

SURF AND TURF

How hockey star turned hotelier Willie Mitchell finds solace and sustenance on Canada's Vancouver Island



Willie Mitchell after a free dive

Rise and Shine

"My routine to get me going in the morning is to run Chesterman Beach, all the way down and all the way back. I love the smooth, flat sand and hearing the surf lap up next to me. Afterward, I'll swing by the Driftwood Cafe at the Wickaninnish Inn, which is perched right there at the edge of the Pacific, and grab a cappuccino and a pastry and sit down to do a little work."

Finding Calm

"When the water is super clear, like in April, before the sun is strong enough for the phytoplankton to really bloom, I free dive as much as I can in the Clayoquot Sound. I don't have Michael Phelps's lungs, so I can stay down for only about 50 seconds. It's like underwater yoga—going deep into the breath and finding a sense of inner peace. And if I get hungry, I just crack open a sea urchin with my dive knife and eat it, sitting on a rock like a seal."

Tofino, on the western coast of Vancouver Island, may be known as the wave-riding capital of Canada, but Willie Mitchell, who returned there following an NHL career, says it's so much more. As the owner of Tofino Resort + Marina, a high-end boutique hotel with adventure in its DNA (think setting crab traps from a stand-up paddleboard before hitting the resort's floating sauna), Mitchell aspires to take guests past the surf line into deeper waters. "I love the ocean here; it's my healing ground," he says. "You see things in these waters you don't see anywhere else." And with miles of hiking trails through old-growth forests and a food scene that punches above its small-town weight, Tofino has as much happening on land as it does off. **JAYME MOYE**



Meares Island from a floatplane

Afternoon Adventures

"My boat is made to handle the open ocean. That's where you'll find me many summer days with my friends and family. We'll grab snacks from Picnic Charcuterie in town and head way out, like 70 miles offshore. There are thousands of dolphins and humpback whales. We'll fish for albacore and yellowtail and make sushi right on the boat."

When It's Windy

"Part of the magic of Tofino is that when the weather is bad offshore, there's still a ton to do elsewhere. I'll head up the inlet, where I can get away from the coastal fog. The water there gets up to 77 degrees in summer—perfect for swimming. I'll try to throw the anchor at a place where, at low tide, I can watch black bears come down from the rain forest and forage on the shoreline."

Saying Goodnight

"With two kids under five, I'm mostly eating dinner at home these days. When I do have a night out, I'm at the Wolf in the Fog, which is the best restaurant in town. Hailey, the bar manager, makes amazing New York City-level cocktails. After dinner, I usually hang out on my patio at home. We're fortunate to look out onto Clayoquot Sound. We get amazing sunsets with all the colors swirling around Meares Island, which is covered in old-growth trees that are reflected perfectly in the water. I'm happy to just sit there and watch the sun fade away."



Just-harvested sea urchins at Tofino Resort