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Andrew Torriani

CEO and GM of The Ritz Carlton Hotel

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Andrew Torriani

– Ritz-Carlton Montreal boss stands tall in the hotel industry

By Mike Cohen

In the Montreal hotel and business sector, there are probably not too many individuals whose ambition and drive can compare to Andrew Torriani. The Chief Executive Officer and General Manager of the prestigious and historic Ritz-Carlton Hotel is a true success story. Andrew became fascinated with the industry at a young age and ended up running the entire operation of a place he once served as a dishwasher and busboy.

It has now been just over three years since The Grand Dame of Sherbrooke Street West reopened amid much hoopla, following an extensive four year, \$200 million restoration. Did Torriani take a risk by shutting things down for such an extensive period of time? What was behind such a bold move?

“Our original plan was to close down for two years,” Torriani told me in wide ranging interview. “This is an old building. When we went into the walls we found asbestos, so we had to decontaminate, gut and rebuild every single room. That took an additional 17 months.”

The Ritz-Carlton Montreal opened its doors on December 31, 1912 – the very first hotel of this glamorous chain in the world. Since then, it has been the address of choice for discerning travelers and public figures, hosting everyone from Elizabeth Taylor and Queen Elizabeth II to Winston Churchill and the Rolling Stones. The recent restoration brought cutting-edge technology to the facility, yet guests can still find historic charm throughout the five-star hotel, from the luxurious accommodations to the lobby, where the curved front desk has stood since the opening.

Today, well-versed palates come to this AAA Five Diamond hotel, the only spot in Quebec for *Maison Boulud*, an upscale restaurant offering a twist on traditional

French cuisine. Meanwhile, the indoor heated saltwater pool overlooks the city from the rooftop, with a welcoming outdoor deck complete with lounge chairs and umbrellas. The place also remains a gathering place, and offers elegant event spaces for meetings and weddings. Magna Sabella, the director of sales and an employee of the hotel for 35 years, told me that during the four year closure people who had a family tradition of getting married here actually delayed their nuptials until it was back in business. The 10,000 square feet of meeting space are flexible and offer event planners the possibility of accommodating up to 300 people.

The Ritz-Carlton Montreal now has 98 rooms and 31 suites. The 4,700-square-foot Royal Suite is the largest hotel suite in Montreal. There are also 45 private residences, which helped finance the restoration. A new spa will open soon.

Torriani, his four brothers and their sister were first exposed to the world of fine hotels and luxury travel at a young age by virtue of the fact their father Marco was a renowned hotelier in South Africa.

As a teenager Torriani held a number of positions in the industry. When his father served as assistant manager at the Four Seasons Hotel in Montreal (now the Omni), he studied at the Petit Séminaire de Québec and worked weekends at the Caf’Conc’ in the Château Champlain hotel. At the Ritz he accepted any task that came his way.

While his family would relocate to Chicago and then Dusseldorf, he chose Canada for his future and graduated from Queens and McGill universities with degrees in mathematics and business respectively. He landed at Air Canada and served as director of Human Resources for 18 years. He returned to the Ritz in 2006. A year later a consortium comprising Mirelis Financial Group and Torriani Group assumed ownership.



Ritz Carlton CEO and GM Andrew Torriani at the landmark front entrance

It is managed by Torriani Luxury Hotel Management Canada, a subsidiary of Monaco Luxury Hotels and Resorts.

“It was my dad who was originally offered the opportunity to run this hotel,” says Torriani, who resides in Kirkland with his wife and three children. “He recommended me. The hotel was on the downswing and I saw a huge opportunity to put it back where it was. We have done that. My dad comes here often. He remains a great sounding board.”

In order for me to get a true “feel” for the Ritz, I accepted an invitation to stay there during a recent weekend. Let’s just say that for anyone in Montreal consid-

ering a “Staycation,” this place should be at the top of your list.

The hotel has 300 employees and I must note that all of those I came into contact with, from the doorman, front desk personnel, dining management and the attendants at the pool, were all so impeccably polite and helpful. “I interview as many of our staff as possible before they are hired,” he says. “Once a month I invite 10 of them for lunch where they can tell me anything on their mind. And in order for them to get a feel for the hotel, each one of them is entitled to stay over for one night.”

Continued on page 8



The completely renovated Ritz Carlton Hotel is a Montreal landmark

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The Ritz Garden is a favourite with tourists and Montreal's business elite



The one-bedroom suites are spacious and beautiful

Cover story continued from page 6

The remake of the hotel is not surprisingly, Torriani's proudest achievement. He made sure to have the building's façade preserved and restored, as were the lobby, the Palm Court, the Oval Room and the hotel's famed garden. Many decorative details from 1912, such as marble fireplaces in some of the suites, reflect this masterful blend of old and new.

The guestrooms also feature high-tech amenities, such as thermostats that intuitively remember a guest's temperature preferences upon check-in, and motion sensors that activate lights when guests enter a dark room. There is a spacious marble bathroom with heated flooring, a deep lounging tub, a separate rain power steam shower, double sink and a toto multifunctional toilet/bidet featuring a heated seat, automatic sensor and remote control. The floors are heated. The toilets

are so fascinating that many guests have posted them on YouTube.

Another coup for Torriani was persuading acclaimed chef Daniel Boulud to create a new restaurant at the legendary hotel. "We always wanted to add a new offering that would stand out in Montreal's already rich restaurant culture, one that would truly enhance our city's culinary vitality," Torriani said. "I cold called him. When he got back to me; he said he was coming to Montreal and would give me 15 minutes. That turned out to be close to three hours. A partnership was established. We run the restaurant and it has become one of the most successful dining spots in Montreal."

Just less than a year ago the Ritz opened the new Dom Pérignon Champagne Bar. Exclusive to the Ritz-Carlton Montreal – and the first of its kind in all of Canada – it is located in the Palm Court. The champagne menu features both Rosé & Brut Dom Pérignon

available by the glass and bottle; the full service bar also features an exclusive cocktail menu, and offers a variety of spirits and drinks. We shared some mini-angus beef burgers and a Montreal smoked meat sandwich, with some sweet potato fries on the side and of course champagne. We saved some room for dessert, chocolate mousse and milfeilles.

When the Ritz-Carlton Montreal opened in 1912 it became known for its legendary style and impeccable service. The hotel also became known as a comfortable spot for Montrealers to enjoy "Afternoon Tea" and socialize. A century later, the Ritz has revived the tradition of 'Afternoon Tea,' a flashback to the Edwardian era when Tea Time was a social ritual. Set amidst the comfort and elegance of the Palm Court, a selection of fine teas, homemade canapés, scones and pastries are on offer. Gentle music wafts through the Palm Court providing the perfect ambiance for a moment spent in lavish repose.

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The pool complex is a new edition as a result of the restoration

I recently experienced this treat for the second time, having gained an appetite for this kind of opportunity after my trip to London, England in the summer of 2014. "It does really well," said Torriani. "This is something that goes back to our history."

The Ritz was recently named the "number one city hotel in Canada" by *Travel + Leisure*, as part of the magazine's 2015 World's Best Awards Readers' Survey. "It is an honour to be recognized by such a well-regarded travel publication," Torriani said. "We take great pride in maintaining high standards of quality in all areas from design, to service and amenities, and are grateful for the recognition by all the readers who took the time to vote."



The new Dom Pérignon Champagne Bar is exclusive to the Ritz-Carlton Montreal – and the first of its kind in Canada

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A closer look at Maison Boulud

By Michael Cohen

As with all of Daniel Boulud's restaurants, the Ritz-Carlton Montreal establishment has been uniquely adapted to its setting.

"While I create restaurants that reflect my own distinct style, always inspired by the seasons, my traditional French culinary roots and my standards of hospitality, each place is developed to reflect the culture, tastes and lifestyle of its native city, with a particular focus on local products and purveyors," Boulud says.

Boulud runs restaurants around the world, including New York's *Daniel*, *Cafe Boulud*, *db Bistro Moderne*,

Bar Boulud, *DBGB Kitchen and Bar*, *Boulud Sud* and *Épicerie Boulud*, as well as restaurants in Miami, Palm Beach, London, Beijing and Singapore. The renowned chef comes to Montreal with the support of his Dinex Group, the management company he created in 1997 to assure the consistent quality of his restaurants' cuisine and service. Staff tell me he is on-site in Montreal several times a year.

On the night we ate at the restaurant, we were greeted by our very charming server Marie-Christine. Our table was beautifully situated outdoors, overlooking the garden and the pool where ducks swam by. We started off with some beverages and shared some sensational pasta plates as appetizers (homemade Quebec Lobster Gnocchetti, Leeks, Mushrooms and Coral Emulsion and Homemade Mezzelune Pasta Filled with Princesses Scallops and Black Truffle Mousseline). For our main meals we chose the garlic roasted lamb chops, the Cornish hen and the scallops – each fabulously prepared. For dessert we shared some peach, chocolate and lemon creations. If you have allergies, the staff will do whatever possible to remove certain ingredients.

Maison Boulud has quite a reputation as well The Ritz Carlton. In fact it was named one of the Top 100 Best Outdoor Dining Restaurants in Canada by OpenTable diners. The list of winners is derived from more than 275,000 reviews for approximately 1,600 restaurants submitted by OpenTable diners across the country.



Daniel Boulud and Chef Riccardo Bertolino.

The night we were there, every table was taken. Seated behind us was Quebec Minister of Energy and Natural Resources Pierre Arcand along with his wife and some friends. The evening prior, philanthropist Charles Bronfman held a birthday celebration dinner there for his wife. Like the hotel itself, Maison Boulud has become the "it" spot in Montreal. Executive Chef Riccardo Bertolino typically makes his way through the restaurant and talks to diners. The entire experience is phenomenal, from the service, ambience and of course the superb food.

For reservations, call 514-842-4224 or visit www.maisonboulud.com. **The dress code** is casually elegant, so no jacket or tie is required. The wine list contains 300 selections from \$50 per bottle with a focus on the wines of Burgundy, The Rhône Valley, and North America. It is open for breakfast from 7 am to 10:30 am; lunch from Noon to 2 pm, weekdays, with a bar menu daily from 2:30 pm to 5:30 pm. Dinner is from 6 pm to 10 pm Sunday to Thursday and 6 pm to 10:30 pm Friday and Saturday. Brunch is served on weekends from Noon to 2:30 pm.



Maison Boulud at The Ritz is the part of international super-chef Daniel Boulud's world-wide network of fine restaurants



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