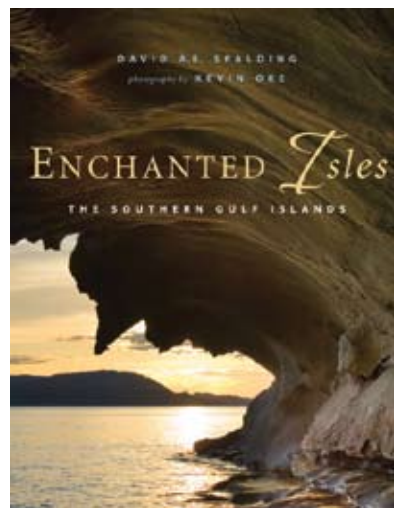


Enchanted Isles

GULF ISLANDS COFFEE TABLE BOOK SHOWS 'WHY WE LIVE HERE'



Enchanted Isles, The Southern Gulf Islands, by David A.E. Spalding, photography by Kevin Oke. Harbour Publishing, 2007, \$34.95.

By CHERIE THIESSEN

It's overdue — a book that lushly celebrates our special place in the world while informing, challenging and surprising.

Of course no one needs to tell us how special our island is, be it North or South Pender, Salt Spring, Galiano, Mayne, Saturna or Gabriola, but many of us like an occasion to gloat and would be happy to clear a spot on our coffee table for a book that shows the rest of the world what they're missing.

Spalding and Oke, both long-time North Penderites, are a natural team for this venture. The former is a prolific writer with a strong interest in the natural sciences and history. Some of his works include *Into the Dinosaur's Graveyard*, and *Whales of the West Coast*. He also was one of the writing team on *Southern Gulf Islands of British Columbia*.

Many readers will already be familiar with Oke, whose photographs have frequently graced the pages of *Aqua*, *The Gulf Islander* and *The Driftwood*. Although his photographs can be seen on magazine covers, framed in galleries and on his websites, this is his first book. Not for long, however; he's been discovered. Two more books on the Cowichan Valley and Victoria are already in the works.

Each of the main islands is lauded in its own chapter, but some other islands, less populated or not serviced by ferries, also get their mo-



ment in print. Piers Island, for example, just off the Swartz Bay terminal, was for a short time a prison for lawbreaking Doukhobors, and D'Arcy, Sidney, Moresby, Thetis and Kuper, Wallace, and further north, DeCourcy, with its infamous history.

It begs the question, what were the criteria for inclusion? It would be interesting, for example, to know more about Tent Island, that unofficial campsite that was once a park. Or Parker Island, now bristling with wharfs, but not so long ago home to but a colourful few, or mysterious Valdes. However, there are as many southern Gulf Islands as boats at Sidney Spit in summer, so obviously they could not all be covered.

While some may wish a more clearly defined pattern to the information contained in each chapter, the fact is that the text captures exactly the flavour of life on the islands, with interesting bits of history popping up — did you know that Magic Lake on North Pender used to be called Dead Cow Swamp? — colourful locals sharing their memories, a sudden discovery of wildflowers or uncovering of a geological fault, or a bit of history moldering under the brush. Like a summer day spent on one of these islands, stories and adventures unfold to delight and intrigue. You'll discover things you didn't know, meet interesting people, find new trails, and stop dead to marvel at the images.

The variety and tone of Oke's photos parallel these sudden surprises: his reflective sunset

seascapes are juxtaposed with delightful snippets of children leaping exuberantly into the sea, and his photos showing island celebrations are balanced with wildlife images of our other island inhabitants going about their daily lives. An arbutus sheds its copper skin at dusk, a pod of Orcas goes on the hunt, a heron stills and waits.

Informative yet questioning, satisfying yet challenging, sumptuous yet sparse, *Enchanted Isles* reflects our lives, our challenges and our paradise back to us, reminding us of why we're here.

If anyone asks you why you decided to move to a "remote" Gulf Island, just hand him or her this book. ★



Above, from left: Saturday market blown glass and a Gabriola Island flower planter — two examples of island life photographed by Kevin Oke.

Previous page: The book cover and an aerial photo of Sidney Spit.

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