

ROCK STEADY

THEY WERE HERITAGE BUFFS BEFORE THEY WERE INNKEEPERS, BUT IF HOSTING GUESTS IS WHAT IT TAKES TO SAVE A FEW PIECES OF A NEWFOUNDLAND VILLAGE, THEN SO BE IT.

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PHOTOGRAPHY BY WAYNE BARRETT

As seen from the top of Gun Hill, the village of Trinity is an essay in Newfoundland charm, whose vista opens to the Atlantic Ocean. The Gows' Artisan Inn comprises the old twine loft in the right foreground, the house to its right and a second white house on the rise to its left.



Tineke Gow recalls that it was the scenery that attracted her and her husband, John, to the seaside community of Trinity, Newfoundland and Labrador, back in the 1970s. "It was—and still is—a picture-perfect place," she says today from the helm of the Artisan Inn, a local hostelry of renown. It's been more than 30 years since they first crossed the isthmus that leads to the pretty little town on the Bonavista Peninsula and still, "the view never fails to inspire me."

It's easy to share Tineke's enthusiasm. In a province known for quaint villages that cling to the seashore, Trinity stands

as one of the quaintest of them all. Not only does it abound in quintessential Newfoundland character, its edge is its age. Settled earlier than some, it had ambitions—the local citizenry was confident it would overtake St. John's as Newfoundland's premier town. These early aspirations show in the number and quality of early buildings that survive from the colonial era. Back in the day, Trinity's optimism might well have been justified, because the peninsula's setting within a tranquil bay offered not one but three deep-water harbours for the fishing and shipping industries. However, the

town never attained the same status as its rival and settled into a quieter existence.

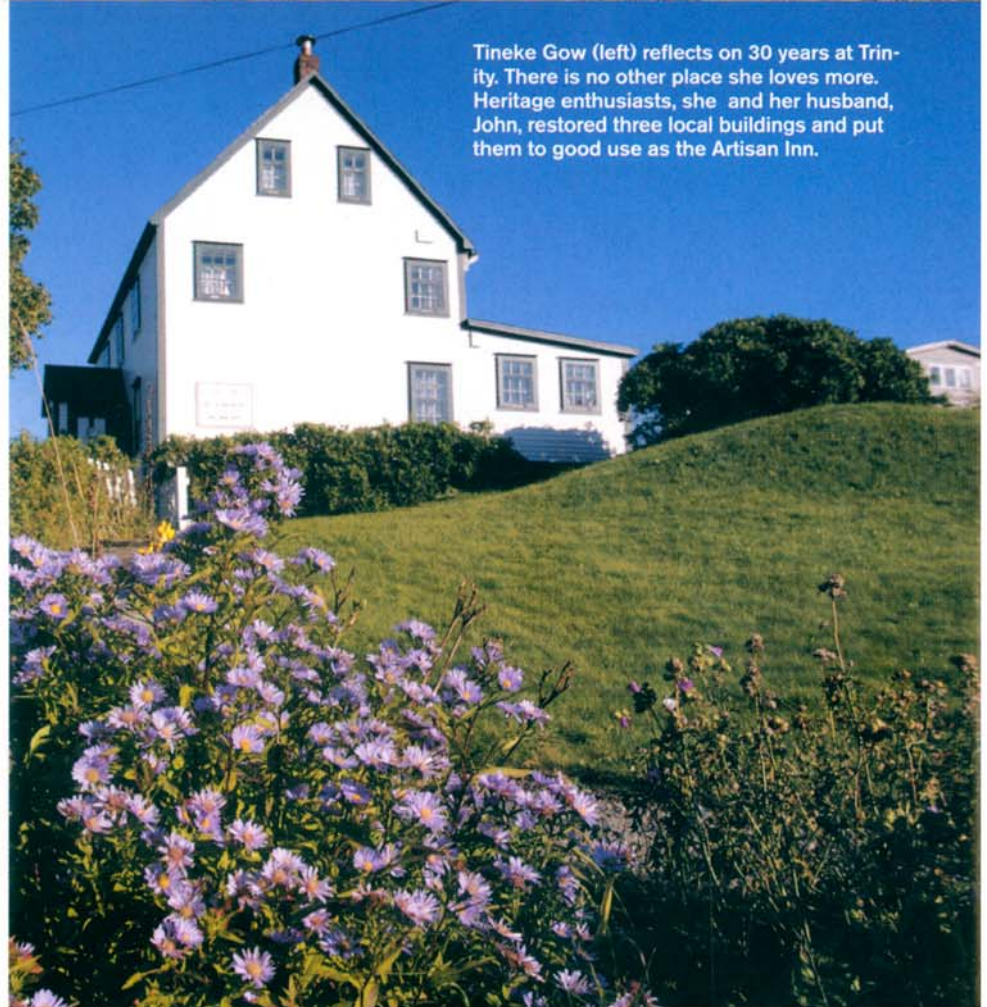
In fact, Trinity languished through most of the 20th century. Its population dwindled to a mere 350 souls and many of its vintage buildings stood neglected. But this apparent misfortune would ultimately prove to be its trump card for today, Trinity's old-time character is the major factor in its current renaissance. "In the last 25 years or so, the rustic geography and heritage architecture have attracted new residents and tourists alike," Tineke explains, noting that many buildings once down on their luck have





been restored as residences, museums and bed-and-breakfasts. There are paths to hike, icebergs to watch and views from any number of hilltops to admire. Best of all, local history is kept alive in something called the Trinity Pageant, an anthology of eight plays that follows local actors to various outdoor locations around town as they depict everyday life in an earlier era. Says Tineke: "Trinity is on the map again."

The Gows are typical of the new breed of Trinity boosters. They have restored not one, but two houses, both of which are open to overnight guests, and



Tineke Gow (left) reflects on 30 years at Trinity. There is no other place she loves more. Heritage enthusiasts, she and her husband, John, restored three local buildings and put them to good use as the Artisan Inn.



In the beginning there was the small white house by the seaside (opposite page, foreground, with red roof). Then the Gows bought and restored the house next door (left, below) before unleashing their talents on the twine loft (right).



As part of the milieu at the inn, the Gows open their doors to creative pursuits, among them lessons and exhibits by artist-in-residence Kathleen Knowing. The Shipping News poster (in background) is a reminder of the Hollywood movie that was shot locally; most of the cast visited.

converted an old twine loft into a restaurant with more accommodation. The three properties compose the Artisan Inn. "But back when we first arrived here in the '70s, innkeeping was the last thing on our minds," Tineke reflects. At the time, the couple was newly transplanted to St. John's as John took up research in marine microbiology at Memorial University, and the little clapboard house by the bayshore was the perfect retreat for summer getaways.

Set in a hollow beside the water, the house was a little gem dating back to the 1840s. Never a grand showplace, it revels in the unassuming charm typical of outport architecture: The ceilings are low; the staircase is precipitous; and there are absolutely no pretensions. Avowed heritage enthusiasts, Tineke and John immediately took a shine to it. In a way, the house reminded Tineke of her native



Tineke says that a stayover at the Artisan Inn is a little like visiting a museum and being allowed to sleep in the bed. Interiors have a simple, evocative charm that never fails to inspire guests.

Holland, where she went to high school in a 700-year-old town. "Being surrounded by heritage is wonderful. Every building has a story; it helps you feel grounded," she explains. "I get that same feeling here."

Long vacant, the house needed a whole list of basic improvements, including a new "linhey" (the lean-to extension at the rear, which houses the kitchen and dining room). But most of all, it needed water. Without a reliable well, the Gows looked hopefully at the property next door and decided to purchase it, too. "We bought it for the water," Tineke smiles, "but it also came with an old

house, one that needed even more work than the first."

The second dwelling, another of Trinity's oldest houses, had lost its original steep roof in favour of a flatter pitch that did little to enhance its heritage character. But John and Tineke were willing to rise to the challenge. Likewise, the floors were so badly worn they had to be replaced and modern amenities—such as insulation, up-to-date plumbing, new wiring and a serviceable kitchen—were high on the priority list.

Throughout, the goal was to maintain the historic ambience of each house while making them comfortable for contempo-

rary living. And ideally, the Gows wanted to do it all locally. "Contrary to what you might think, it wasn't hard to find the right tradespeople," Tineke says. After all, Trinity was a shipbuilding town and with the collapse of the fishery, there were plenty of skilled carpenters eager for the work.

Even as restoration progressed, the Gows were scratching their heads over what they would ultimately do with two houses. However, the point was moot for several years, for their attention was deflected unexpectedly by the health of the second of their four daughters, Emily, who was born with a brain injury and

Trinity Attractions

Upon arriving in Trinity, a newcomer should take a quick hike up to the top of Gun Hill and take in the panoramic view of the town below. It's like looking at a model of a picture-perfect fishing village. Even better, there's the vista toward the open sea.

Three hours from St. John's, Trinity is becoming a destination in its own right—it has to be, because once you're there, you're a long way from anything else. Fortunately, there are lots of things to do. Some suggestions: the Rising Tide Theatre; folk and jazz nights, boat tours, photography workshops, walking tours, painting workshops and hiking along the Skerwink Trail. The best introduction is www.trinityvacations.com or call the Artisan Inn at (709) 464-3377.

needed intense therapy in her early years. "It was a long road," recalls Tineke, but gradually, Emily's prospects brightened to the point that the couple could once again return to their restoration projects. It was then that Tineke hatched a plan: "Day to day, it was important that I be there for Emily's sake, so an office job was out of the question," she explains. "So that's how we got into the innkeeping business."

For guests, to stay in either of the inn's two houses is to be part of the community. Indeed, they stand in the heart of town and, typical of a Newfoundland village, there aren't a lot of hedges or privacy fences to sequester

them from the rhythm of daily life. Best of all, each house has been restored as an essay in traditional ambience, striking the right balance between history and amenity. "That's the whole idea," Tineke agrees. "It's like visiting a museum and being allowed to sleep in the bed." And when it came time to expand their enterprise into a restaurant and more accommodation, the Gows applied the same approach when they fixed up the bayside twine loft as the final component in what they now call the Artisan Inn. It wasn't in the plan, but innkeeping has been the means to a very satisfying end. Now, Tineke gets to admire the view every day. ☼

Trinity stands on a peninsula. Everyone has a view of the water.

