

HOTEL INTEL

Versante scales the heights of hospitality in Richmond, B.C.



ROCHELLE LASH

Pandemic protocol: Certain establishments in British Columbia, including restaurants, require proof of vaccination and photo ID (gov.bc.ca).

The Versante Hotel is a vibrant getaway that takes hospitality to a lofty new level in Richmond, B.C.

Bold, dynamic and cosmopolitan, Versante is a striking 14-storey glass tower that opened this summer, adjacent to the International Trade Centre, 20 minutes by car from downtown Vancouver and a handy three kilometres from Vancouver International Airport.

Aside from looks and location, Versante radiates sex appeal. It has inviting Asian-accented interiors, an alluring year-round outdoor pool and seductive cuisine at Bruno restaurant. Plus, Club Versante is offering an upscale social scene with indulgent new venues.

Bruno's Bar is a sophisticated hangout with a generous happy hour, delectable small plates, signature cocktails and select wines. Alaia, a fashionable penthouse lounge decked out in black and white, will have Champagne call buttons at each table. In the International Trade Centre, the Cask Whisky Vault will pair rare spirits with Japanese-inspired food, and O la Cha will be a French-Mediterranean bistro with a Champagne lounge.

"Versante already is a destination hotel and Bruno is a recognized gastronomic go-to, plus we're a new hot spot for drinks,"

said general manager David Curell. "We're much more than an airport stopover, and Vancouver's tourist attractions are a short hop away."

Vancouver's CHIL Interior Design has crafted an audaciously colourful look. The boutique lobby is a vision in coral and glass. Guest rooms are contemporary, with walls of plum, tangerine or aqua, and ornamented with floral wallpaper and painted dressers, as well as vivid still-life prints by Andy Dixon.

"It's definitely not cookie-cutter," said Curell, who also opened the Fogo Island Inn, a highly acclaimed hotel in Newfoundland and Labrador. "Versante's look is youthful, upbeat and distinctive."

Life of luxury: Perks include courtesy cars for airport transfers and local runs, and in select suites, Peloton bikes or Mirror Gyms by Lululemon that stream video workouts on your full-length mirror. Other tech features include energy-efficient windows that tint automatically and bedside buttons to control lighting.

The windows are floor-to-ceiling, and depending on your vantage point, they yield a jaw-dropping tableau: the SkyTrain rapid transit looping around aerial tracks, jets streaming through the sky, and the towering North Shore Mountains in the distance, all surrounded by a bend of the Fraser River.

The bathrooms are deluxe spa-style sanctuaries, with heated floors, glassed-in loos and rain showers. Most have double vanities and deep tubs in front of walls of windows, so you can bliss out on that beautiful view while you soak.

Dining: Bruno restaurant's executive chef William Lew transcends



The Versante Hotel, located in a striking 14-storey glass tower, opened this summer. PHOTOS: VERSANTE HOTEL



The Versante Hotel in Richmond, B.C., has an audaciously colourful look.

labels. "Our cuisine is seasonal and sustainable," he said. "And the ingredients represent the best of British Columbia's fishermen and artisan food producers, as well as that of our own farm and foragers."

Box Interior Design gave Bruno an understated look, with luxe leather seating in mellow earth tones. It's a subtle backdrop to Lew's unabashedly rich and theatrically presented food. Shellfish perch high atop a bed of river rocks, delicacies are served flambéed, and meat and poultry are garlanded with sprigs of lavender, sea asparagus or rosemary.

Favourites for lunch and/or dinner include crab croquettes, halibut with crab risotto, wild mushroom gnocchi, grilled

wagyu steak, and duck with truffles, foie gras, figs and a candied hazelnut crumble. Lew's sharing platters are triumphs of lobster, octopus, fish or a luscious 52-ounce bone-in rib-eye with Gorgonzola horseradish butter.

Even breakfast is masterful, featuring chia and berry pudding, smoked salmon hash, peanut butter smoothies, farm-fresh eggs with crab cakes or burrata-avocado toast.

The neighbourhood: Richmond is a busy residential, commercial, industrial and agricultural community of 224,000, and is tourist friendly. The New York Times has said Richmond is home to the best Asian cuisine in North America.

It is also known for golf and whale watching. Steveston Vil-

IF YOU GO

Versante Hotel: 604-242-7777, versantehotel.com; 8499 Bridgeport Rd., Richmond, B.C. Fully accessible. Pet friendly.

Price: Rooms start at approximately \$249; suites cost \$459-\$10,000, including additional amenities — bathrobes/slippers, Wi-Fi, Nespresso/Tealeaves, Red Flower natural toiletries, Dyson Supersonic hair dryer, 24-hour fitness with Peloton and Life Fitness. Versante app controls check-in/checkout, room key, lighting, 24-hour in-room dining, concierge requests, in-room entertainment.

Tourism information: Richmond, 877-247-0777, 604-271-8280, visitrichmondbc.com. British Columbia, hellobc.com. Vancouver, 604-683-2000, destinationvancouver.com.

lage, a quaint fishing neighbourhood, is popular for the Cannery Café, a waterfront boardwalk, gift boutiques and the Gulf of Georgia Cannery National Historic Site, which tells the history of Canada's West Coast fishing industry.

Versante's Retail Therapy Package includes a \$50 certificate for McArthurGlen, with shopping discounts and car service to tote your haul. And the hotel loans bicycles for use on Richmond's extensive cycling paths (richmond.ca). rochelle@rochellelash.com

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