

Toronto's hip Drake travels to wine region

Montreal-born hotelier Stober expands brand



ROCHELLE LASH
CHECKING IN

Jeff Stober, the impresario of hipness in Toronto, is bringing his unique brand of urban cool to a quaint lakefront village in Prince Edward County. Montreal-born Stober opened the Drake Hotel on funky Queen St. W. 10 years ago and developed a culture of unbridled nightlife, progressive cuisine and ultimate cocktails with a sprinkling of avant-garde art. And yes, there are guest rooms upstairs — unconventional, design-centric guest rooms.

The hotel is a VIP magnet, particularly during the Toronto International Film Festival, which takes place through Sept. 14. The Drake has been host to such high-wattage celebs as Orlando Bloom, Claire Danes, Sam Rockwell, Penelope Cruz, Rachel Hunter, Scott Speedman, Ron Howard, Emma Watson and Woody Harrelson.

I've heard that Robert Pattinson and Julianne Moore, both repeat guests, might reappear since they are coming to TIFF for their new film, David Cronenberg's Maps to the Stars.

That puts me in a party mood, and one unbeatable perk at the Drake is that all hotel guests have VIP access to its gatherings.

Stober's new venture is the Drake Devonshire Inn, which is opening Sept. 15 on the shore of Lake Ontario. This is a picturesque agricultural land of quilting bees and country fairs. It's also a summer vacation utopia of fishing, boating, golf, cycling and wonderful beach life, and an autumn harvest of theatre, art galleries, historic Loyalist sites and passionately locavore cuisine and wine. Tourism has boomed over the past decade with the growth of more than 35 wineries, thanks to the region's limestone terroir and temperate climate.

Town and country. The two



The eclectic, unconventional Drake Devonshire Inn, a countryside expansion of Toronto's hip Drake Hotel, is opening Sept. 15 in the wine region of Prince Edward County on the shore of Lake Ontario.

PHOTOS: KAYLA ROCCA/THE DRAKE DEVONSHIRE INN

Drakes couldn't be more different, although they share a cheeky approach and a focus on art and design.

Drake: Downtown Toronto cool

The Drake in Toronto is so much more than a hotel; it is a lifestyle, an art gallery and the epicentre of hip action.

This offbeat 19-room establishment in a restored 1890s building defies categorization. A playful and eclectic insider choice, the Drake crosses barriers and age groups and welcomes anyone with a sense of adventure, from backpackers to movie stars.

As a drinking and dining hangout, the Drake is the last word in downtown vogue. Its street-level lounge, rooftop Sky Yard and Underground music club rock Toronto nightlife with entertainment and good food.

The guest rooms are creative, functional hideaways of industrial-chic, with dark-wood floors, platform beds, metal-mesh curtains and ladders to reach overhead luggage racks. Not fancy, not traditional, and maybe not for everyone, but truly innovative.

Stober also reinvented the hotel gift shop with the Drake General Store, a boutique of clever wares, including cute Canadiana, monogrammed bar glasses, street clothes by



Simon Ho, a mixologist at the Drake Hotel, creates cocktails at the Sky Yard bar.

Shared and Levi's new skinnies.

You would think it's impossible to be unique in a global environment where someone, everywhere, has thought of everything. But the Drake is full of surprises.

Take the Pleasure Menu, for example. It's not about soft sheets, bubble bath or a snifter of Cognac. It's a mini-bar for bed that includes connoisseurs' condoms, a colourful plume meant to tickle and other toys for lusty liaisons.

Drake: Lakefront food and wine

The Drake Devonshire Inn is a cottage-inspired get-

away on the shore of a Lake Ontario bay, so tranquility, beautiful views and lakefront dining are paramount. Built around a repurposed iron foundry, the Drake Devonshire will be an instant linchpin of tourism in a peaceful, mostly residential town that dates to the Loyalist times of the 1700s.

The exterior of the new inn is a comfortable white and grey with sunny pops of bright yellow doors and rugged natural wood. The 11 guest rooms and two suites have a choice of dramatic lake views or pastoral garden-creek scenery. Some have balconies and they all have

original artwork, flat-screen TVs, Bose sound systems and bathrooms with large glass showers. There is indoor warmth around the living-room fireplace and outdoor coziness at the firepits.

The traditional scene stops there. The bright, airy interiors blend contemporary artwork with country antiques and rustic whitewashed wood. The Devonshire is a buzzy brew of florals, stripes, colours and a mosaic of floor tiles and patterns, with design hits such as a mural of graffiti by FAILE, a duo of accomplished street artists (who underscore their influence with an all-caps name).

IF YOU GO

Wellington, Ont., is a four-hour drive (380 kilometres) from Montreal via Highway 20 west and Ontario Highway 401 to Exit 566.

The Drake Devonshire Inn, Wellington, Ont.: 613-399-1851, drakedevonshire.ca; \$229- \$449 weekdays or \$259-\$519 weekends for two, including Wi-Fi, Malin + Goetz toiletries, in-room Bose Bluetooth speakers, game room, evening turndown. After Nov. 1, \$159-\$499.

The Drake Hotel, Toronto: 866-372-5386, 416-531-5042, thedrakehotel.ca; rooms (weekdays) start at \$160 (one person, one twin bed); \$219 for a queen; suites cost more; incl. Internet, iPod library, access to 99 Sudbury Gym. Weekend rates are higher. Parking, \$25.

Prince Edward County: 800-640-4717, pecc-chamber.com, prince-edward-county.com, winecountryontario.ca; princeedwardcountyywine.ca, thegreatwaterway.com/ prince-edward-county.

Wellington: discoverwellington.ca.

Whereas the Drake in Toronto helped create a downtown scene, the Drake on the lake plans to blend into the cultural and culinary tableaux.

That means ambrosial wine tastings of Prince Edward County's finest products and seasonal cuisine that Stober calls "from farm and lake to table." The menu will feature the Drake's signature blueberry scones and Devonshire eggs Benny for breakfast; artisanal cheeses, market-fresh tomatoes, greens and berries; and such mains as sweet-corn risotto, lamb confit from McColl Farms, rotisserie chicken from Prinsen Farms and roasted pickerel from Kendall Dewey Fisheries.

The Devonshire is a modern take on a classic inn, but it wouldn't be a Drake without a frisky edge. To that end, guests enjoy kinetic art, a micro-Drake General Store — and the Pleasure Menu.

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