

InterContinental reflects Yorkville chic

Hot spot on Toronto's Mink Mile has added even more glam to its luxe lobby



ROCHELLE LASH
Checking In

The InterContinental Toronto Yorkville is a sophisticated getaway that reflects a posh slice of Canada's largest city: interesting food, chic surroundings and a staff that speaks 15 languages.

It's on Bloor St., known as Toronto's Mink Mile, a thoroughfare of posh shops such as Cartier, Hermès — and even Winners.

This stretch of Bloor also is called the Cultural Corridor for its exceptional arts venues, including the Royal Ontario Museum and the Telus Centre for Performance and Learning at the Royal Conservatory of Music.

With more than 170 guest rooms and 32 suites on a modest eight storeys, the InterContinental Yorkville has a boutique feel.

But it is part of an international luxury brand and it has enough pleasures to fulfill almost any visit: a penthouse lap pool with a sundeck, a gift shop, the popular Proof Vodka Bar and the delicious Signatures restaurant. Its outdoor summertime patio, Skylounge, has been singled out in O, Oprah's magazine.

"About 30 per cent of our guests are repeat clients," said front office manager Rolf Kenda. "We are compact enough to establish rapport, but we are full-service."

The InterContinental Yorkville is a hot spot during the annual September celeb-fest, TIFF (Toronto International Film Festival).

Some of the A-listers who have visited for various events in recent years include Justin Bieber, Charlize Theron, George Clooney, Brad Pitt and Kevin Spacey. And Prime Minister Justin Trudeau was a guest here during his appearance at the 2016 Gay Pride Parade.

What's new: The petite, luxe lobby is flush with new decor: stylish velvet club chairs and sprays of white orchids spilling over rich

marble floors.

Signatures restaurant, once draped in sombre maroon and navy, now is bathed in light from a wall of glass. It has been redone with an inviting urban cottage look of bleached oak furniture, cleverly mismatched armchairs and soft shades of pale greys and cloudy whites.

Signatures is roomy and relaxed, with spaces for all diners: a tiny bar for singles, cushy booths for intimate business or pleasure and large refectory tables for families and friends. **Food and drink:** Executive chef Chris Perera hails from Sri Lanka and has brought a world of experience from as far away as the Maldives and the Emirates.

Here, at InterContinental Yorkville Toronto, the cuisine is fresh, based largely on local ingredients and seasoned with herbs from Perera's rooftop garden as well as more exotic flavours.

The dinner menu features classics like steak and foie gras, and also bass with edamame and saffron, salmon with tomato confit and fennel, chicken with kale and bok choy, and showstoppers such as bouillabaisse in lobster broth and venison with cherries and plums.

Even breakfast and weekend brunch stand out, with choices such as strawberry shortcake French toast, duck egg quiche, kippers and eggs, charcuterie, chicken sausage and smoothies blended with mango, berries, soy milk or kale. The health section focuses on bran loaf, steel-cut oats with fruit or muesli with nuts and honey.

Proof Vodka Bar is a handy pre-show stop if you are heading to the Telus Centre. It stocks 50 different vodkas — martinis are the specialty here — and serves suppers of burgers and ricotta ravioli, as well as tapas like paella, sriracha fritters and a connoisseur's selection of cheeses and Spanish charcuterie including Serrano ham.

What to do: The hotel's Chef Concierge Carolina Avaria (she uses the title "chef," not chief) is president of Les Clefs d'Or Canada, an organization of the best hotel advisers.

She's strong on creative ways to experience Toronto, such as



The newly reimagined Signatures restaurant — with its bleached oak furniture and soft pale grey and cloudy white shades — serves contemporary Canadian-inspired cuisine. *INTERCONTINENTAL TORONTO YORKVILLE*

IF YOU GO

InterContinental Toronto Yorkville: 877-660-8550, 416-960-5200, toronto.intercontinental.com; 220 Bloor St. W., Toronto. **Price:** Rates fluctuate and currently start at \$219 per night for rooms (suites cost more), including indoor lap pool and outdoor deck, 24-hour fitness centre. It's free to sign up for IHG Business Rewards, and Wi-Fi is included even for on-the-spot members. Pet-friendly. Extra: massage service, valet or self-parking. **Packages:** Toronto Cultural

sampling tapas in Kensington Market; lunch in Osgoode Hall, home of the Law Society of Canada, where lawyers congregate in their formal court robes; or a Segway tour through the Distillery Historic District (available at certain times).

The Toronto Christmas Market

Getaway includes Royal Ontario Museum, Bata Shoe Museum, Gardiner Museum, valet parking, breakfast. The Google+ deal adds dining and room upgrades. The Sounds in the City package includes concerts at the Royal Conservatory of Music.

Signatures Restaurant: Breakfast daily; lunch Mon.-Fri.; brunch Sat.-Sun.; dinner Tues.-Sat. **Tourism:** Toronto: 416-987-1739, seetorontonow.com; Ontario Tourism, live chats at: ontariotravel.net.

will ring in the holiday season in the Distillery District, Nov. 18 to Dec. 22. It's a delightful street fair of treasures ranging from German music boxes to unique pieces by Bergo designs. Food includes Maple Leaf Fudge and windmill cookies from The Dutch Shop.

Culture: The current blockbuster at the Royal Ontario Museum is Chihuly, curated by Diane Charbonneau of the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, and showcasing dazzling, colourful glass and plastic sculptures of Dale Chihuly (416-586.8000, rom.on.ca, until Jan. 2).

If you would like to take home artworks, the Old Master Gallery is just off the InterContinental's lobby. The tiny shop sells — like hotcakes — fine paintings ranging from 17th-century French portraits to Canada's Group of Seven (416-700-2787, old-master-gallery.com).

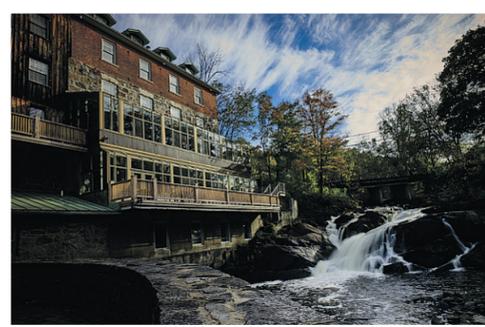
TIFF goes Trekkie this season. TIFF Bell Lightbox (a year-round presentation of the Toronto International Film Festival) is marking Star Trek's 50th anniversary with a marathon of events and screenings (888-599-8433, tiff.net, until Dec. 30).

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