

November 19, 2008

## Six of the best downtown Toronto hotels

We round up the best beds that the Canadian city has to offer, from budget to luxury penthouses



*A suite at The Drake Hotel in Toronto*

### **The Drake Hotel**

This place has glam rock and lush style. It's nonchalant, sophisticated, artfully retro and an air of cheeky naughtiness. It is, in short, where the party's at.

A one-stop venue for great dining, stylish bars, cafe culture, music and contemporary art, The Drake is a nobody-does-it-better, upmarket microcosm of its hip and lively (if fascinatingly seedy) environs, Queen Street West.

A full-time music curator ensures they're ahead of the curve with live performances from the best in town in the intimate Underground venue, also used for cocktail parties and discos, while DJs add late night ambiance in the Lounge. And a full-time art curator not only brings in temporary exhibitions, but is largely responsible for the fact the hotel as a whole is a visual treat, full of fabulous, witty artwork and installations from the likes of Even Penny and Bruce LaBruce, positioned to catch you by surprise or to set the mood, like Joe Becker's take on Dutch baroque murals by the grand copper-topped bar.

Owner Jeff Stober travelled the world drawing inspiration from grand hotels and returned to channel the best of his findings into The Drake. It's a heavy emotional investment, he says, the result: part 30s (like an art salon with red velvet), part 50s (booths and

banquettes) part au courant (sashimi and indie bands). Despite its undoubted cool, it invites a demographic clash 'like a British pub'. They've primed the canvas he says, and they benefit from whatever guests, artists and creative staff bring to it.

After all that, the rooms are almost a bonus. While there are larger suites, the bright, light, clean-lined Crashpads are a lesson in ergonomics and proof that small(ish) is beautiful. In keeping with the general air of innovation and playfulness, there's a Pleasure Menu as well as the usual array of nice soaps, arty magazines and in-room paraphernalia offering order-to-own sensual toys courtesy of local suppliers Come as You Are.

Plenty on the doorstep – not only supermarts, pawn shops and another fine bar and live music a few doors away at the Gladstone (see below), but several galleries including the Stephen Bulger Gallery, Clint Roenisch, Fly and Museum of Contemporary Canadian Art (952 Queen St W), boutiques and vintage emporiums stuffed with clothing and 50s furnishings.

**1150 Queen St West, [www.thedrakehotel.ca](http://www.thedrakehotel.ca), tel +1416 531 5042. Rooms \$189-\$299 (£100-£160)**