

MIXING IT UP

Whether it's the blend of old and new architecture, the smorgasbord of cuisine, or the multicultural populace, Toronto is defined by its ability to integrate the disparate.

Gayatri Bhaumik heads to the Great White North and finds a city of compelling juxtapositions.

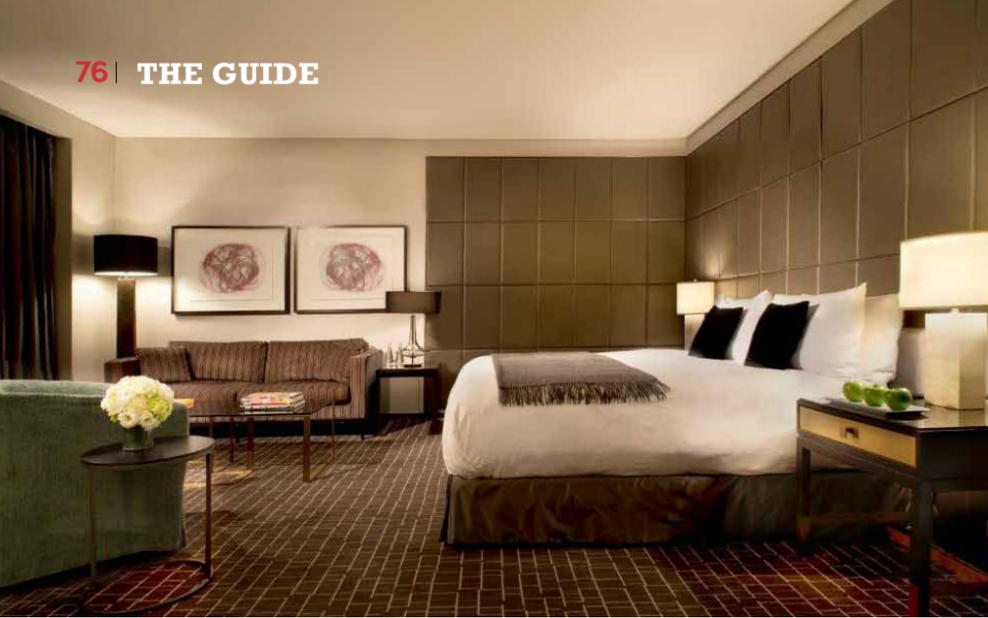
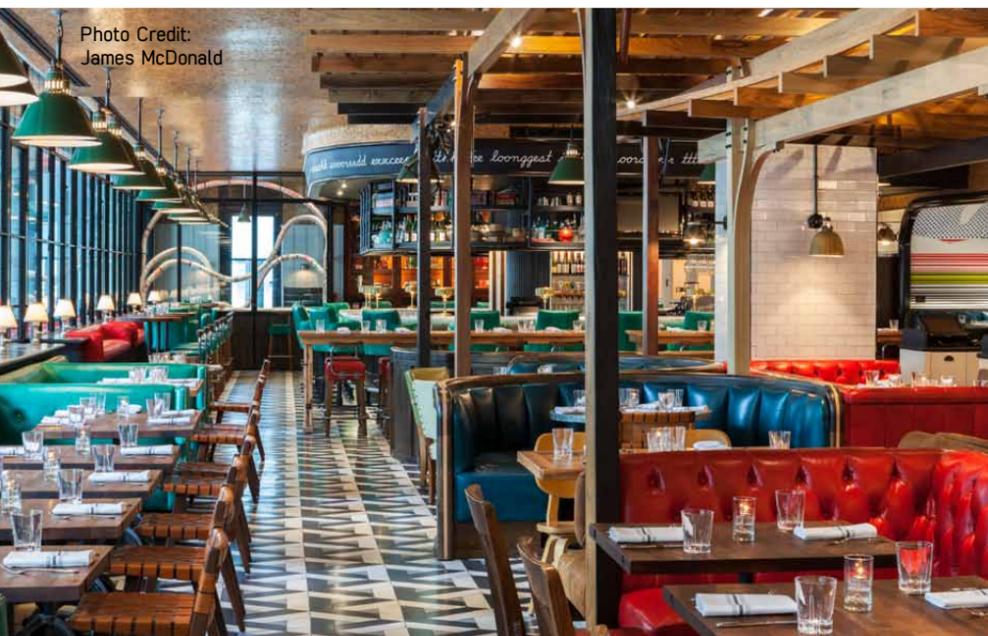


Photo Credit:
James McDonald



Top: A sumptuous Luxury King Room at The Hazelton Hotel
Bottom: The interiors of Drake One Fifty

SLEEP

Intriguing works by local artists create fascinating focal points against Yabu Pushelberg's sleek interiors at **The Hazelton Hotel** (118 Yorkville Avenue; +1-416-963-6300; www.thehazeltonhotel.com), a sophisticated urban hideaway in the luxe neighbourhood of Yorkville. Soothing neutral palettes and plush furnishings evoke a sense of old Hollywood glamour through the 62 rooms and 19 suites, all cloaked in the hotel's pervasive sense of privacy. Make like the camera-shy celebrities that hole up here and check into the Presidential Suite, a 4,000sqft oasis with three bedrooms, four bathrooms, a private elevator and wine cellar, and a living space with a seven-foot

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linear fireplace. Be sure to have dinner at One, the restaurant by local celebrity chef Mark McEwan, before a movie night in the hotel's 25-seat screening room.

In the city's downtown theatre and entertainment district, the **SoHo Metropolitan Hotel** (218 Wellington St West; +1-416-599-8800; www.metropolitan.com/soho) is a deluxe retreat with 90 modern rooms and suites. Treat yourself to the opulent three-storey Penthouse Suite, which boasts several fireplaces, floor-to-ceiling windows over city views, a library, and a rooftop terrace with a hot-tub and built-in grill. Toronto's foodies flock here to feast on chef Susur Lee's 'nouvelle chinoise' cuisine at Luckee Restaurant and Bar,

and enjoy burgers in the recently opened Wahlburgers, the first Canadian outpost of the sports bar-like eatery by actor Mark Wahlberg and his brothers.

A bastion of Victorian-era elegance, **The Windsor Arms** (18 Saint Thomas Street; +1-416-971-9666; www.windsorarmshotel.com) is an intimate property bursting with old-world charm. The 28 sumptuous suites include a butler's pantry, along with classic interiors in beiges, browns, and creams, with stately yet comfortable furnishings, and hardwood floors covered with plush carpets. Each room boasts a musical instrument so guests can have in-room jam sessions on baby grand pianos, guitars, or harps if the mood strikes. Spend an afternoon indulging in the hotel's luscious afternoon tea; a Toronto institution since 1927, the tea is served in one of three lavish, old-world settings.

EAT

Set in historic Yorkville, **Sassafras** (100 Cumberland Street; +1-416-964-2222; www.sassafras.ca) has reemerged as a choice culinary destination for movers and shakers since being damaged by fire in 2006. In the open-plan dining room, shielded by a vaulted glass ceiling and dominated by a towering waterfall, diners feast on market-inspired Canadian cuisine that draws heavily on the country's French heritage. Expect dishes like French onion soup, Ontario artisan beef tartare, Alberta bison striploin, and maple beignets, accompanied by selections from the custom cellars which boast over 300 labels from 16 countries.

A lively neighbourhood restaurant in downtown Toronto, **Richmond Station** (1 Richmond Street West; +1-647-748-1444; www.richmondstation.ca) is helmed by Carl Heinrich, the season two winner of Top Chef Canada. The subway-themed eatery features white tiled walls, black and white photos from the city's archives, and quirky antique knickknacks, but the kitchen offers ingredient focused, technique driven dishes like Cajun fish cakes, Peking duck pancakes, and braised beef ravioli. Try the ever-popular STN Burger, made with beet chutney and aged cheddar and served with rosemary fries and bread and butter pickles, or sample fresh market produce with the daily 'chalkboard specials.'

An engaging concept that fuses food, drink, and art, **Drake One Fifty** is a slice of

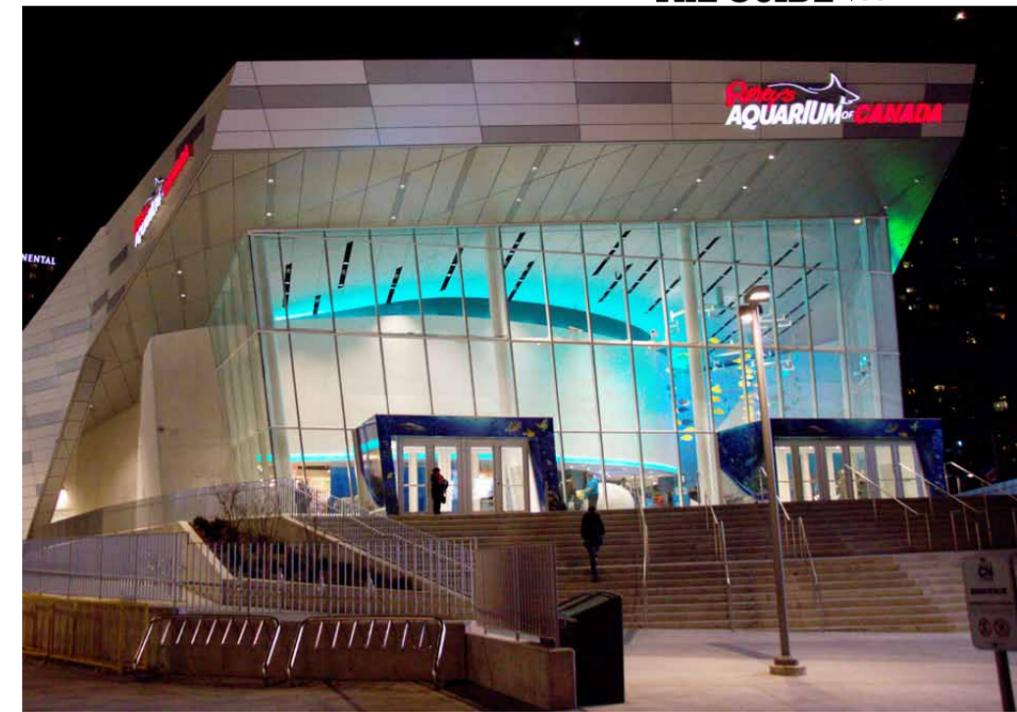
flair in the financial district. In a 1980s-era postmodern building, chef Ted Corrado celebrates Canadian cuisine with a menu that includes comfort food dishes like Steak & Fries, 30-day aged ribeye with house steak sauce and garlic fries, and Lobster & Grits, butter-poached Nova Scotia lobster with cheesy grits, smoked pork hock, and pork broth. Make time to sample award-winning cocktails from the 60-foot marble bar amid industrial-feel steel-framed windows, handmade geometric floor tiles from Morocco, and art installations by local artists like Douglas Couland and Micah Lexier.

PLAY

A Toronto landmark, the **Horseshoe Tavern** (30 Queen Street West; +1-416-598-4226; www.horseshoetavern.com) has been the lynchpin of the city's music scene since 1947. Over its storied history, the unfussy venue has seen a wide range of acts take the stage, including country legends Willie Nelson and Loretta Lynn, local talents like Bryan Adams and The Barenaked Ladies, and established vets like The Rolling Stones and Melissa Etheridge. Grab a beer and shoot a game of pool in the tavern's small, wood-heavy front bar, then head into the back bar to join music aficionados enjoying cosy, informal sets by up-and-comers and the occasional big name.

It's common knowledge that some of the best bars are notoriously hard to find, and so it is with **The Libertine** (1307 Dundas St West; +1-647-748-8288; www.thelibertinespeak.com), a small, modern take on the prohibition-era speakeasy. Guests walk through a storefront for a fortune teller – you can get your fortune told, if you're so inclined – and through a beaded curtain into the bar proper. Deep colours, low lighting, upholstered banquettes, and a stuffed peacock for good measure form the backdrop of the bar's punch-packing cocktails and fresh, seasonal plates. Try The Baudelaire, a concoction of Amaro, Grand Marnier, gin, and Campari, paired with something from Momofuku alum Leonie Lilla's ever-changing menu.

Run by one of the city's favourite microbreweries, the lively **Mill Street Brew Pub – The Beer Hall** (21 Tank House Lane; +1-416-681-0338; www.beerhall.millstreetbrewpub.ca) is tucked into Toronto's historic Distillery district. Inspired by Europe's *bierhall* tradition, the space is comfortable, bright, yet slightly



The design-savvy façade of Ripley's Aquarium of Canada

gritty, with plenty of light wood, steel, and copper; the open kitchen and brewing vats act as focal points. On tap are well-loved brews like the Original Organic Larger, Belgian Wit, and Cobblestone Stout, while seasonal ales – like the Vanilla Porter – beer flights, and *Bierschnaps* can be ordered off the menu. Line your stomach with the hearty pub grub that's also on offer.

EXPERIENCE

Canada's answer to Europe's majestic castles, **Casa Loma** (1 Austin Terrace; +1-416-923-1171; www.casaloma.org) is situated on a hill on the outskirts of downtown Toronto. Built by Canadian financier Sir Henry Pellatt in the early 1900s, the sprawling Gothic Revival property boasts magnificent craftsmanship, gorgeous art and furniture, and a studied air of importance. Guests can wander through the sumptuously decorated suites, secret passages, and grandiose reception rooms, before descending into the keep and walking through the 800-foot underground tunnel that connects to the stables – still bearing the name of Pellatt's horses – and garage and carriage room which host an exhibition of vintage cars, including a 1914 Ford Model T.

Explore Toronto's history through its brews on *The Old Toronto Beer Tour* by **The Beer Lover's Tour Company** (+1-416-

662-6312; www.beerloverstour.com). Visit local favourites like Steam Whistle Brewery and the Six Pints Beer Academy; discover the city's lost breweries at Corktown, the brewing hub of pre-prohibition Toronto; and see original War of 1812 buildings at Fork York, the city's birthplace. Later, take a cross-city drive past the Canada Malting Silos and Toronto's oldest tavern, before heading to the Distillery district to sample brews at the Mill Street Brewery and trawl through the eclectic art galleries and boutiques that line the area's cobblestone streets. Round off the experience with the optional Beermaker's Dinner at Granite Brewery.

Nestled in the shadows of Toronto's iconic CN Tower, **Ripley's Aquarium of Canada** (288 Bremner Boulevard; +1-647-351-3474; www.ripleyaquariums.com/canada) houses nearly 14,000 creatures of the deep, so you'll get up close and personal with all manner of sea-dwellers, including a Giant Pacific Octopus, colourful tropical fish, Electric Eels, Sandbar Sharks, and Moon Jellies. Make sure to take the two-hour behind-the-scenes *Stingray Experience*, where you'll get the chance to swim with Southern and Rough tail stingray. Enjoy a nocturnal walk amongst the sea animals on the second Friday of each month, when the aquarium hosts live jazz performances; or practice sun salutations with creatures of the deep in one of the morning yoga sessions held in summer. ✈

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