

HOTEL INTEL

KIMPTON LAUNCHES BOUTIQUE BRAND IN TORONTO'S ANNEX

New contemporary hotel steps away from museums, concert venues



ROCHELLE LASH

The new Kimpton Saint George Hotel is a supremely comfortable boutique getaway in the busy metropolis of Toronto.

It's both part of the action and a pleasant escape in the Bloor St. neighbourhood called The Annex. This is a leafy, mostly residential area known for the University of Toronto and also as the former home of the Duchess of Sussex Meghan Markle when she was shooting the TV show *Suits*.

The experience: I arrived at Kimpton Saint George tired, chilled and hungry, and I was cured immediately. I rested on downy pillows and Italian sheets by Frette in my guest room. Then I perked up at the Kimpton's 5 p.m. wine hour, with a lightly spiced Cab Merlot from Pillitteri Estates Winery in Niagara-on-the-Lake. Soon, I was feasting on comfort food at The Fortunate Fox, just off the lobby.

The Kimpton Saint George is the first of its brand in Toronto. The hotel is purely boutique that is friendly, helpful and inviting. The guest rooms have cards that offer courtesy amenities ("Forgot it? We've got it"), such as tooth-paste or cellphone chargers. And the concierge texted me periodically to see if I needed anything.

Lifestyle means a lot, so the Kimpton Saint George provides yoga mats in every room and loans bicycles.

The look: If you know the area, the Kimpton Saint George is a complete overhaul of the former Holiday Inn Toronto Bloor Yorkville. It has 188 rooms, including 21 suites of various sizes, plus a meeting space and a fitness room.

The interiors by Mason Studio

IF YOU GO

Kimpton Saint George
Contact: 888-563-2004, 416-968-0010, kimptonsaint-george.com
Address: 280 Bloor St. W., Toronto. InterContinental Hotels Group (IHG) rewards apply.
Rates: Rates fluctuate, starting at \$299 in lowest seasons (currently starting around \$379), including 5 p.m. wine hour, morning coffee/tea, fitness centre, yoga mat, bicycles. Wi-Fi included for IHG members (guests can enrol on the spot).

The Fortunate Fox
Contact: 416-972-6559, thefortunatefox.com
Hours: Mon.-Fri. from 6 a.m. to late night; Sat.-Sun. from 8 a.m.
Toronto info: 800-499-2514, 416-203-2500, seetorontonow.com; Ontario Tourism live chats at: ontariotravel.net.

of Toronto are simple with a relaxed, residential feeling. The intimate lobby "living room" has a fireplace, flannel sofas and windows opening onto Bloor St., and it really is like a chic home with art books and collectibles. Mason added clever design elements such as wooden archways to warm up the public spaces and to reflect the neighbourhood's Victorian roots.

Throughout the hotel, subtle, deep colours like teal blue, cinnamon, toffee and moss green create a soothing, sophisticated ambience. Linen walls, sisal rugs and rattan armoires add a home-



The new Kimpton Saint George recently opened in The Annex district of Toronto, in a space formerly occupied by the Holiday Inn Toronto Bloor Yorkville. PHOTOS: NAOMI FINLAY FOR KIMPTON SAINT GEORGE

spun nod to nature. The artwork — contemporary prints, water-colours and ceramics — is mostly by Canadian artists, including muralist Tisha Myles.

There's a lightly retro Mid-Century look to the curved armchairs and round lamps, and the suites (not the rooms) have turntables with vinyl by Canadian artists — I spotted LPs by the Tragically Hip, The Weeknd and Leonard Cohen.

Food: The Fortunate Fox calls itself a gastro-pub, which means that it delivers hefty portions of good casual food, plus craft beer and cocktails.

The Fox has several TVs tuned to sports as well as games for customers to play. On Mondays, it's bingo, plus \$5 bourbon and \$10 burgers; Tuesdays focus on darts, with \$5 beer and \$10-per-pound wings, and so on, with music or trivia every night, winding up on Sundays with karaoke, prime rib and half-price wine.

The Fortunate Fox's cooking creativity starts at breakfast with short rib hash, blueberry French toast or the croque-madame, a fusion of smoked ham, beer cheddar, egg and potato.

The day-to-evening menu features mac 'n' cheese, chicken pot pie, chicken curry, braised short ribs and six kinds of wings — try the buffalo-butter or four-alarm. There are light touches such as the Cobb salad, tuna tartare and the portobello mushroom burger.

The Fortunate Fox has another, more epicurean, facet, but not in the pub. It catered the Kimpton's swish opening party with unique drinks and beautiful bites such as lobster rolls and grilled octopus.

The neighbourhood: The Annex, a



The Kimpton Saint George is a boutique hotel with a residential feel.

bohemian area known for its distinctive Victorian brick houses and a lively fraternity scene, is gentrifying apace.

The area still reflects historic charm with its vintage architecture, but indie boutiques and bistros are popping up along Bloor Street west of Yorkville's Mink Mile.

The Annex is home to (or near) some of Toronto's most illustrious cultural venues, including the Hot Docs Ted Rogers Cinema, Casa Loma, University of Toronto, the Tarragon Theatre, the Dance Cave (Lee's Palace), the Bata Shoe Museum, the Gardiner Museum, the Royal Conservatory of Music and the Royal Ontario Museum.

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