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For affordable, alternative places to stay, it's worth investigating old-made-new spots such as the **Drake** (see p49), a heavily redesigned former flophouse, or the **Isabella Hotel & Suites** (see p47), which has less character but a more central location.

The best Hotels

For clandestine affairs

The dingy but funky **Drake Hotel** (see p49) – never was a hotel more suited to a secret rendezvous. Appropriately, it opened on Valentine's Day.



Moderate

Drake Hotel

1150 Queen Street W, at Beaconsfield Avenue, ON M6J 1J3 (416 531 5042/fax 416 531 9493/ www.thedrakehotel.ca). Streetcar 501. Rates \$149-\$259 single/double. Credit AmEx, DC, MC, V. Map p278 A7.

If you've spent more than three seconds in Toronto you'll have heard of the Drake. Once a flophouse, the 19-room property was transformed by ex-dot.commer Jeff Stober, who devoted \$5 million and two years to building something Toronto lacked – a multi-purpose HQ of hipdom. Public rooms nicely blend original trimmings of mahogany, terrazzo floors and steel railings with rotating art exhibits and the odd performance piece: don't be surprised to catch a striptease on the stairway or a spoken word act over Eggs Benny. Though wired for the 21st century with flat-screen TVs, CD and DVD players and high-speed net access, the rooms are not for the claustrophobe (at least the rates are pretty puny as well). The basement provides a venue for eclectic performances. Queues form to get into the funky street level bar and Sky Yard on the roof (heated in winter, but a great place to relax at any time of year). The Corner Café, a restaurant and raw bar round out the attractions of a destination that anchors the transformation of the West Queen West scene. Naysayers maintain this transformed ugly duckling is trying too hard to be cool, but we say, for once, do believe the hype. See also p130, p140 and p203. Bars (2). Concierge. Internet (high-speed, wireless). No-smoking hotel. Restaurants (4). Room service. TV (DVD/VCR, pay movies, widescreen).

Walk on West Queen West



Start: Queen Street West, at Dufferin Street

Finish: Bathurst Street

Length: About 4 miles (6km)

Time: three hours, including gallery time and a meal break

This downtown stroll takes in up-and-coming West Queen West and Dundas Street West, via art, history, street culture and architecture. Take the subway to Dufferin station, then bus 29 southbound. Get off at Queen Street West. Cross Dufferin to the east at the lights and enter the Gladstone Hotel (see p94).

Stroll through the lobby to hop aboard the city's oldest and loveliest elevator to the second floor. Gazing to the south from the balcony, railyards and warehouses sprawl down to Lake Ontario. The hotel was founded in 1889 by Susanna Robinson as a family-run hotel; under current owners, the Zeidler family, it is once again a family enterprise. Meticulous heritage restoration, under the eye of proprietor Eberhard Zeidler (the Canadian architect who designed the Eaton Centre), will one day recap the building with its glorious flag-topped cupola. There is also a ballroom and two lounges on the ground floor.

Turn to your left when you exit, heading east. As you stroll, be gently forewarned that like the Gladstone, West Queen West is a work in progress. Contrasting forces give the area its gritty energy – appliance stores, flophouses, print shops and greasy spoons of yesteryear underscore the mondo bars and boutiques of the moment. Street life gets a bit spicy around here after dark, so heads up. In this robust culture, dozens of galleries have collectively arisen in a creative cabal. Conveniently, almost all of them are on the north side of the street.

Walking east a block or two, at Beaconsfield Street you'll find the Drake Hotel (see p93). The Drake has been a major contributor to the area's resurgence, and even if you're not staying here, pop in for breakfast or a drink. Alternatively, continue walking east, and try one of the restaurants nearby – Brazilian, Ethiopian, Vietnamese, or even a Canadian classic like **Oyster Boy** (see p130).

The migration of **MOCCA** (see p98) to its new digs at No.952 is nicely augmented by other art institutions nearby, such as **Edward Day** (No.952; see also p186); **DeLeon White** (No.1096; see also p186) and **Stephen Bulger** (No.1026, 416 504 0575). Bar-wise, there's **Lot 16** at No.1136 (416 531-6556), plus Atom Egoyan's **Camera Bar & Media Gallery** at No.1028 (see also p139).

After *Oyster Boy* you'll see Trinity-Bellwoods Park stretching to the left (north). The park is home to the former Trinity College, as well as another lost treasure: the Garrison Creek, which is now buried deep below. Head on a loosely defined north-east trajectory through the park until you reach the top at Dundas Street West. Then continue right (heading east).

Observe how this traditional Portuguese neighbourhood is in upward urban flux. New galleries, cafés and small clubs are staging a mini-revival of their own. Check out the **Chelsea Room** (No.923; see also p140), **Cocktail Molotov** (No.28; see also p140), the **Press Club** (No.850; see also p141) and **Musa** (No.847, 416 368 8484).

For an arty end to your walk, cross over Bathurst Street and continue on to the *Grange Modern* (see p69), *Will Alsop's addition to OCAD* (see p69) and the *Art Gallery of Ontario* (see p71).



Civic gestures aside, Toronto has an unstoppable energy that finds new outlets for expression. The music and club scenes thrive as bands come up through the ranks and many take their rightful place on the world stage. The art scene is buzzing with two new destinations, one in the Distillery District and the other across town on the hip West Queen West strip. In the first edition of this guide, they barely rated a mention. Now they are must-see attractions. Visitors also have new options for boutique and unique hotels, including the Drake and Le Germain. And Toronto's restaurants continue to serve up the world on a plate.