



Nacarat Bar. PHOTO BY STEPHANIE BRUGGER.

Queen Elizabeth Hotel's New Face

In Montreal, step back into the '60s with this retro renovation

BY LARRY BLEIBERG — *Spring 2018*

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he world was on the cusp of change when Montreal's Queen Elizabeth hotel opened 60 years ago. As Canada's largest hotel east of Toronto, it helped usher in the swinging '60s, welcoming everyone from Fidel Castro to Queen Elizabeth herself. As the era came to an end, the hotel found itself in the middle of the cultural conversation. In Room 1742, John Lennon and Yoko Ono held their "bed-in" protest and recorded the song "Give Peace a Chance," enshrining the site in music history.

But through subsequent decades, the high-rise began to feel dated, leading the owners to close it in 2016 for a **yearlong, top-to-bottom makeover** costing more than \$112 million. Since its grand reopening in November, the Fairmont property has dazzled the city by going back to the future.

Using pod-shaped lobby chairs, pop-art-inspired carpets, and life-size projected video images of waving hostesses from the city's 1967 World's Fair, Sid Lee Architecture has embraced the building's midcentury modern roots. Boldly colored murals animate the 950 guest rooms, and even vacationers should sneak a look at the meeting rooms – in one, two playground swings hang from the ceiling; in another, a conference table converts for pingpong play. One workspace even resembles the war room from Stanley Kubrick's 1964 film, *Dr. Strangelove*.

What about Room 1742? It has been converted into the John and Yoko Suite, decorated with artifacts from the famous couple's weeklong visit, including archival photos and a reel-to-reel tape deck that plays interviews from the event.

But the renovation also looks forward. The lobby floor features a bustling urban market with gourmet dining stations selling everything from Prince Edward Island mussels to Quebec rotisserie quail to maple ice cream. An open-air design adds to the high-energy scene because diners watch busy chefs at work. Since everything's available for take out, the market also buzzes with Montrealers stopping by for lunch or picking up dinner.

Its downtown location makes the hotel convenient for guests, but its link to the business district runs even deeper. Built atop the main train station, it's connected to Montreal's underground city, a 20-mile network of corridors and shopping passageways that make it possible to cross the urban center without braving winter weather.

Once inside the hotel, though, the city seems far away. The Queen Elizabeth's Moment Spa offers a full range of treatments, from warm pebble massages to men's pedicures. Elsewhere, guests can relax in a play room with clear acrylic foosball tables and a big-screen video-gaming area.

Others unwind at the Nacarat Bar, which has already become a favored watering hole for celebrities after performances at nearby Bell Centre arena. Recent stars enjoying a nightcap have included Canadian crooner k.d. lang and — perhaps fitting for the storied hotel — musician and rock photographer Julian Lennon, whose father once urged us all to give peace a chance. From \$160. 866-540-4483; fairmont.com/queen-elizabeth-montreal