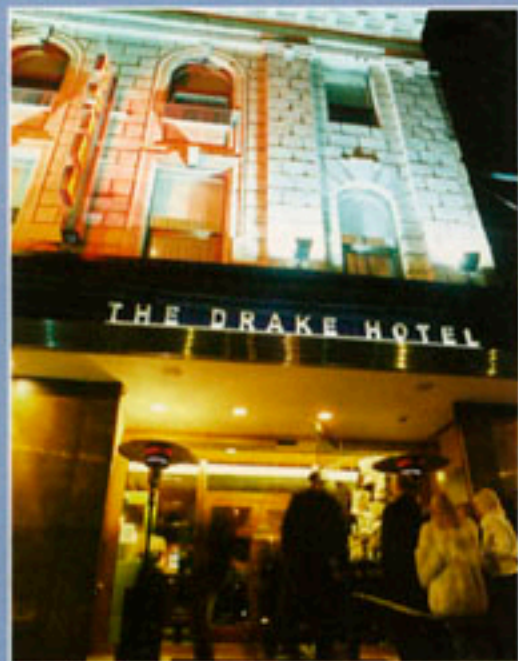


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THE DRAKE TORONTO



In creating The Drake for dotcom businessman Jeff Stober, 3rd Uncle Design and architect Paul Syme have driven the regeneration of Toronto's arts and design district Queen West.

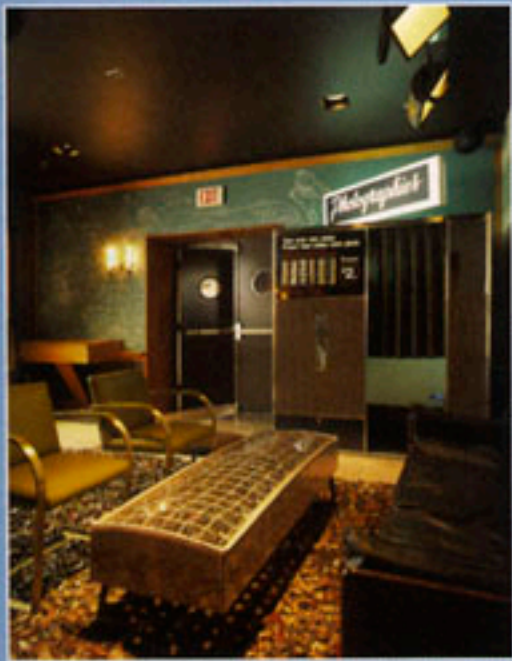
ABOVE: The lobby combines original features of the building such as the stairwell and terrazzo flooring with modern stainless steel railings and a contemporary chandelier

We are inviting international guests into our living room" explains Jeff Stober, owner of Toronto's 19-room bohemian design hotel, The Drake.

Located in the up-and-coming arts and design district of Queen West, it has been a major influence behind the area's emergence as the most dynamic neighbourhood in the city, with The Drake's three bars, restaurant, café, performance space and sky-yard patio at the centre of the action.

"The hotel is at the epicentre of a cultural ecosystem," says the outgoing owner, a former dotcom businessman with no hotel experience but plenty of vision. "When we first walked in during the summer of 2001, it (the old Smalls Hotel built in 1890) was part flop-house and part crackhouse. We fell in love with the historic spiral staircase – the centerpiece of the main lobby and were struck by this touch of glamour in an otherwise seedy establishment." Enlisting the help of hip, local designers

3rd Uncle Design and architect Paul Syme, Stober funded a \$6m renovation, reinstating much of the original 1890s décor with a contemporary twist. Opened in 2004, the lobby's original terrazzo floors have been restored, with stainless steel railings and mahogany wainscoting paired with vintage furniture and a long blackboard added for scribbling creative graffiti. The lobby entry is sandwiched between the packed Corner Café, with floor-to-ceiling glazing and roll-



ABOVE: 3rd Uncle Design's scheme uses mismatched vintage furniture with its innards exposed by see-through upholstery RIGHT: The Drake Lounge and Corner Cafe are popular with local residents of the Bohemian Queen West quarter

up industrial metal doors, and the enormous, street-level cocktail bar Drake Lounge that has a 'raw food' bar and adjoining restaurant, The Lounge, has quirky custom furniture designed by 3rd Uncle, with comfortable, mismatched reupholstered vintage chairs and ottomans covered in see-through plastic to expose the springs. An enormous Rorschach Ink Blot mural lines one wall and flat screens show the in-house music and information network as well as digitally projected art installations. 3rd Uncle designer John Tong collected abandoned bicycle parts from around the city, welding them together in a web to create a unique bike chandelier for

the Corner Café. The imaginative interiors are cutting edge and funky, yet they have not dated in the three successful years the hotel has been open. They change constantly, with emerging art transforming the public areas, and exhibiting in stairwells and the purpose-built artist-in-residence room. With a changing roster of invited artists each year, the hotel's interiors are kept lively and exciting. The Drake feels like an artist designed 'clubhouse' (as it has been dubbed in the local press) filled with one-off art pieces and friendly, personal service, allowing a neighbourhood feeling for guests and locals alike. The staff do not have uniforms, they are all from the area,

and keen to make suggestions about the burgeoning arts and culture scene. It is clear that around The Drake, a whole community has developed. Both the lounge and the café are always packed. By day they are full of local artists and students, and film directors having meetings with laptops (it is a wireless high speed environment). By night the lounge hosts an impressive line up of live music, DJs, and private parties. Downstairs the Drake Underground is a flexible space for comedy nights, film screenings and live music, the open-air sky-yard upstairs serves classic cocktails to guests at striped, oversized bed/loungers in a timber clad oasis,

and the yoga den has classes and private instruction. The guest rooms, many with exposed brick or vintage inspired wallpaper come in four sizes, with the tiny Crash Pad, being the most cosy at 15m² with high ceilings, charcoal wood flooring, original artwork and luxury beds, and the Suite at just under 40m² with a small living room setup with couches and a slightly larger bathroom. The rooms have been carefully planned to be pared down and efficient, with a compact bathroom with excellent fittings and high level storage for suitcases (accessible by a sliding ladder) and open clothes rails for hanging clothes.



ABOVE: The Corner Cafe features a 'bike chandelier' by 3rd Uncle
RIGHT: The lounge plays host to an ever changing roster of performance arts, comedy, film screenings and music events



Neat touches geared towards the cosmopolitan urban traveller includes quirky hand-made dolls to sleep with and DVD players with movies available to rent. Cheeky glazed shower units create a voyeuristic bathing experience and one-off vintage furniture adds charm to the small spaces. The rooms range from ultra budget \$179 per night in the Crash Pad to \$289 in the Suite, but given the small number of these stylish, well appointed rooms, they fill up quickly.

The hotel has received unprecedented international and local media attention, with features in more than 100 magazines since it opened, especially from New York but also sources as varied as the South China Post to the Finnair inflight travel magazine. The media has called it 'retro' as well as 'futuristic', and it feels both international and local. The Drake not only 'fits in', but it adds excitement and drama to this emerging neighbourhood as a carefully curated,

creative hotspot.

With the nearby Gladstone Hotel recently opening as a complementary music and art venue, Stober explains The Drake's unusual success as neighbourhood and international hang-out "It's a hotel built for a local neighbourhood, a targeted community" explains Stober. The Drake embraces creativity in all forms, from visual and performance art, music, fashion, architecture, design and great culinary experiences.

EXPRESS CHECKOUT

THE DRAKE HOTEL
1150 Queen Street West,
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Tel: +1 416 531 5042
www.thedrakehotel.ca

- 19 bedrooms
- Corner Cafe Dining Room
- ⌋ The Lounge, Raw Bar, Underground
- + Sky-yard, Yoga Den