

Neighborhood of many names

□ Ramsay district is a community with a multiple personality

By Cinda Chavich
Calgary Herald

Ramsay is a neighborhood that's had about as many names as it's had phases of development.

A walk through this both historic and modern, restored and run-down, inner-city community is a lesson in the history of a place that was first settled in 1875 and seems to have been in transition ever since.

Like the various names on the neighborhood records — Burnsland, Mills Estate, Brewery Flats, Grandview and finally Ramsay — it's a community with a multiple personality.

And it's a community with a multitude of interesting and eclectic nooks and crannies.

You'll find funny little streets with ancient names and unusual building codes, like steeply winding Bison Path and Maggie Street, with its homes built right on the city property line.

There are examples of every sort of 20th-century architecture within the boundaries of Ramsay, from a Victorian brick mansion and a pair of ultra-modern homes scaling the slope of Scotchman's Hill, to a trendy southwestern spot in rough-hewn wood and pastel stucco, painted ladies, working-class cottages and 1950s ranch homes.

"You can see architecture from the 1900s right up to the 1990s," says photographer Ed Spiteri who makes his home in Ramsay. "The big difference between Inglewood and Ramsay is the building continued here throughout the '40s, '50s and '60s."

It's this higgledy-piggledy jumble that gives Ramsay a real small-town feel, like a village that's developed in dribs and drabs with a renegade's disregard for conformity.

And those are the kind of people who hang their hat in Ramsay today — a disproportionate number of artists and free spirits, the kind of people who create works of national significance in the garage.

"I wanted to find a neighborhood where I felt I could work," says Glen MacKinnon, whose large sculptures and eight-foot wood block prints can be seen at museums like the Glenbow or Nickle Arts. "Artists are attracted to places with a bit more character, places that are cheaper,

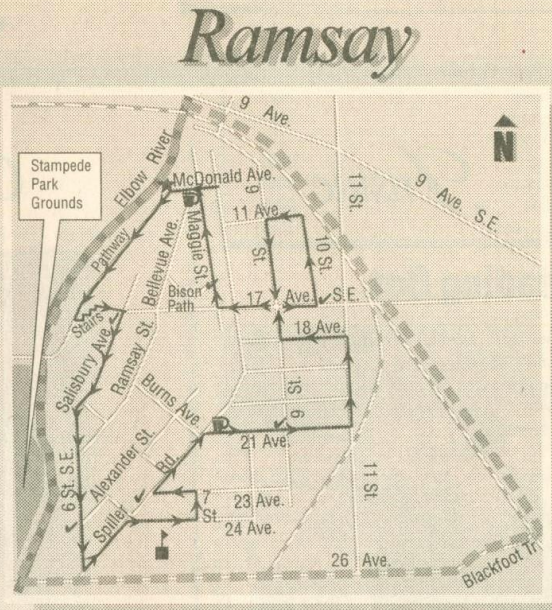
ROUTE: Start your walk at the McDonald Bridge at the base of McDonald Street. Head along the bikepath that hugs the river, then climb the 188 steps to the top of Scotchman's Hill. The city view is great from up here, and there's no better place to watch the races or the Stampede fireworks.

Head south along the hill past an old Victorian brick house at 2004 and examples of every era of architecture. Watch for a wonderfully renovated house in full southwestern regalia, then head down the hill to Spiller Road. On 24th Avenue you'll see the old Dominion Bridge site. Duck in to the galleries here and visit local artists. Back on 23rd Avenue, head for the sandstone Ramsay Elementary School, then turn north on Spiller Road to 21st Avenue. Stop here at Kam Han Szechuan House for some of the best spicy Chinese food in town.

East on 21st Avenue, you'll see St. Anne's Catholic Church and the original St. Anne's Rectory, a historic brick building that now houses the Sunrise Residence. Turn north on 11th Street and pass the Calgary Biker Church and the old Fox and Mink Feeds. Circle through the neighborhood to 17th Avenue where you'll find an old brick corner store that now houses the Avatamsaka Buddhist Monastery, and deke down 10th and 11th streets to see examples of turn-of-the-century homes and 1920s painted ladies.

Cross 8th Street and head back to the start of your walk along Maggie Street, a funny lane with houses both facing and backing onto its narrow passageway.

MUST SEES: Don't miss Ramsay Elementary School at 2223 Spiller Road; the old St. Anne's rectory at 21st Avenue and 9th Street S.E.; the Buddhist Monastery



at 1024 17th Avenue S.E.; and twisty Bison Path.

HIDDEN TREASURES: Inside the old Dominion Bridge site at 803 24th Avenue S.E. you'll find eclectic businesses, from artists and galleries to high-tech computer wizardry,

set designers and advertising agencies.

PIT STOP: The Kam Han Szechuan House at 2016 Spiller Road S.E. At the end of Maggie Street and McDonald Avenue, there's a fast-food spot for ice cream.



where they can live and work."

One such place is the old Dominion Bridge site, 200,000 square feet of circa 1920 industrial space that's been reopened recently as the Saddleview Industrial Park.

Inside these brick buildings with their funky interiors are all manner of businesses — from contemporary art galleries like the New Zones Gallery and painter Eroll Lee Fullen's studio, to Trails End photo studio, creative photographer Ian Groll and trendy ad agencies like the Idea Machine. Upstairs Image Club artists create fonts and art for their international computer graphics business and next door Brian Cooley is building 40-foot, scientifically accurate dinosaurs in metal and fibreglass for museums around the world.

At the same time, F & D Scene

Changes is busy building a 50-foot guitar for the entrance of the new Hard Rock Cafe, between assignments creating sets for such productions as Lonesome Dove, North of 60, Les Miserables and the Phantom of the Opera. Through another door, you're into the heavy industrial metal work of Plains Fabrication, an odd juxtaposition to the current upscale tenants but a use that's closer to the building's origins of metal fabrication.

When Dominion Bridge opened its doors here in 1926, the company started making mining and farming equipment, then moved on to railway bridges and continued with structural steel until the late 1980s, making the skeletons of many city buildings including the Calgary Tower.

Like Dominion Bridge, Ramsay has always had a working-class core — from pioneer Pat Burns' gigantic Burns Meats that started here back in 1884 to railway yard and brewery work.

The neighborhood's namesake is Silas Alexander Ramsay, a former city alderman and mavor.

Ramsay came west from his home in Ontario in 1870 with Lord Wolsey's expedition to help quell Louis Riel's Red River Rebellion. He arrived in Fort Calgary in the 1880s and established a machinery business, but was back to Manitoba in 1885 for the second Riel uprising.

Ramsay, like other residents this hilltop neighborhood, likely watched parts of the first Calgary Stampede in 1912 from the top of Scotchman's Hill, so named because it gave a free view of the show.

Today, it's also the best place to walk to take in the city and mountain skyline, and the eclectic neighborhood of Ramsay.



Do you know of a great neighborhood walk? Call the Talkies line, press 1272 and leave your name and a message. If we use your suggestion we'll give you a living T-shirt to say thanks!