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CHECK IN CHECK OUT

Toronto: The Hazelton Hotel



The Hazelton lobby features green granite

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THE BASICS

While Toronto has never lacked for luxury hotels, somehow the city has survived without one given five stars from a rating service. That's changing fast: by 2009 as many as six hotels expected to compete for top ratings and the city's wealthiest visitors. The first, the 77-room Hazelton Hotel, opened at the end of August by the local developers Peter Cohen and Bruce Greenberg, is too new to have stars. Still, every aspect of the hotel, from its sleek limestone and brick exterior to its copious, designer-dressed staff, announces its intention to provide a different class of experience.

LOCATION

The Hazelton sits in the middle of Yorkville, the city's most expensive shopping and dining district. The Royal Ontario Museum (and its controversial new extension, the Daniel Libeskind-designed Crystal) is a few blocks away.

THE LOOK

Somewhere there's a granite mine with a hole the size of the Hazelton. Dark green slabs are everywhere, beginning with the floor of the lobby, where richly upholstered couches and modern sculptures give way to tastefully private check-in and concierge nooks. Decorated by Yabu Pushelberg, the Canadian interior designers behind the W and St. Regis in New York, the hotel has a muted, masculine palette of rich browns, plums and grays.

THE CROWD

Movie stars and studio executives (there's a private screening room); the young and fashionable on a splurge.

THE ROOMS

Our second-floor deluxe room — at 475 Canadian dollars (about the same in U.S. dollars) the second-cheapest of seven room classifications — was spacious and coolly pleasing to the senses, with the same high design and tactile appeal as the public spaces. Leather padding ran behind the bed to the ceiling; the flat-screen television was mounted on a wall of rich, dark wood; and a boxy oversized armchair was upholstered in thick ribbed velvet. The geometric lines on the carpet resolved themselves into the pattern of cobblestones when viewed from an angle. Motorized curtains opened on a balcony overlooking the Dumpster of the building across the alley.

THE BATHROOMS

Almost a third the size of the bedroom, the bathroom was a green granite utopia with rainfall shower stall and heated floor. A small LCD TV is built right into the mirror — perfect for viewing from the soaker tub.

AMENITIES

In-room WiFi and broadband and business centers on every floor for work; mosaic-tiled lap pool and a shiny workout room and spa for play.

ROOM SERVICE

Available 24 hours, from the menu of ONE, the hotel restaurant. Mains like Alaskan black cod (35 Canadian dollars) are designed to be shared. But with sides (10 to 13 dollars) offered separately, plus an automatic 17 percent tip and 5 dollar room service charge, prices added up quickly. Breakfast, ordered at 8:20 a.m., arrived 20 minutes later, as promised.

THE BOTTOM LINE

More than the service and amenities, the Hazelton's arresting style distinguishes it from Toronto's other luxury hotels. Already favored by visiting celebrities, the hotel and its place on the paparazzi stakeout map is likely to remain unchallenged, at least until the next round of aspiring five-star hotels open. Rates range from 405 to 3,500 Canadian dollars.

The Hazelton Hotel, 118 Yorkville Avenue; (416) 963-6300; www.thehazeltonhotel.com.