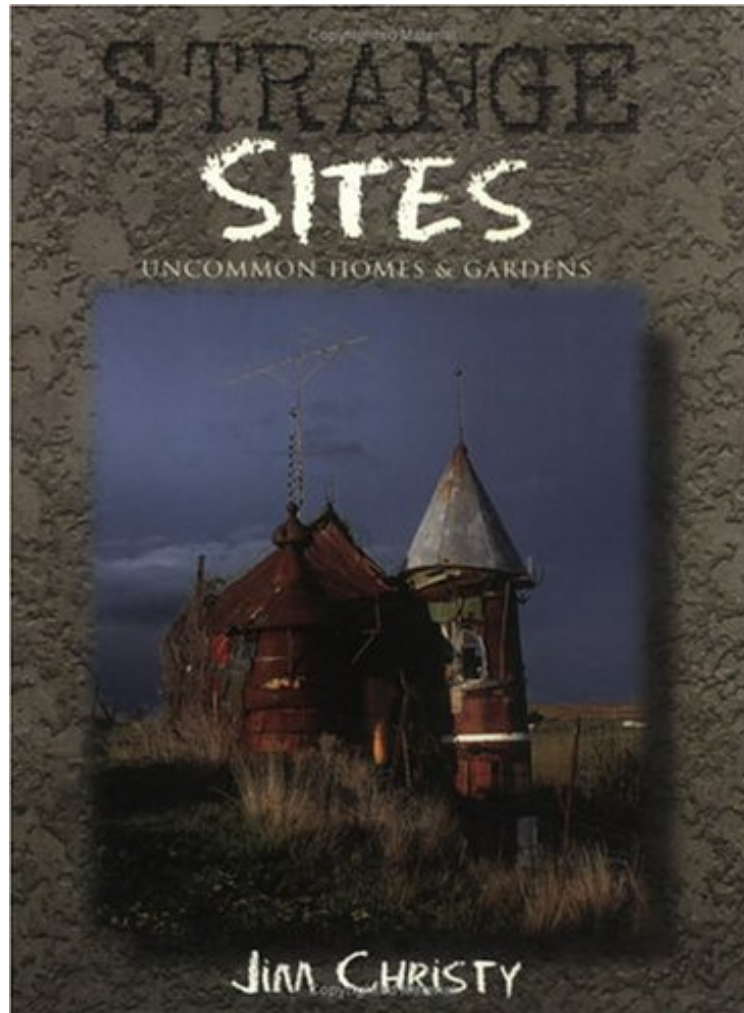


[E-BOOK] Strange Sites: Uncommon Homes Gardens of the Pacific Northwest

## Strange Sites: Uncommon Homes Gardens of the Pacific Northwest

*Jim Christy*

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**Jim Christy : Strange Sites: Uncommon Homes Gardens of the Pacific Northwest** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Strange Sites: Uncommon Homes Gardens of the Pacific Northwest:

0 of 1 people found the following review helpful. I love this bookBy marciI love this book, the people that created these unique homes are my heroes. They forged ahead to make an environment that they could call their own. I have been to several of the homes and all the people were very friendly, inviting me into their home and talking about why they created what they did. Some of the homes have since been demolished, get this book, see these places before it's too late. Or better yet...make your house the next Strange Site in your town!!!!0 of 3 people found the following review helpful. S'okayBy Jessica SalmonsonNo one here cops to having ordered this. I'm sure it's a fine book. I'm not

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I like to collect books about space people have customized in an eclectic and eccentric way. This is one of the best.

There is only one human impulse as old as the desire to build a house - the desire to decorate it. From a house made entirely of embalming fluid bottles created by an ex-undertaker, to a miniature backyard Dodge City built by a devoted "Gunsmoke" fan, to a junk castle assembled from old bedsteads, metal fans, and washing machine parts for a fine arts doctoral project - these are some of the uncommon homes and gardens found throughout western Canada and the United States. Meet some of the people who created these weird but magnificent places: Tim Anderson, from Roundup, Montana, who erects his graceful pillars and whirligigs from scrap iron and is said to be directed by visions; Rasmus Petersen, of Redmond, Oregon, who immigrated from Denmark in 1906 to clear 300 acres of rock and forest and created an extensive rock garden with the by-product of his labours; and John Keziere, who hails from Esquimalt, BC, a former whaler and merchant marine who modelled his garage on Davey Jones' locker. This exuberantly illustrated book is a tribute to men and women in Alberta, British Columbia, Idaho, Oregon, Montana, Washington and the Yukon who have created domestic monuments that are out on the margins. *Strange Sites: Uncommon Homes and Gardens of the Pacific Northwest* celebrates the creative spirit in us all, the spirit that defies the trends, the neighbours and the building codes to construct unique, joyous and very strange sites.

Excerpt. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved. *Bottlerama*: Gottfried Gabriel (1891-1983) Oliver, British Columbia  
On my first trip to Western Canada, in 1970, driving through the Okanagan Valley of B.C., I saw first in my peripheral vision and then in my sideview mirror, a flash of chrome and coloured glass, a cluster of peculiar buildings - and I'm sure there was an old man pushing a wheelbarrow - the entire scene encompassed by sagebrush and desert hills. It was an interesting old pack rat, I concluded; part of the montage of the road. I sped on by. Twenty years later, turning the pages of a book on unusual structures, I stopped at a photograph of an old man pushing a wheelbarrow full of hubcaps and bottles. I knew I had seen him before, and I had. The caption identified him as Gottfried Gabriel who lived near Oliver, British Columbia. Pictures of his work showed that it spread over a considerable property and included bottle buildings and strange monuments of automobile fenders, motor parts, reflectors, wires, garden ornaments. By this time I was living in Vancouver, just 450 kilometers away, and I was planning a business trip to the Okanagan. I decided to go visit Gabriel and his home. Oliver is a small town, and Gabriel's work had been featured in a lavish coffee table volume available throughout Europe and North America, so everyone there would of course know all about him, which was fortunate since I had only a couple of hours to spare from my other chores. The first few people I spoke to didn't know what I was talking about. The editor of the local weekly was aware of the place, but when I asked him whether he'd ever done a piece on Gabriel, he answered, "Why would we have done that?" Then a woman at the historical society gave me both directions to the property, and, alas, the obituary for Gabriel, who died in 1983. She also gave me the only photograph they had--black and white, underexposed, showing another tower, this one topped by what seemed to be a tree welded from metal scraps. It put me in mind of a tree in no man's land in a First World War winter. Other than the death notice, there were no clippings, no pictures, no addresses of relatives, nothing. It was another year before I returned to the Okanagan and met a Mr. Lehman at Vaseux Lake, who gave me postcard of his next door neighbour, Gottfried Gabriel, who is shown standing beside one of his towers. He is wearing a black cap, blue work shirt and green pants, and he holds a 40-ounce liquor bottle filled with marbles. He is about a third as tall as the monument, the plinth of which seems to be made of concrete sprouting bottle bottoms. All this is clothed in chicken wire festooned with bicycle reflectors and other coloured disks. At the base of the tower are stones, some painted, and more headlamps, plastic flowers and living flowers. A four-foot-tall statue of a Roman goddess stands nearby, and more plastic flowers wind round a concrete column supporting the ubiquitous red-capped garden elf - on whose knee sits a plaster statue of John F. Kennedy. "Junk. All of it junk," said Mr. Lehman. "He work like crazy. Work, work, work. Then he drop dead." We both stared at the postcard. "But you know," added Mr. Lehman, "there were always people coming to see him. And I think the bastard was happy. So who's crazy?" Gabriel was of Frisian ancestry, born April 13, 1891, in the Ukraine. He was blind in one eye and rejected for military service. Frisians are Celtic in origin, but Gabriel was pronounced German and ordered to work in logging camps in Siberia. He married when the war ended and emigrated to Canada in 1930. Gabriel farmed near Eatonia, Saskatchewan until 1943 when he moved to Oliver with his wife and son, Eric, who supplied me with most of the biographical details about his father. In the Okanagan, Gabriel would buy a lot, build a cabin and sell for a profit. Later he constructed small houses and sold them. In the early 1960s, he made a fence of bottles and cement around the family bungalow in Oliver. Next he built a bottle garage, and he was at work on a windmill when the city authorities called a halt to his mania. But Gabriel, who was by then obsessed, purchased the five-hectare site near Vaseux lake, beyond the reach of the building code. Thus in 1966, at the age of seventy-five, Gabriel was able to give full rein to his fantasies. "From then on," says Eric, "he was free and happy." Eric Gabriel had

long since left home by the time his father moved to Vaseux Lake, but from visits he remembers his dad hard at work until the age of ninety, a year before he died. His father made his monuments from bottles, car parts, "musical instruments, statuettes, hot water tanks painted in different colour, and the bar from the old-time gold mining settlement of Fairview." In the middle of the Vaseux Lake compound was a museum featuring old furniture, farm equipment, riding tack and artifacts donated by the local Indian band chief. Eric reckons there were also 5,000 Christmas tree lights about the place, and when they were all turned on at night the compound glowed like a vast city in the desert. He sent me some photographs of the place and I found a few more. Each picture reveals another corner of the property, another vignette, another piece of a mysterious story. There are windmills, a little church, a giant plywood Santa Claus high in a cottonwood tree, a 150-foot-long house of bottles, and what looks like a miniature railway winding through crushed glass tunnels. Many far less impressive places in the world have earned their creators notoriety, respect and considerable amounts of money. Gabriel got none of this. He charged no admission, nothing was preserved, and not even the local paper paid him any attention. The book that did mention him, *Fantastic Architecture*, appeared one year after he died. Gottfried Gabriel's estate was in contention for five years after his death in 1983, and Eric fought to have at least part of the property preserved or donated to the government for protection. But this was not to be, and during the years of dispute, much of the material was stolen and the property often vandalized. Finally the estate was settled and the land was sold. In a note Eric wrote to me, he said, "Have heard that a house is being built and as far as I know nothing remains, only memories." (Excerpt from *Strange Sites: Bottlerama*)