

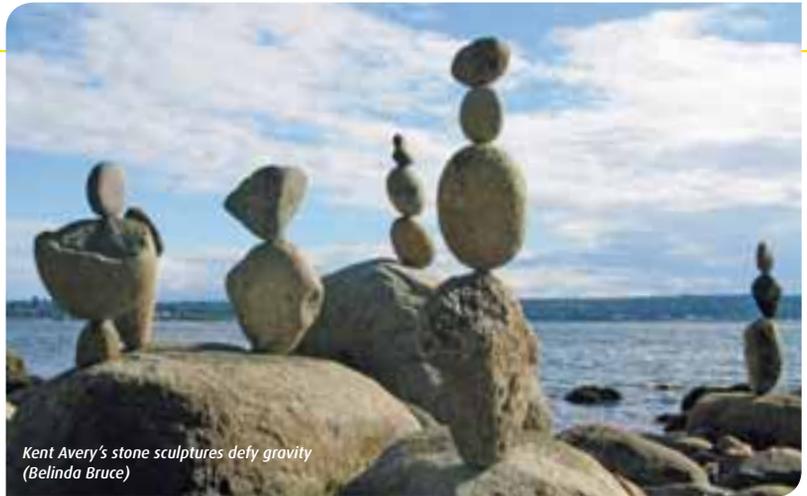
Kent Avery

Balancing act

"How can something so simple be so inspiring and beautiful? Perhaps we all yearn to be like this in some way: tall, centred, awesome." —joy to you brother from the land of Oz.

FOR THE LAST SEVEN years, Vancouver artist Kent Avery has spent his weekends balancing stones along the shores of English Bay. He descends the seawall at low tide and begins to select and haul, placing rocks of various sizes one atop another—two, five, twelve stones tall. Soon, he has created a village of magical, precarious pillars that draw passersby to stare in wonder. When the tide rises again the stone sculptures begin to tumble, but by that time Avery is long gone.

Stone balancing is a vocation that calls only the most grounded of souls. "I have always loved



Kent Avery's stone sculptures defy gravity (Belinda Bruce)

sculpture," says 46-year-old Avery, exuding a calmness and monkish reserve that lends him a very spiritual quality. His own journey began nine years ago after observing a veteran East Coast balancer create these improbable obelisks on English Bay.

"He fascinated me," says Avery. "I asked him some questions and two years later I began to balance small stones. I realized what I'd known

already; that I had the 'feel' or sensitivity to balance stones. That sensitivity has become fine-tuned over time."

Many people want to know how he does it—the trick. Skeptics ask if rods or glue are involved. "It's amusing. I tell them it's all by feel, by assessing how much weight each stone can bear. I've had people say, 'But you did it too fast!'"

This gateway makes the perfect getaway.



Richmond, BC is a place to

rejuvenate, and a place to come alive. Venture into the Historic Fishing Village of Steveston, where you can stroll the scenic boardwalk, experience a whale-watching adventure or dine in one of the many restaurants after a day of shopping for eclectic treasures.

Explore the bustling streets of the Asian-influenced Golden Village. This cultural mecca welcomes you to explore its colourful dimensions with tastes, sights and sounds that will make you will feel as though you have visited China itself.

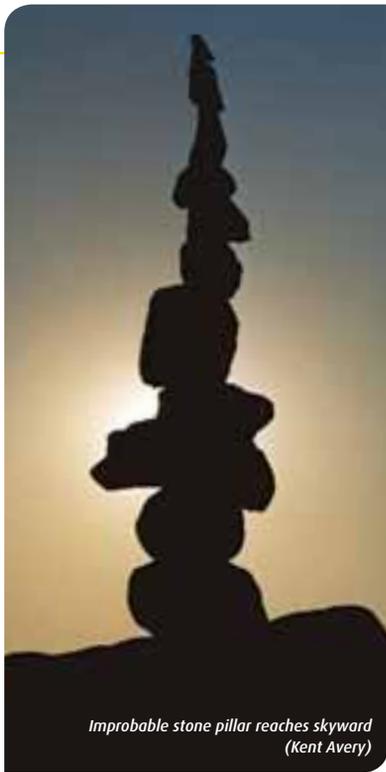
The airport, ferries and border are all close by and with over two dozen brand name hotels to choose from and attractions galore, it's the gateway that makes a great getaway. And then some.



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Photo Credit: Kurt Westle.



Improbable stone pillar reaches skyward
(Kent Avery)

Balancing one stone can take anywhere from five minutes to a half-hour. Most of the rocks he uses come from the area where he works, between Second and Third beaches, but he lugs some stones all the way across town on his bicycle. "Every February, March and April, I bring rocks from Capilano River, usually the rounder ones."

The nature of his work is ephemeral and elusive. His creations are dependent on high and low tides, and he takes a break for December through February. Avery used to balance as many as 80 sculptures a day, but in the last few years the lifting and concentration has taken its toll. Now 30 is his maximum.

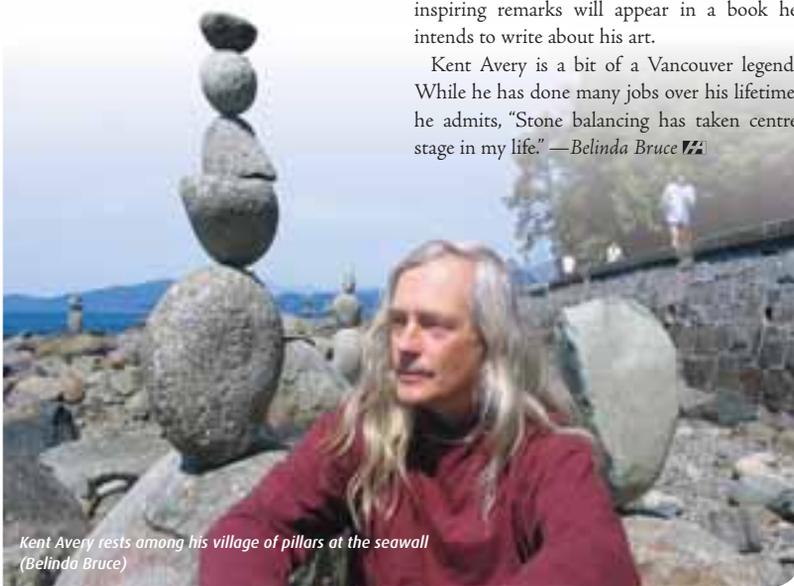
Avery writes poetry and songs and last year put out an independent CD called *A David Among Goliaths*. He is also a skilled

photographer and sells greeting cards mounted with his own shots of his sculptures. Sales and tips garner him anywhere from \$100-\$400 daily; his top day earned him \$750. But he'll tell you it's neither about the money nor the praise. In fact, he noticed a drop in tourism after 9/11: "There used to be fifty to one hundred people clapping."

"Stone balancing has taken centre stage in my life."

He leaves out a book on the seawall for comments. "It really seems to bring something out in people. Many echo the yearning to be more balanced in their own lives." The most inspiring remarks will appear in a book he intends to write about his art.

Kent Avery is a bit of a Vancouver legend. While he has done many jobs over his lifetime, he admits, "Stone balancing has taken centre stage in my life." —Belinda Bruce



Kent Avery rests among his village of pillars at the seawall
(Belinda Bruce)

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