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# Hollyhock retreat offers tool for change, hope and optimism

BY ERIN O'NEIL, SPECIAL TO CANWEST NEWS SERVICE

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Hollyhock is a wellness retreat that encourages progressive thinking.  
Photograph by: Handout photo, John DeVault/Hollyhock Retreat Centre

"During these challenging times." How often have you heard this phrase recently?

Planetary eco-meltdown, world-wide economic recession, global inequity, war, social injustice, poverty the list goes on. Reflect for a moment, though, on the big picture. Now is also our chance to step up. A wise perspective might see the human species being called on to sow seeds of change, hope and optimism in time for the fruits to make a difference. As our perspectives, like our information, become more global, reality reminds us that solutions are inevitably local and personal.

Now more than ever we need places where we can build our capacity to be better global citizens. These places are rare. For more than 25 years, Hollyhock on Cortes Island in British Columbia has offered guests an experience that sends them home transformed and inspired to engage in making the world better. Hollyhock is a non-profit centre offering cutting-edge programs with world-class instructors, a gathering place for pursuit of advanced knowledge and deep insights. New learning for new times. And all of it happening amidst the kind of breathtaking island beauty that makes you remember why it's good to be alive.

Glance through their catalogue, and you'll find an impressive array of programs and enticing unstructured ways to enjoy what Hollyhock has to offer. In a world where loss of biodiversity is precipitating a crisis of epic proportions, Hollyhock aims to nurture the biodiversity of the human organism, enabling people to feed their diverse skills and passions and grow new ones. Workshops in arts, health, relationship, yoga, and wisdom practices mix unapologetically with business, leadership and social change programs. Part of Hollyhock's charm is that it's hard to define—an alchemical mix of part university and conference facility, part spiritual centre, part sweet holiday getaway.

While they take their mission very seriously, the staff and the whole property are imbued with realness, a culture of fun, healthy irreverence, and an un-contrived, hip joie de vivre. And they're attracting a more diverse crowd than ever before. Gatherings of web, media and environmental activists return to the campus for strategy and network-building conferences because the setting helps catalyse new visions. Hollyhock is also proud of having expanded their scholarship program over the years, which in 2008 granted over \$97,000 to 116 people.

Something else they take seriously is the issue of sustainability. Part of their strategy is to make the Hollyhock experience count and go for ripple effect. "We're going for maximum impact. Yes, people are travelling, but they're learning, connecting with new people, having meaningful experiences and returning home to spread seeds of change, like guerrilla gardeners," says CEO Dana Bass Solomon. While laying no claim to perfection, the facility is an impressive model of sustainable practice. The kitchen, organic garden and dining room are a cozy, closed loop system—compost nourishes the garden that provides for the kitchen, feeds the guests, whose scraps go directly to the compost heap.

Hollyhock is a place where the ecology of human well-being is naturally nourished.

If we want a more sane, just and peaceful world, Hollyhock is a place that can kick-start us to do our part. This one-of-a-kind campus is an institution the planet can't afford to lose.

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