



The stylish Vogue has reopened after a total makeover as part of the Curio Collection by Hilton, with a dramatic entrance by Sid Lee Design. CURIO COLLECTION BY HILTON

HOTEL INTEL

Montreal’s revamped Vogue partners with chef Antonio Park



ROCHELLE LASH

Vogue Hôtel Montreal Downtown, a boutique bijou on the edge of the Golden Square Mile, has made a stunning second debut as part of the upscale Curio Collection by Hilton. The super-stylish Vogue has completed an all-encompassing redesign, emerging as a vision of easy modern elegance, with an aura of light floating through sensual curved spaces. Most momentous, one of Montreal’s most respected chefs, Antonio Park of the gourmet temple Park in Westmount, is a major player. He has opened YAMA, a sensational dining spot serving inspired cocktails and artful cuisine with his signature global ingenuity. Adding a French-Montreal accent, the Vogue’s Café Bazin is a treasure of scrumptious pastries and cakes, a tiny pâtisserie for take-away. This precious stretch of de la Montagne St. has been re-

talized, partly because of Holt Renfrew Ogilvy across the street. Plus, the Vogue is halfway between the Musée des Beaux-Arts Montréal and the Bell Centre, so guests can score a Montreal lifestyle hat trick of shopping, hockey and culture. Since it opened in 1989, this chic getaway has been a celebrity destination. Back in the day, I met Brad Pitt, Matt Damon and George Clooney in the lobby. Other past guests include Bill Gates, Luciano Pavarotti, Eddie Murphy, David Bowie and Céline Dion. That’s a testament to the Vogue’s deep-rooted attentive service, air of discretion, spacious accommodations and pivotal location. “So many people have great memories of our beloved hotel,” said Gaurav Gupta, president of Artifact Group. “We have re-created the Vogue’s timeless refinement and flair, but our interiors are in the moment. “And our culinary collaboration with the amazing chef Antonio Park and pastry wizard Bertrand Bazin is already being embraced by both guests and the local community.” **Dining:** It takes an all-star team to produce the virtuoso dishes and drinks at YAMA. The chef

and Park group director Simon Schmidt have recruited people from Montreal’s finest places, including executive chef Konstantin Chakhnov, bar chef Justin Daigle and maître d’ Samuel Gagnon-Mackay. True to Park’s unique approach, the cuisine has roots in Asia and South America, with Euro techniques and the finest and freshest of Canadian ingredients. Standouts include sushi tacos wrapped in nori and akami tuna with caviar, plus theatrical cocktails elevated with almond dust, meringue and charred citrus, as well as a unique cognac flambé with rare A5 wagyu beef atop. At dinner, gastronomes swoon over the elaborate tasting menu of delicacies like duck breast with foie gras, wagyu beef and rib-eye, followed by sorbet, a pre-dessert, a dessert and a surprise finale. The à la carte route adds raw choices like maki and tiradito, plus seared octopus with spicy Korean Romanesco, tuna with ginger, miso black cod, lamb with lemon grass and scallops with yuzu and pisco. It’s enhanced by YAMA’s sophisticated wine list and Park Selection sake.

IF YOU GO

Vogue Hôtel Montreal Downtown, Curio Collection by Hilton: 514-285-5555, 844-442-8746, hilton.com; 1425 de la Montagne St. Accessible rooms available soon. Pets, \$49 per visit. Hilton Honors Program/App apply. Artifact Group (formerly Sageblan Investments) also owns Hyatt Place Montreal Downtown. **Price:** Rooms from \$450, suites from \$850, including in-room Nespresso, WiFi, fitness centre, business centre. Discount for advance bookings and CARP/CAA. Valet parking, \$54. **YAMA:** Breakfast, lunch, dinner, bar, in-room dining, banquets. Café Bazin: Take-out pâtisserie. **Tourisme Montréal:** 514-844-5400, 877-BONJOUR (877-266-5687), mtl.org.

The lunch and bar menu has apps like burrata, Japanese dumplings, chicken teriyaki, plus the irresistible sushi tacos (salmon, tuna, foie gras, shrimp and wagyu) and fancy twists on a double “smash” burger and a club sandwich with duck bacon

and kimchi fries. Breakfast, inspired by Café Bazin Westmount, features barista coffee, smoothies, shakshuka, French toast, an elaborate egg sandwich on a brioche or a chia-berry bowl. **Interiors:** Sid Lee Design fashioned the Vogue’s seductive entrance with a dramatic two-storey glass façade and a metallic column that generate light, shimmer and radiance. Then, rounded limestone walls flow through the lobby’s open lounges to YAMA’s oval bar and dining rooms. It’s airy and cool, but there’s warmth in textures and colours like ivory leather, cinnamon suede and charcoal tweed, as well as plants and organic materials: chalky limestone walls, travertine floors and natural wood panels. The circular sofas and tables draw people together. You can choose a see-and-be-seen spot or one that says, “We want to be alone.” I breezed in recently when the bar was hopping with a well-heeled crowd. The guest room décor by Camdi Design has a polished residential look, using walnut and ebony furniture and mellow recessed lighting. The 148 rooms and suites are models of understated luxury, with lustrous fabrics, mirrored makeup tables and fine Frette bedding. It’s no wonder VIPs flock here for comfort, extended sojourns and private parties. The Apartment Suites and the Presidential Suite have fireplaces, Fisher & Paykel kitchens, living-dining rooms and two bathrooms, one with a soaking tub.

Verona is for lovers

Famous for fictional romance, Roman city is truly a historic joy, **Rick Steves** writes.

Between bustling Milan and touristy Venice — about two hours from each — is Verona, a welcome sip of pure, easygoing Italy. Made famous by Shakespeare’s star-crossed lovers, Verona is one of Italy’s most-visited cities — second in the Veneto region only to Venice in population and artistic importance. If you don’t need world-class sights, this town is a joy. Shakespeare’s Romeo and Juliet made Verona a household word. The House of Juliet, where the real-life Cappello family once lived, is a crass and throbbing mob scene. The tiny, admittedly romantic courtyard is a spectacle in itself, with visitors from all over the world posing on the almost believable balcony and taking snapshots of each other rubbing Juliet’s bronze breast, hoping to get lucky in love. The city is so famous for love that it gets countless letters addressed simply to “Juliet, Verona, Italy.” A volunteer group, the Juliet Club, responds to these mostly lovesick people. (They got particularly busy after the 2010 movie Letters to Juliet, about a girl who finds a letter while visit-

ing the House of Juliet and travels through Italy to help reunite the author with her lost love.) Despite the romantic fiction, the town is packed with genuine history. Because ancient Romans considered Verona an ideal resting spot before crossing the Alps, the city has a wealth of Roman ruins. The well-preserved amphitheatre — the third-largest in the Roman world — dates from the first century AD and still retains most of its original stone. Over the centuries, crowds here of up to 25,000 spectators have cheered Roman gladiator battles, medieval executions, and modern plays — including Verona’s popular summer opera festival, which takes advantage of the arena’s famous acoustics. Corso Porta Borsari was the main drag of Roman Verona. A stroll here makes for a fun, ancient scavenger hunt. Remnants of the town’s illustrious past — chips of Roman columns, medieval reliefs, fine old facades, and fossils in marble — are scattered among modern-day fancy shop windows. You’ll end up at Piazza Erbe, Verona’s market square, where



Love is in the air at the House of Juliet, where you’ll find amorous graffiti, couples romancing, and Juliet’s statue. RICK STEVES

vendors come to slice and sell whatever’s in season. This bustling piazza is a photographer’s delight: Its pastel buildings corral the fountains, pigeons, and people who have congregated here since Roman times, when it was a forum. Hovering above the square is a column-topping Venetian lion, reminding locals of Venice’s conquest of their city in 1405. At that time the square had been ringed by the towers of the city’s proud noble families. But the Renaissance nobles who followed their forefathers showed off instead with palaces sporting finely painted facades. By the 16th century, Verona had become known as “the painted city” — and plenty of those Renaissance remnants survive. Today Piazza Erbe is for locals,

who start their evening with an aperitivo here. It’s a trendy scene, as young Veronans fill the bars to enjoy their refreshing spritzes, olives, and chips. Verona has its share of excellent eateries. One of my happiest Verona memories is eating with my friend Franklin at a popular enoteca (wine bar). The carne cruda (raw beef) was, as Franklin put it, “the smile of a beautiful woman you can still recall after 10 years. You never forget her.” The mortadella (Italian-style bologna — not a high-end meat) was served with black truffle ... and it was exquisite. (Is Spam also just a side-of-truffle away from exquisite?) Then came the best polenta I’d ever tasted, served with anchovies. As it turns out, anchovies and polenta are a “good mar-

riage.” For dessert: a plate of voluptuous slices of cheese. “Even if we do not talk,” said Franklin, “with these cheeses we have a good conversation.” As I held the warm and happy tire of my full tummy, I thought about how Italians live life with abandon — and how they enjoy their food. Besides eating, for me the highlight of Verona is the evening passeggiata (stroll). It’s a multi-generational affair. Like peacocks, the young and nubile spread their wings across the wide sidewalk promenade, made broad by the town’s 17th-century Venetian overlords so the town’s beautiful people could see and be seen in all their finery. Whenever I stroll here, I find myself surrounded by little love stories — romantic snapshots fluttering in and out of my world like a butterfly. A guy on a bike pedals gracefully by, his girlfriend sitting on the handlebars embracing him. A woman tells me her husband is her mezza mela — half an apple. Apparently, when soulmates find each other in Italy, it makes the apple whole. I don’t know if all of this love is related to the Romeo and Juliet hype — or if it’s just the natural high that comes from living in such a joyful and cultured place. Rick Steves (www.ricksteves.com) writes European guidebooks, hosts travel shows on public TV and radio, and organizes European tours. You can email Rick at rick@ricksteves.com and follow his blog on Facebook.