



Old Town Montreal, Canada, in the winter.

Photo: Lonnie Kishiyama / Getty Images

TRAVEL

Montreal Is a Paradise for Design Lovers

For many U.S. residents, it's a quick trip—but the UNESCO City of Design feels oceans away

Credits

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A short jaunt from most U.S. cities, Montreal—named a UNESCO City of Design 11 years ago—continues to evolve, with new reasons to see its takes on design, art, and culture. Not since Expo 67 (a World Exhibition spanning six months and celebrating its 50th anniversary this year) has there been such a spotlight on this Canadian cultural capital's design. Fun fact: It's also morphing into a Hollywood of the North as a major filming site for movies including *Life of Pi*, *The Aviator*, even the action-packed *X-Men: Days of Future Past*. While more known for its gastronomy scene—which visitors should definitely not scrimp on, because the bagels and poutine really are that indulgent—stepping into the city's visual arts is a treat. Against a backdrop of Art Deco and Gothic Revival buildings, not to mention modern-concrete structures, the tide is turning to welcome today's hot new designers and artists, fitting for a city celebrating its 375th anniversary this year.

Stay



The Hotel William Gray.

Photo: Alexi Hobbs / Courtesy of the Hotel William Gray

In a boutique-y version of the W Hotels brand, St. Paul Hotel's owner—an artist and interior decorator—has injected purple, gold and other jewel tones into the design, including in each of the 119 rooms. Craft cocktails at the hotel's Hambar are Instagram-worthy and among the city's best, perfect for sipping with a Quebec-cheese platter. Hotel William Gray, also in Old Montreal, opened two summers ago. Its black, white and gray design scheme extends to the spa and rooftop restaurant, with skylights throughout that bring in the sun on a cold wintry day.



A guest room at the Fairmont Queen Elizabeth.

Photo: Courtesy of the Fairmont Queen Elizabeth

The grand dame of Montreal's hotel scene—*The Fairmont Queen Elizabeth*—reopened in the summer after a \$140 million renovation, with a new look that harkens back to the middle of last century (think lots of gold and chrome), fitting for its 1958 debut. Grab a seat in the egg chairs off the lobby, or with espresso and a flaky croissant at Kréma Cafe.

Eat & Drink



Bistrot La Fabrique.

Photo: Susan Moss / Courtesy of Tourisme Montréal

Finding a good meal in Montreal? *Très facile*. Dining in a veritable design showroom can be more of a challenge. Where the Latin Quarter meets the Plateau, *Bistrot La Fabrique*'s minimalist design includes a sunken open kitchen and exposed-brick walls. Uniquely plated dinner dishes fold in Québécois ingredients, such as the French toast dessert, topped with a gob of salted caramel sauce; or lamb and octopus stew in coconut and red curry broth. *Restaurant Mélisse* popped up last summer in the Cité du Multimédia neighborhood with its all-white interior, gold accents, and wisps of greenery. *Mélisse* is open for lunch and breakfast, and the menu ranges from Jamaican pâté at sunrise to oven-baked trout with ancestral tomatoes and tomato caramel by afternoon. A favorite cocktail spot for arts-minded locals is *Foodlab*, inside the Société des Arts Technologiques—under white umbrellas on the *terrasse* during summer and, come winter, the intimate third-floor space.

Do



A piece from the Mural Festival.

Photo: Daniel Esteban

Got limited time? Montreal's many street-art murals expand each June after the Montreal Mural Festival wraps. House of Meggs' colorful mural is one of the most photographed, with its tropical flowers and bright hues; find it where Rue Prince Arthur meets Boulevard Saint-Laurent.



The Contemporary Art Museum of Montreal.

Photo: Michel Jasmin

Montreal is home to 50 museums, and among its artsiest is the *Contemporary Art Museum of Montreal*. The highly anticipated Leonard Cohen show (through April 9, 2018) uses virtual reality and Cohen's drawings to document the late singer-songwriter's work. Lesser known is *Arsenal Gallery*, inside an 83,000-square-foot former shipyard building.



The Sculpture Garden at the Montréal Museum of Fine Arts.

Photo: Courtesy of Montréal Museum of Fine Arts

For a reminder of Expo 67, check out [Habitat 67](#), one of the first examples in North America of an eco-friendly and affordable apartment building. Designed by Moshe Safdie, it's occupied by renters and owners—and no longer affordable. Exterior views, however, are complimentary.