

HOTEL INTEL

THE MATH IS QUITE SIMPLE: FOUR SEASONS, FIVE STARS

High-end hotel chain opening new location in Montreal on de la Montagne Street



ROCHELLE LASH

In the beginning, Isadore Sharp said: Let there be light.

If there were a god of contemporary, global five-star hospitality, it would be Sharp, the Toronto-based architect, builder, hotelier par excellence and founder and chairman of Four Seasons Hotels and Resorts.



Isadore Sharp

With the Montreal opening of the prestigious brand planned for spring 2019, I looked at the origins of Four Seasons, arguably the world's top luxury hotel company.

GENESIS

Sharp had a few startups in Toronto during the 1960s, including a motor lodge and a large conference hotel, but the real forerunner of today's elegant Four Seasons concept was a contemporary 1970 glass tower, the Inn on the Park in London, England.

It wasn't quite the biblical Genesis 1:3, where it was written, "And God said, 'Let there be light,' and there was light." But

Sharp had created what would be the world's first modern, top-tier hotel.

Sure, a century of aristocrats frequented clubby grandes dames like the Plaza Athénée in Paris, Claridge's in London and the Ritz-Carlton in Montreal. But Sharp fostered a revolution and replaced the turgid formality of the posh old palaces, doing away with dark brocade drapes and deep-sixing stuffy dining rooms.

"We wanted something different," said Sharp via email. "Our goal was to offer luxury but without being stuffy or formal."

"We aimed to be comfortable, familiar and friendly while still known for the highest levels of quality and service."

COMPANY CREDO

With a firm philosophy of attentive service for all, blue blood or not, Sharp and his team coddled and cosseted a new breed of jet-setting executives and moneyed leisure travellers. And he invoked another sacred maxim, one that goes back to Confucius and has been attributed to virtually every religion, including Moses, Jesus and Mohammed.

"Our guiding principle is the Golden Rule — to do unto others as you would have them do unto you," said Sharp. "Personalized, consistent service marked by respect and kindness is a distinguishing element of Four Seasons, and we achieve this by empowering our people."

As outlined in his 2009 book, *Four Seasons: The Story Of A Business Philosophy*, the company's other defining factors include a focus on medium-sized hotels, and a policy of managing — rather than owning — properties that carry its banner.



The Four Seasons Hotel and Private Residences Montreal will be a glass tower built on the site of the former Hôtel de la Montagne. The architects are Lemay and Sid Lee Architecture, both of Montreal. *FOUR SEASONS*

It's working. In one recent year, Forbes Travel Guide awarded five-star ratings to 33 Four Seasons worldwide, the most of any banner. They include Toronto, Vancouver, Whistler, New York, Beverly Hills and London.

Following the post-Sept. 11 tourism downturn, the company went private in 2006, and 95 per cent of its shares are held by two equal partners: Microsoft founder Bill Gates and Prince Al-Waleed bin Talal of Saudi Arabia. Sharp owns the rest.

MONTREAL, 2019

Montreal soon will be in the coveted club for the second time. L'Hôtel Quatre Saisons operated on Sherbrooke St. from 1976, the Olympic year, until 1994 under Swiss-born general manager Kuno Fasel. The property then became an Omni.

The 2019 version, Four Seasons Hotel and Private Residences Montreal (the English banner is used globally), is a glass tower that will be built on the site of the former Hôtel de la Montagne on de la Montagne Street near Ste-Catherine Street.

The return to Montreal is a harbinger of good times. The company's reputation for excellence and its international presence — more than 100 hotels in nearly 50 countries — will attract elite travellers for business, culture and cuisine.

"The Four Seasons brand is truly international and a significant reflection of the recent growth in luxury travel to Montreal," said Yves Lalumière, president and CEO of Tourisme Montréal. "The opening certainly contributes to the city's sophisticated DNA."

Four Seasons will encompass 168 rooms and suites with décor by Paris-based Gilles & Boissier, plus 18 condo residences, a restaurant, a spa, a fitness centre, a sky-lit indoor pool and a fifth-floor ballroom with a terrace. The project's architects are Lemay and Sid Lee Architecture, both of Montreal.

The third floor will be a social hub, a trio of linked spaces — the lounge, the restaurant Marcus and its terrace — all designed by the Montreal firm Atelier Zébulon Perron. And this floor will connect indoors to Holt Renfrew Ogilvy, an expansion and reconfiguration of the existing Ogilvy that will launch in 2020.

Marcus is named for New York-based celebrity and TV chef Marcus Samuelsson, who is known for his casual American cuisine with a Southern accent.

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