

# Indulge in the nation's capital

## Château Laurier, Ottawa

by JOSEPHINE MATYAS

IT IS THE GRANDE DAME of the Ottawa hotel scene, but this venerable property knows how to stay in style, while never being so gauche as to turn its back on more than a century of history. The Fairmont Château Laurier has always been one of my favourite stays—it may not attract the hipsters but it has both comfort and class. Real class.

A stone's throw from the Parliament Buildings, "Ottawa's castle" has been playfully referred to as "the third chamber" because political deals have been struck, governments created and destroyed, and careers determined all within the grand chateau-like walls. It's also hosted big names including Nelson Mandela, B.B. King and royalty from countries around the globe. When it opened in 1912, people flocked to see Prime Minister Sir Wilfrid Laurier be the first to sign the guest register.

But this grand property has no intention of standing still. Soon after turning 100 years old, the updates and refurbishments were underway. Most recently, there have been complete renovations of several of the hotel's premiere rooms, including the Karsh Suite. Want to feel like royalty? This is the spot.

The elegant Karsh Suite is named in honour of its past occupants, legendary photographer Yousuf and Estrellita Karsh, who lived at the Château Laurier through the 1980s and '90s. Karsh operated his studio from the hotel's sixth floor, where he photographed the who's-who of world leaders, royalty and celebrities. There's a richness and grace to the apartment-suite, where nine signed Karsh originals hang on the walls (including a very pensive George Bernard Shaw, with spectacles in hand, overseeing the living room). Key architectural and decorative elements that defined the lifestyle of the famous couple have been preserved, including the refinished wood parquet floors, a 1929 refrigerator and checkerboard leather flooring in the kitchen. The main bathroom has been completely modernized with a soaker tub and open double shower;



The Statesman cocktail arriving in its smoke box.

Zoe's Bar at Fairmont Château Laurier, Ottawa, Ontario.



luxury touches that give the suite an up-to-date look while retaining some of the historic elements. This is my idea of a getaway: luxury linens, a living room with furnishings to sink into, a dining room to seat eight and a kitchen to make eating-in a private, no-stress affair.

And when I want to venture out from my cozy corner of the castle, I can mosey on down to Zoe's Lounge and ask the bartender to shake me up a signature cocktail, The Statesman, an oh-so patriotic mix of Canadian Club, Laphroaig single malt scotch, maple syrup, house bitters, cedar smoke and fresh lemon. There is no other drink I can think of that makes such an entry—in a stainless-steel smoker box, with smoldering cedar wood chips filling the air with a most enticing aroma.

When the weather turns fine again (yes, there is an end to Ontario winters), La Terrasse is the best spot in town to snuggle up with a loved one and dig into the Surf 'n' Turf Caesar, a cocktail and meal in one. The spacious patio is the best spot in town to watch the sunset, as the glowing orb casts its end-of-day warmth across the Ottawa River.

Another perfect Ottawa getaway comes to a close. **L**

### PLAN YOUR VISIT

**TRAVEL:** Air Canada, WestJet and Porter all make the one-hour flight between Toronto and Ottawa.

**STAY:** Visit [fairmont.com](http://fairmont.com); The Karsh Suite from \$3,500/night.