

# Queen of Quebec City unveils renovations

Château makeover creates new dining, updates 400 rooms



ROCHELLE LASH  
CHECKING IN

Long live the queen. Fairmont Le Château Frontenac is wrapping up a dramatic \$75-million, top-to-bottom makeover that has affected everything from the regal crest on the staff uniforms all the way through the lobby, dining spaces, guest rooms and 12 kilometres of corridors. It's an exciting, fresh approach for the hotel's loyal subjects.

The five-star queen dates to 1893 and its medieval- and Renaissance-inspired architecture makes it as much of a landmark as Hôtel du Parlement, the provincial capital buildings, and La Citadelle, home of the Royal 22nd Regiment (the famous Van Doos who are celebrating their 100th anniversary in 2014 with a new museum).

Le Château Frontenac always will be exceptional for its majestic summit setting and views of the St. Lawrence River and Old Quebec, but even royalty must keep up. The hotel has brightened its aristocratic lobby, spruced up its business centre and Grand Ballroom, expanded the fitness centre and added meeting rooms.

Groups — the convention and cruise people — now have their own check-in desks on the lower level. And the new lobby shops include Lambert & Co., an adorable boutique of Quebec woollens, fur pillows and wooden sculpture.

The Spa du Château also has moved. Since the renos, it is a luxurious sanctuary with seven treatment rooms on the sixth floor; adjacent to the indoor swimming pool and the impressive outdoor sun terrace. (That terrace is my favourite Château summer place; it's a treasured oasis of lounging, especially after a day of sightseeing.)

On the accommodations front, the hotel renovated two-thirds of its 600-plus guest rooms (the rest had been done in recent years).



Bistro Le Sam is one of three new dining spots at Fairmont Le Château Frontenac.

PHOTOS: LE CHÂTEAU FRONTENAC

They're now more contemporary, decorated in soothing neutrals with two pastel colour schemes: My room had butter-coloured, art-deco leather club chairs and next door, my cycling pal Rae Turley recouped on a turquoise Edwardian-inspired fainting couch. Fairmont Gold, the posh hotel-within-a-hotel on the highest five floors, ramps it up with magazine-worthy decor in elegant ivory with ebony detailing, plus satin pillows, elite sheets and modern furniture with clean lines. Fairmont Gold also has a larger, more luxurious lounge, with the customary private concierge, continental breakfast and afternoon canapés.

The transformation is an astounding feat of interior design: With all the hotel's turrets and facades, no two rooms are exactly alike.

Apart from accommodations, the biggest change is in dining. Two great new chefs with Michelin credentials, executive chef Baptiste Peupion and restaurant chef Stéphane Modat, have been cooking up tantalizing dishes since 2013. The kitchens have been rebuilt with the latest in culinary technology and Le Château has created three



Fairmont Le Château Frontenac, a landmark of Quebec City, is winding up a \$75-million, top-to-bottom renovation this month.

progressive options, all on the lobby level, and all overlooking the St. Lawrence:

- The smart Bistro Le Sam, which has brassy navy and gold decor and an open kitchen. Here, mixologists amuse with martinis and mocktails and casual gourmet fare includes lobster mac 'n cheese, Cornish hen or braised ribs.
- The dazzling 1608 Wine and Cheese Bar where le tout Québec will meet for drinks, with a rare selection of Quebec cheeses and charcuterie. A striking, contemporary

chandelier and rich leather and brass seating make the clubby 1608 both stately and stylish.

- The chic Le Champlain, which has the same name as the former dining room, but it's an all-new space with the glamorous sheen of silvery decor. Quebec gastronomy features venison, foie gras, Matane shrimp, North Atlantic halibut, Chantecler poultry, lobster stew and grilled beef with marrow.

The modernization has been done with respect for

the past, and I was charmed by the contrasts. The lobby is more upbeat, with sky-blue carpets and mirrored reception desks, but the century-old cherubs and griffons still dance on the hand-painted ceilings, and the handsome woodwork speaks of a noble background. A museum-like display on the lower-level showcases archeological artifacts from Quebec's early days. And, even in this instant e-world, a souvenir shop sells postcards that you can send via the hotel's own

## IF YOU GO

Fairmont Le Château Frontenac: 800-441-1414, 418-692-3861, [www.fairmont.com/frontenac](http://www.fairmont.com/frontenac), [www.cuisinechateau.com](http://www.cuisinechateau.com); Quebec City. Pet-friendly, \$35 per day.

Prices: Summer offer until Sept. 30: third night is free. Rates fluctuate; rooms, approximately \$299-\$389 per night, double occ.; suites, \$699-\$2,000, including indoor pool, whirlpool, steam room, fitness centre. Children under 18 stay for free. The Nouveau Château Package, from \$359 for two, per night, includes buffet breakfast and \$50 dining credit. Other packages with Parc Aquarium du Québec and Musée de la Civilisation. Prices will decrease late-Oct. to April.

Extras: parking (free for electric and hybrid cars), spa treatments. Fairmont Presidents' Club includes Wi-Fi; Fairmont Gold adds private lounge.

Quebec City Tourism: 877-783-1608, [www.quebecregion.com](http://www.quebecregion.com)

brass mailboxes. Back to the future: Le Château soon will launch a historic guided tour app, for both iTunes and Android.

Le Château Frontenac is prime VIP territory. Churchill and Roosevelt, with Mackenzie King as intermediary, planned the Second World War's invasion of Normandy (aka D-Day) at the top-secret 1943 Quebec Conference held at Le Château and La Citadelle. Later, the guest register boasted Queen Elizabeth, Princess Grace of Monaco and showbiz kings Sir Paul McCartney, Steven Spielberg and Leonardo DiCaprio.

Clearly, Quebec City is the place for a selfie with a star: Billy Joel and Lady Gaga are among 1,000 performers of Le Festival d'été de Québec, July 3-13, which will feature nearly 300 indoor and outdoor shows. (888-992-5200, [www.infofestival.com](http://www.infofestival.com)).

Rochelle@rochellelash.com  
Twitter: rochellelash

The writer was a guest of the hotel, which did not review or approve this article.

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