatively named and designed including the Drum Circle, Wilderness Teachings Hummingbird, Longhouse, Poem and King Salmon suites.

See Skwachays on 5B



Skwachays

from page 4B

Tourists aren't the only ones staying at Skwachays. It's also temporary home to First Nations artists in residence who come to Vancouver to work on the craft. A behind-the-scenes studio is located next to the garage where guests park.

The hotel's lobby, which is really more of a gallery and shop with works by a number of British Columbia's indigenous people, leads to the hotel's welcome room where guests can share a meal or relax by the fireplace. The brightly colored space is decorated with aboriginal art and the focus of the room is a communal totem table handcrafted by local artist **Eric Parnell**. Douglas fir planks from the original 1906 structure that preceded the hotel have been repurposed into the table, fireplace surround and ceiling.

Other unique features include a smudge room and sweat lodge on the hotel's sixth floor where traditional First Nations' purification ceremonies are held. An elder trained in the traditions oversees the culturally relevant activities, which are options for guests.

"It's been very well received," said **Maggie Edwards**, Skwachays general manager, of the property that's been open since 2012.

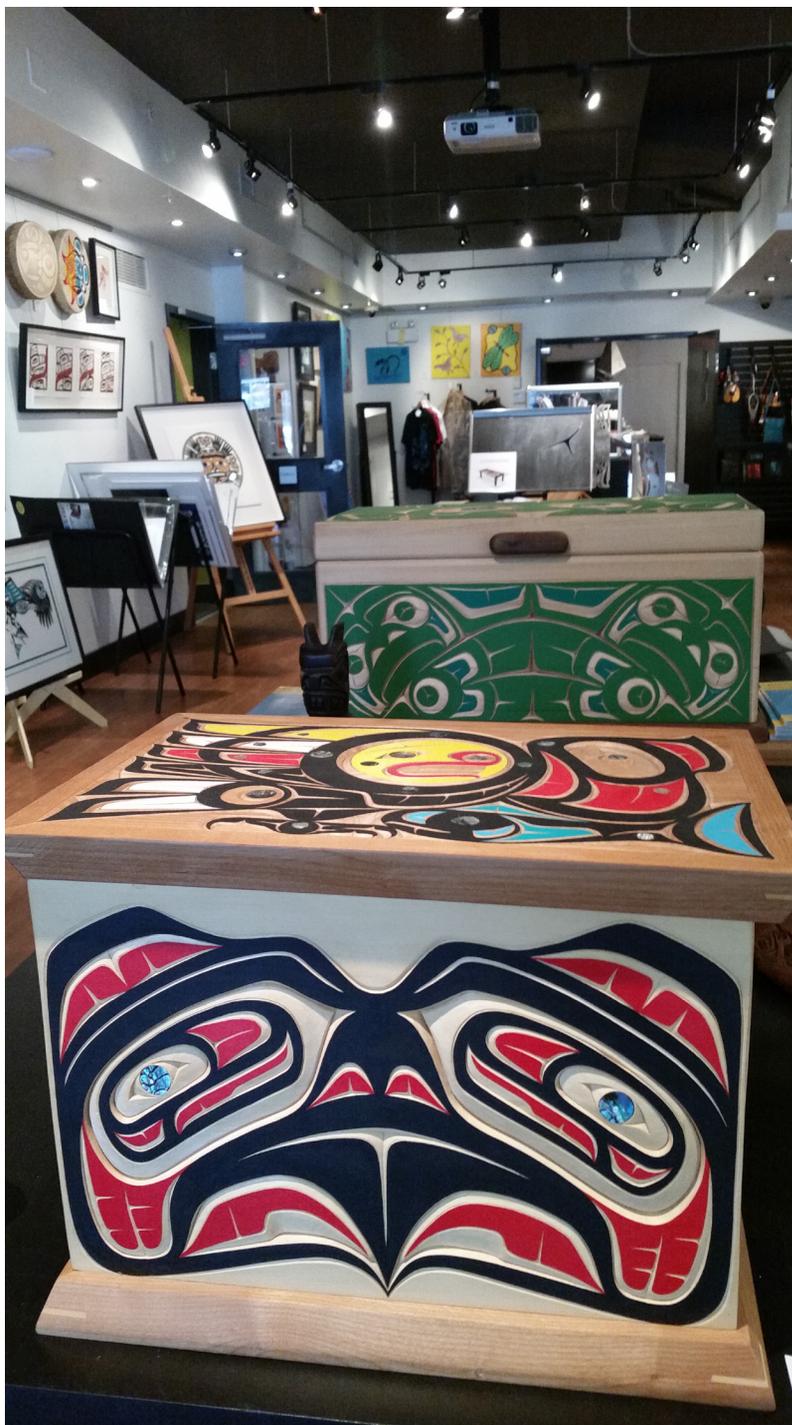
The Skwachays Lodge Hotel sits on the edge of Vancouver's Chinatown—on W. Pender St.—and is an easy walk to pick up/drop off spots for tour buses and dining, although some parts of the area are a little sketchy with an abundance of foot traffic going to and fro clinics in the mix.

Guest rooms range from \$129-\$189 October to March and \$189-\$229 from April to September.

For more information on the Skwachays Lodge Hotel and Gallery, go to www.skwachays.com go call 1-888-998-0797.



Writings and black and white graphics are part of the décor in the Poem Suite. Photography by Craig Minielly at Aura Photographics



The lodge is part hotel, part artists' gallery and residence. Photo by Gale Horton Gay