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Five-star town

The Hazelton Hotel sets a new standard in Toronto



Cities are constantly transforming—their neighbourhoods waxing and waning in popularity when businesses move in or move away, injecting their energies into once-shoddy areas of town. Toronto's tony Yorkville district, known for its chic boutiques and elegant bistros, is no exception. Once the laidback bohemian quarter of Toronto, chockfull of coffee houses, crumbling Victorian rooming houses, and legendary performing venues like *The Riverboat*, today there's not a trace of the old Yorkville left. But by the time its newest addition, the ritzy Hazelton Hotel, opens this summer, the city fathers will have placed a historical plaque nearby, reminding the stiletto-heeled shoppers of today of that vibrant era when Joni Mitchell, Gordon Lightfoot, and The Band strode the streets and played to crowds of hippie devotees.

It's a nice gesture, but frankly few of the film buffs, movie stars, industry execs, and assorted hangers-on will notice once the Toronto Film Festival is underway and *The Hazelton's* doors have swung open. Rarely has there been as much excitement and specu-

lation about the opening of a hotel, in this case, Toronto's first five-star property. People wondered all summer: who's booked into its suites for the festival? Will its interior (designed by superstar firm YabuPushelberg) live up to its five-star billing? And, most importantly, who do I need to bribe to get a table at Mark McEwan's latest restaurant, 'One,' which will cater around the clock to the late-night needs of its esteemed guests?

Coping with these huge expectations is veteran hotelier Klaus Tenter, who moves up the street from his last position—a twenty-five-year tenure managing the *Four Seasons*. Judging from an interview just prior to its opening, Tenter had few opening night jitters. "For many years, Toronto has lagged behind other major cities in our hotel offerings," he says. "The Hazelton will be for the discriminating guest who is used to the finest hotels in the world, and almost everything will be a first for this city."

Descriptions of the amenities seem to bear that out: generous rooms that have vast dressing areas with floor-to-ceiling mirrors and enormous closets; luxurious soaker tubs and rain showers in the glamorous, 1940s' Hollywood-inspired bathrooms; and contemporary entertainment centres with plasma screen TVs. Other hotel amenities include a spa, a private jet concierge, a two-million-dollar private screening room, and Mark McEwan's able staff, whipping up his fabled comfort food 24-7.

A few weeks before setting up his test kitchen, I met McEwan at the hotel where his newest baby, 'One,' was taking shape. Donning hard hats, we strolled through the spacious airy bar into the main restaurant with its cozy banquettes and dramatic floor-to-ceiling windows offering a view onto the leafy streets of Yorkville.

Clearly excited about the room and its possibilities, McEwan has developed a menu that trades on his beautifully managed take on classic dishes. "I like to make food that's sincere but not overly orchestrated," the host of Food Network's *The Heat*, explains. "We'll buy great ingredients, seasonal when we can, and interpret them in a generous way."

Fans of his *North 44* and *Bymark* restaurants will be happy to note his twin inspirations—Japanese and Italian cuisine—will be present at 'One' as well. "I always seem to land there," says McEwan, "because Japanese cooking is so strong on starters, and the Italians finish meals so well. Actually, they're both very alike when it comes to food, in that it's not fussed with much. And both rest on the laurels of the basic quality of the products." For the record, McEwan's war on over-the-top interpretations includes an outright ban on tasting menus at 'One,' something many in Toronto's overheated gastronomic world will no doubt applaud.

His approach to serving hotel guests is much the same. "God forbid a place is too luxurious that you can't get a sandwich at 2:00 a.m." The film festival crowd will be thrilled to hear that.

—ILONA BIRO