

HOTEL INTEL

# W Toronto sizzles with style, youthful buzz



ROCHELLE LASH

Born to buzz, the dynamic W Toronto opened in July, just in time to join the city’s post-COVID upward trajectory of culture and commerce.

The W is youthful, colourful and unconventional, radiating next-generation affluence.

Architects-Alliance rehabbed the concrete exterior of a moribund Marriott on fashionable Bloor St., adjacent to Yorkville, adding dramatic panels of lights and a glowing glass elevator that sweeps guests skyward.

The designers of Sid Lee crafted fresh and flamboyant interiors, energized with decorative greenery and arty industrial metalwork, plus indoor-outdoor areas and a hint of 1970s retro decor with lots of round spaces and curved furniture.

The dining and drinking scene is maverick, too. Forget about old-school meat and potatoes. The gastronomy by executive chef Keith Pears and team is creative, refined, adventurous and very plant-forward.

All three venues — the seductive Living Room, the perky Public School Coffeehouse + Kitchen + Bar, and the socially sizzling rooftop Skylight — bring lounging, sharing, grazing and sipping to the next level.

**The city:** Toronto’s fun factor is growing exponentially, although Pearson airport is suffering popularity pains. The metropolitan area of North America’s fourth-largest city is home to 6.3 million residents, as well as Canada’s first Michelin Guide, and has a spot on Time magazine’s 2022 list of World’s Greatest Places.

The city of 140 languages,



W Toronto’s Living Room is a design knockout, its bar topped by a giant crown of amber lighting. W TORONTO

Toronto will hold its Diversity Festival on Aug. 27. The 47th edition of the Toronto International Film Festival will run from Sept. 8 to 18, attracting nearly a half-million movie enthusiasts to screenings including Steven Spielberg’s latest oeuvre, The Fabelmans, and premières of films starring Hugh Jackman, Jennifer Lawrence, Nicolas Cage and Frances McDormand.

**Food and drink:** The W’s Skylight (skylightrooftop.com) is a see-and-be-seen rooftop restaurant and terrace that was a smash hit within days of its recent opening. From 5 p.m. through sunset to late night, a grown-up crowd of suits, influencers and socialites gather for drinks, a raw bar, Mediterranean-inspired meze and main courses featuring vegetable options like cauliflower-chickpea stew. Seafood delicacies include lobster, oysters, za’atar-spiced

branzino, tuna crudo and charred octopus. The grill menu features a 22-ounce steak, beef kebabs, harissa chicken and roast lamb.

The Living Room is a design knockout, with leather and velvet furniture in jewel tones of ruby, amethyst and topaz, plus towering red tubes used as wall dividers; a circular bar topped by a giant crown of amber lighting; and a glowing indoor firepit in the round.

Cocktails are big and there will be mixology classes, but you are never far from a tulip of Champagne: the Living Room specializes in bubbly and has a Moët & Chandon vending machine. The tapas menu features favourites of Toronto neighbourhoods including jerk chicken skewers, a staple of Little Jamaica, and cod cheeks with masala and curry yogurt, popular in Little India.

Public School (publicschoolto-

ronto.com) is an all-day coffee house, diner and bar serving highly inventive, plant-driven food, as well as cocktails, wine and beer. Pears’ cuisine uses rare techniques to reinvent the basics, producing soy milk bread, a vegan olive-oil spread instead of butter, and desserts that use agave to sweeten, and oat milk instead of dairy products for sundaes and custards.

Was I ready for this progressive new age of gourmet cuisine? I was on board big time after my group sampled several unique dishes: gazpacho with dill sorbet and almond foam; Thai cashew curry with coconut milk; a tuna poke bowl with guava salsa; a Korean chicken sandwich; and zucchini noodles Bolognese. And yes, there is a steak.

**The rooms:** The W prides itself on being playful, and its 254 rooms are categorized as Won-

IF YOU GO

**W Toronto:** 416-961-8000, 888-236-2427, w-hotels.marriott.com; 90 Bloor St. E., Toronto. Marriott Bonvoy loyalty program (marriottbonvoy.com). Accessible. Pet-friendly, \$150 per stay. **Price:** City or courtyard view, rooms from \$629, suites from \$829; including in-room Nespresso, bottled water, bathrobes, fitness centre, evening turndown on request. Marriott Bonvoy loyalty program includes Wi-Fi (membership is free). Extra: valet parking, 24-hour in-room dining, pay-per-view movies. **Tourism information:** Toronto, destinationtoronto.com; Yorkville, bloor-yorkville.com; Ontario, destinationontario.com.

derful, Spectacular, Fabulous, Marvellous, the Fantastic Suite and Extreme Wow.

Are they all that? They’re certainly deluxe, with comfy beds, large-screen TVs, and touch panels for room controls, including lights, drapes and privacy. The walls are glossy white panels edged in metal and brightened with cobalt blue colour blocks. Some room types have open-concept bathroom sinks and vanities, which was a somewhat jarring surprise, although showers and loos are encased in frosted glass.

Retro hints include the Hollywood-style vanity mirrors and terrazzo tabletops. The mini-bar’s indulgences include Empress 1908 Indigo Gin, from B.C.; an oxygen spray for energy; Three Farmers roasted lentils, from Saskatchewan; and W brand condoms.

**One more unique feature:** If Toronto stars such as Drake or The Weeknd are in their old stomping grounds, they can record their next hits at Canada’s first W Sound Suite, a professional studio with a vocal booth and mixing equipment.

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