



FUTURE CITY

Vancouver wants to be the greenest city in the world by 2020 – and it's well on the way. *Audi Magazine* goes to find out what they're doing

WRITER Alec Marsh PHOTOGRAPHER Rama Knight

Looking north from the rooftop of Vancouver's City Hall, you'd be forgiven for thinking you can see the future reflected in the dense mass of glinting, dazzling downtown skyscrapers. Quickly, the towers shorten, morphing into low-rise suburban

districts, while beyond the city is the green disc of Stanley Park, and the Lions Gate Bridge that leads to the Sea to Sky Highway and the tree-coated North Shore Mountains in the distance.

According to our Vancouver guide, city councillor Andrea Reimer, everything north of 12th Avenue was built before the existence of cars, including downtown. Everything after, says Reimer, an ardent force in the city's drive to be the greenest city in the world by 2020, came after the automobile.

'It's very instructive,' says Reimer, because for all its sheer glass and concrete, downtown Vancouver is a sustainable model: the majority of the 100,000 people who live on the peninsular walk, cycle or use public transport every day. And like everyone else in this city, they compost their kitchen scraps and recycle. Yet this city is not anti-car, far from it. Reimer proudly points to a street that has electric charging points and tells us that she recently saw a couple of cars queuing up for them – which is new. Electric cars aren't only green, they're useful. 'The first thing people do when they get home from work is put the car on charge – and it dumps its battery, just like your mobile does when you charge it,' Reimer smiles. 'That's precisely when the city needs the power.'

Launched by cycling-mad mayor Gregor Robertson in 2009, Vancouver's Greenest City 2020 Action Plan was given a boost by the 2010 Winter Olympics, which the city co-hosted with Whistler. 'The games changed everything in terms of Vancouver's sense of what is possible,' says Reimer. 'It gave us the confidence, drive and the belief.'

In the last five years the city has introduced 300 green measures, from cycle lanes and a sustainable building code, to a plan to increase urban food production. So are they on target? 'Absolutely,' says Reimer. 'We're the greenest city in Canada, in the top two on the continent and one of the greenest cities in the world.'



FRONTIERSWOMAN
A N D R E A
R E I M E R

During the Winter Olympics, Andrea Reimer, a former Green Party member, was the deputy mayor. She's a passionate supporter of the Greenest City 2020 Action Plan: 'To make it happen you need leadership, a plan, and then to follow the plan and measure the results.' One of the key movers in the council, Reimer loves her job but says: 'The politics of politics I could do without.'



Beyond 2020, the plan is for 'one-planet living', to cut the environmental impact of each Vancouverite to a third of what it is now. 'Our idea is to be 100 per cent out of carbon fossil fuels by 2050,' adds Reimer. 'Thirty-six years to be out of something that fuelled a whole century – that's pretty challenging.'

As well as technology and innovation, Vancouver's success is thanks to its broader outlook, insists Reimer: 'We're only 128 years old. We don't have a lot of history to hold us back or guide us. This is still a frontier town. Vancouverites view themselves as being in control of their destiny. It's about striving for the future. We're making it up as we go.'

Making it up as they go is a mantra for a famous export of British Columbia – the province where Vancouver is located – timber. Swooshing along on the super-smooth high-speed transit from the airport we cross the Fraser River, still home to vast floating clusters of logs, called booms, much as it would have been when Vancouver was founded. These logs have been towed down the coast in vast bundles and await milling. Forestry veteran Bob Craven tells me that 17 million cubic metres of timber – typically Western Red Cedar, Douglas fir or hemlock

– is felled in the coastal region of British Columbia annually. 'For every tree we cut down, we plant four,' he says. 'We keep an eye on them till they get to about 10 feet. After that they're good by themselves, and we'll go back in 80 years and harvest them again.'

There's plenty of British Columbia timber on show at the Vancouver Convention Centre. The vast facility comprises two buildings – East and West – where they recycle and compost as much as possible. It has a seawater heating and cooling system, a drainage and water recovery plant and a fish habitat built into the foundations of the West building, making it one of the greenest convention centres in the world.

'I love it here,' says our guide Jinny Wu. She's showing us around the six-acre living roof – a natural ecosystem designed to attract birds and insects. 'You'd think a convention centre isn't exciting, but it's much more than four walls,' she says. 'People come here from all over the world to share their ideas.' In March of this year, it hosted the 30th anniversary TED (Technology, Entertainment, Design) conference, which was attended by Bill Gates.

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Water, water everywhere: from the houseboats on Vancouver's Granville Island, to the dramatic British Columbia coast, nature is close by in this city – as are coffee shops. Thomas Haas's place in the Kitsilano district is famed for its signature double-baked almond croissants and handmade chocolates



The high life: downtown Vancouver from beyond False Creek, so-called because this salt-water inlet leads nowhere, shows how high-rise living and working can be sustainable

U L T R A C I T Y

in the winter and cool in the summer because we can irrigate it using our grey water,' says Jinny. The roof also has four hives with 250,000 bees producing honey, which is used in the catering facilities.

The centre's facade is glass, through which you can see the wood-panelled interior walls, which are clad with vast mosaics of robotically assembled hemlock blocks, or flat planks. These face east and west, or north and south, helping you to navigate the structure – another example of how design can be both sustainable and intuitive.

On Jinny's suggestion we drop into Miku, a buzzing sushi restaurant nearby. It's one of about 200 sushi outlets in Vancouver – and locals claim their sushi is the best in the world. At Miku, the chefs beyond the bar shout a traditional greeting, *Irasshaimase*, meaning 'welcome, come in' whenever someone arrives, and this offers a beat, a tempo to the place: *Irasshaimase!*

'Aburi sushi is our speciality,' explains my waitress Thalia, a psychology graduate from Canada's pre-eminent McGill University. 'It's flame-seared sushi.' I spot a chef wielding a blow torch and order, before turning to my paper. 'Orcas hunt, attack dolphins near Nanaimo,' says a headline in the

Vancouver Sun. It explains how killer whales were spotted attacking a pod of dolphins. An expert from Vancouver Aquarium says this shows that the local waters are in fine fettle.



My food arrives, and through the window I can see the blue waters of the harbour. There are no killer whale fins cutting through the waves, but I recall that cleaning up the harbour is a big part of the city's green plan. It makes sense: if you love raw fish (as Vancouverites do), clean waters are a must.

On Miku's menu I notice a small fish logo next to some of the items. The rubric explains that this is a marine sustainability programme called Ocean Wise and shows that the dish is recommended as an eco-friendly choice by Vancouver Aquarium.

An hour later I'm gazing at a 40-year-old rockfish in the aquarium while I wait to meet Ocean Wise manager Ann-Marie Copping. 'If we don't change the rate of extraction of fish out of the oceans by 2048, the fisheries will collapse,' she says. 'We're fishing in the last 10 per cent. If you're going to eat seafood, then eat sustainable seafood.'

Ocean Wise works with chefs and suppliers to inform consumers about sustainable seafood, with the logo on menus and packaging to highlight the eco-friendly choice. It also has an iPhone app that provides users with lists of ocean-friendly food and even hosts an annual Chowder

RESIDENT
J I N N Y W U

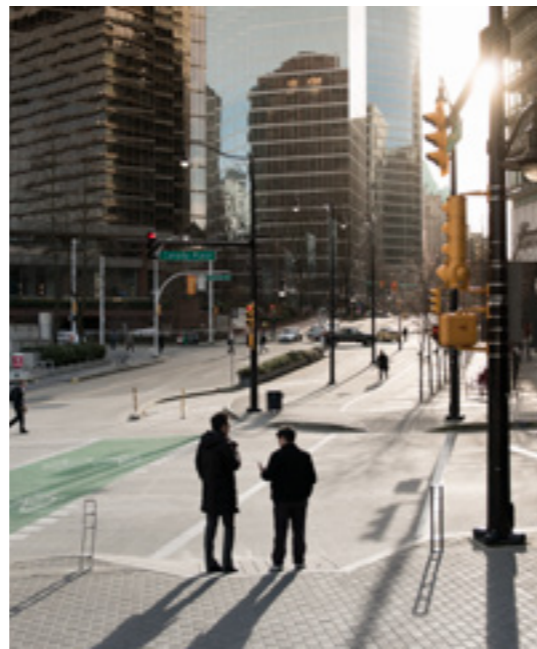
A convention centre doesn't sound like an exciting place to work, but for Jinny Wu it is because it's where ideas are shared. And every year she shares the idea of sustainability with thousands of visitors eager to see the living roof and other eco-friendly facilities. Wu is passionate about the city's 2020 ambition: 'Vancouverites feel a responsibility to be green,' she says. 'It comes naturally.'

ULTRA CITY



FORAGER
CHRIS
WHITTAKER

Award-winning chef Chris Whittaker lives, eats and breathes sustainably – or as sustainably as he can. His downtown Vancouver restaurant Forage is the greenest in the city, making it arguably the greenest in the world. 'This is my life,' he says. 'I view myself as a conservationist.'



Chowdown in the aquarium, in which chefs compete to make the best fish soup.

A stone's throw away in Stanley Park, we meet two-times Chowdown winner and Vancouver's greenest chef, Chris Whittaker. His restaurant, Forage, only serves food from sustainable sources, including mushroom and spruce tips that have literally been foraged for. The place has a relaxed vibe: when the sharing plates come out, the scallops disappear in seconds, the elk melts, and the kale salad is the best-tasting green-coloured food on the planet.

'We are trying to do the best we can and still serve interesting food,' says Whittaker.

'You can cook the same dish all year round if you like but it's not a challenge creatively. It's also not very natural.'

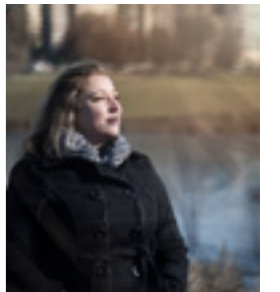
Green technology helps too – Forage, located downtown at The Listel Hotel, was fitted out with input from local power firm BC Hydro, and has equipment such as smart ventilation which uses 30 per cent less energy. At home, Chris has 2000 square feet of beds and says he's turning over the front yard to food production. 'I had a great season for scarlet runner beans last year,' he says, some of which found their way into his restaurant. 'This year I'm going for tomatoes.'

The air tastes like chilled Evian on Kitsilano Beach the next morning. Walking among the joggers and families with their dogs, beside the crystalline waters of the Pacific, we meet Vancouver's top blogger, Rebecca Bollwitt. She started her site miss604.com 10 years ago as an anonymous online diary, but it has since evolved into one of the city's go-to guides. 'The local area dialling code is 604,' explains Bollwitt, who is committed to the city's green agenda. 'When I go away I feel horrible if I can't recycle and have to throw things away.'

We go for coffee, not far from where Greenpeace was founded. 'Vancouver has hundreds of green apps,' says Bollwitt, who shows me one called Tap Map, which helps users find public water fountains, so they can cut back on bottled water. 'Technology is helping us to live greener lives. If you go to a food van and they're using Styrofoam containers that can't be composted, people will be outraged on social media. And if someone has an event and you have to print paper tickets, people will shame them on Twitter.'

Back at my hotel, The Listel, general manager Jim Mockford explains that the heat-capture system which was installed, along with solar panels on the roof, helps save £100,000 in energy costs a year. 'It amazes me that other hotels aren't following suit. We're saving a ton of money by being green.' He's also proud of what they're doing at their restaurant, Forage. 'Everything there was designed with sustainability in mind – including the food,' he says.

Leaving Vancouver, the flanks of the tall buildings shine hues of copper, blue and aquamarine in the setting sun. There is optimism in this city's clean air and I know immediately that this is a frontier town that's pushing the boundaries for cities around the world.



THE BLOGGER
REBECCA
BOLLWITT

Appropriately for a full-time blogger, Rebecca Bollwitt met her husband online. Today her blog, miss604.com, helps Vancouverites be tourists in their own city. 'Vancouver looks like a green city and it feels like it when you walk around,' she says. 'It wasn't always like this. I'm optimistic about 2020.'

THE FUTURE OF THE CITY

The Audi Urban Future Award is part of Audi's global programme to foster innovative solutions to city living. Turn to page 97 to find out more