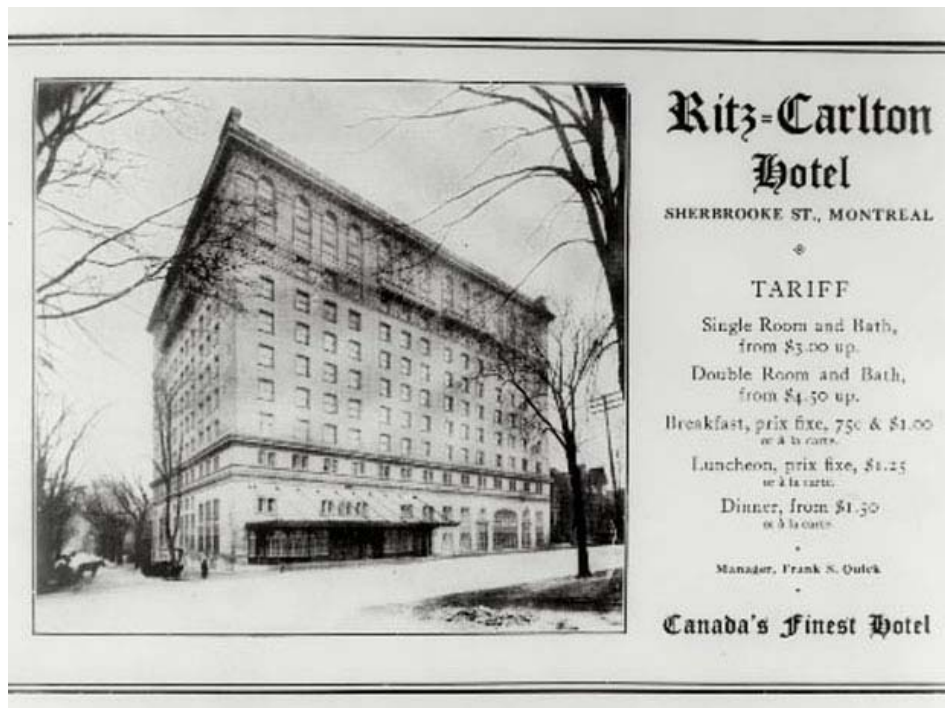


Richler's old local, new and improved: Montreal Ritz set to re-open

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Montreal's Ritz Carlton

Handout

Long live the queen. The stately 100-year-old Ritz-Carlton Montreal, a landmark of the Golden Square Mile, re-opens May 28, following a massive four-year renovation.

The revamped property retains its regal elegance while adding dazzling new features, including a year-round rooftop swimming pool, luxury condominiums and Maison Boulud, a chic contemporary bar and dining room run by Michelin-starred chef Daniel Boulud.

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Visitors to Ritz 2012, renovated and modernized to the tune of about \$200-million, will find the hotel lighter and brighter, walls of Old World green and gold replaced by luminescent creamy whites.

Still a model of classic luxury, the restoration has preserved prized architectural features such as marble-framed fireplaces, the gilded Oval Room, and the lobby's fabulous curved staircase, site of many a grand entrance.

If you are looking for a glass of Champagne or a stiff Scotch to celebrate the return of Montreal's most famous watering hole, The Ritz Bar, historically an A-list meeting place, is now a stunning modern fireplace lounge and part of Maison Boulud.

The oldest Ritz-Carlton in North America has hosted a political who's who of the 20th century, including heads of state such as Churchill, de Gaulle and the Shah of Iran, plus generations of glitterati, like Rita Hayworth, Bob Hope, Christopher Plummer, Mick Jagger and Jerry Seinfeld. The Ritz Bar was Mordecai Richler's "local." The hotel's biggest celebrity coup is that Elizabeth Taylor and Richard Burton married there.

When the Ritz-Carlton opened in 1912, Montreal's business and social elite yearned for a clubby venue for tea dances and debutante balls. Here, shipping, banking and railway tycoons signed deals over cigars and cognac. Ladies lunched at the Ritz Garden while ducks frolicked in the famous pond. But, by the turn of the 21st century, the Ritz's Old World appeal faded, standards slipped and it closed in 2008 for a major makeover.

Ritz 2012 has 129 sleek, five-star guest rooms and suites (down from about 165), decorated in soothing earth tones and subtle pastels, with flat-screen televisions and high-tech touch sensors for lighting, temperature and window shades.

The Ritz's prices match its upgrade. A deluxe king room will cost approximately \$425 in high season and rates rocket up to \$6,600 per-night night for the three-bedroom Royal Suite

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The biggest change at Ritz 2012 is the swish new Maison Boulud, its summer-time Jardin du Ritz and the new bar which all have a contemporary look. The old ornate wrought-iron garden chairs and French doors have been replaced with sleek, square modern seating and a wall of glass separating Boulud's two spaces: chic, urban indoor dining and the leafy, flower-filled outdoors. The menus will be overhauled, too. You can probably forget about roast beef and Yorkshire pudding, but you can expect Boulud's signature foie gras burger. And yes, Boulud is keeping the Jardin du Ritz' duck pond. If he knows what's good for him. *Rochelle Lash was a consultant to Ritz-Carlton Montreal for its 90th birthday.*

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