



The rooftop terrace at Hôtel William Gray yields a wide panorama, including the Old Port and the Casino de Montréal. PHOTOS: HÔTEL WILLIAM GRAY

# HÔTEL WILLIAM GRAY REFLECTS NOW AND THEN OF OLD MONTREAL



ROCHELLE LASH  
Checking In

The new Hôtel William Gray personifies both the deep history and the contemporary cool of Old Montreal.

The hotel is a progressive fusion of a stone house from the 1700s and a glass tower of 2016, serves terrific food and great drinks, and opens onto Place Jacques Cartier, where lively street life brings together locals and tourists.

And it is already a hit, after being open only two months. U2 frontman Bono breezed by me in the lobby recently, on the way to a meeting upstairs with Microsoft founder Bill Gates and Prime Minister Justin Trudeau.

**Boutique, but big:** The William Gray looks and feels like a boutique hotel, but it is a complete package. The lobby is an inviting hangout with low-slung sofas, a gas fireplace and a communal high-top table, which was packed with lap-toppers when I visited.

The hotel has 127 guest rooms and suites, plus ballrooms and conference space. The stylish



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bistro and grill, Maggie Oakes, has taken Old Montreal by storm. And the hotel's wow factor is its rooftop terrace, which yields a 180-degree panorama of the St-Lawrence River, Marché Bonsecours, the Old Port and the Casino de Montréal. I can only imagine how exciting this would be as a vantage point for fireworks from La Ronde and the planned light show of the Jacques-Cartier Bridge.

Hôtel William Gray also has partnered with two notable local companies that operate off the lobby: Café Olimpico, the esteemed Italian coffee and pastry shop in Mile End; and Off the Hook, which launched OTH Boutique, selling hip street wear labels like Naked & Famous and Vans.

Scheduled for late November are a full-service spa with an outdoor pool and a fitness room. The spa will offer massages, esthetic and body treatments, a hydrotherapy circuit with a sauna and steam, and a salt-encrusted room for halotherapy, which is believed to have respiratory benefits.

**Design, décor:** Hôtel William Gray's architectural blend of old and new was created by Bélique Legault Thuot Architectes, who merged a new eight-storey glass tower and two historic buildings, Maison Edward-William-Gray (1785) and Maison du Cabinet-de-Côme-Séraphin-Cherrier (1877).

Indoors, Camdi Design has fashioned a bold contemporary look with slate floors, stone walls and a slab of marble for the

reception desk. Graffiti-splashed murals by Montreal artist Alan Ganev add hip street vibe.

The rooms and suites are bathed in soft neutrals, heightened by black metal light fixtures, sheer white curtains and dark wood furniture. Luxe accents include down comforters over pillow-top mattresses, bathrobes, Frette towels, large flat screen TVs and Bang & Olufsen Bluetooth sound systems.

**Food & drink:** Chef Derek Bocking, a former Top Chef Canada contestant, cooks a balance of vegetables, crudo, creative dishes and grilled meat and fish.

Maggie Oakes (named for Edward William Gray's wife, Margaret Oakes) is a handsome bistro with an open kitchen and a large dining space decked out with black leather seating and touches of walnut, ebony, brass and white marble.

The restaurant's outstanding design incorporates Bocking's ingredients: A living wall of herbs and micro-greens is his garden, and massive cuts of fine beef are on display in glass dry-aging coolers. A world of wine is on view, so diners can get ideas while on the way to their tables.

And the food? Bocking brings experience from Montreal's trendiest restos, such as Globe, Le Pois Penché and Îcone.

At Maggie Oakes, patrons can start with a raw bar of Atlantic oysters, P.E.I. lobster and Quebec snow crab, then tuck into other starters such as green pea soup with garlic-flower sour cream, compressed melon in Ungava gin, lamb stew poutine, bison tartare and scallops crudo.

Bocking does wonders with vegetarian mains — linguine with roasted cauliflower, sweet potato manicotti with ricotta and grilled peaches with quinoa — and his veggie side dishes are creative: kale purée, watercress pesto, green tomato chimichurri or tagliatelle of carrots.

The grill features AAA Canadian beef, including rib, T-bone and Porterhouse steaks, and some of the other main courses are pork chops, roast cod and duck breast.

Two seasonal spaces have boosted the buzz. Maggie Oakes opens onto a busy, trendy patio on Place Jacques Cartier, where the entertainment of the passing parade is free. And the rooftop Terrasse William Gray serves drinks and small plates such as lobster and shrimp rolls, confit duck legs, and the sǎn míng zhī burger with miso beef, cilantro, shiitake mushrooms and wasabi.

Cocktails and the fab view top it all off.

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