

WINTER WONDERLAND

Quintessence Hotel beckons to those who need pampering

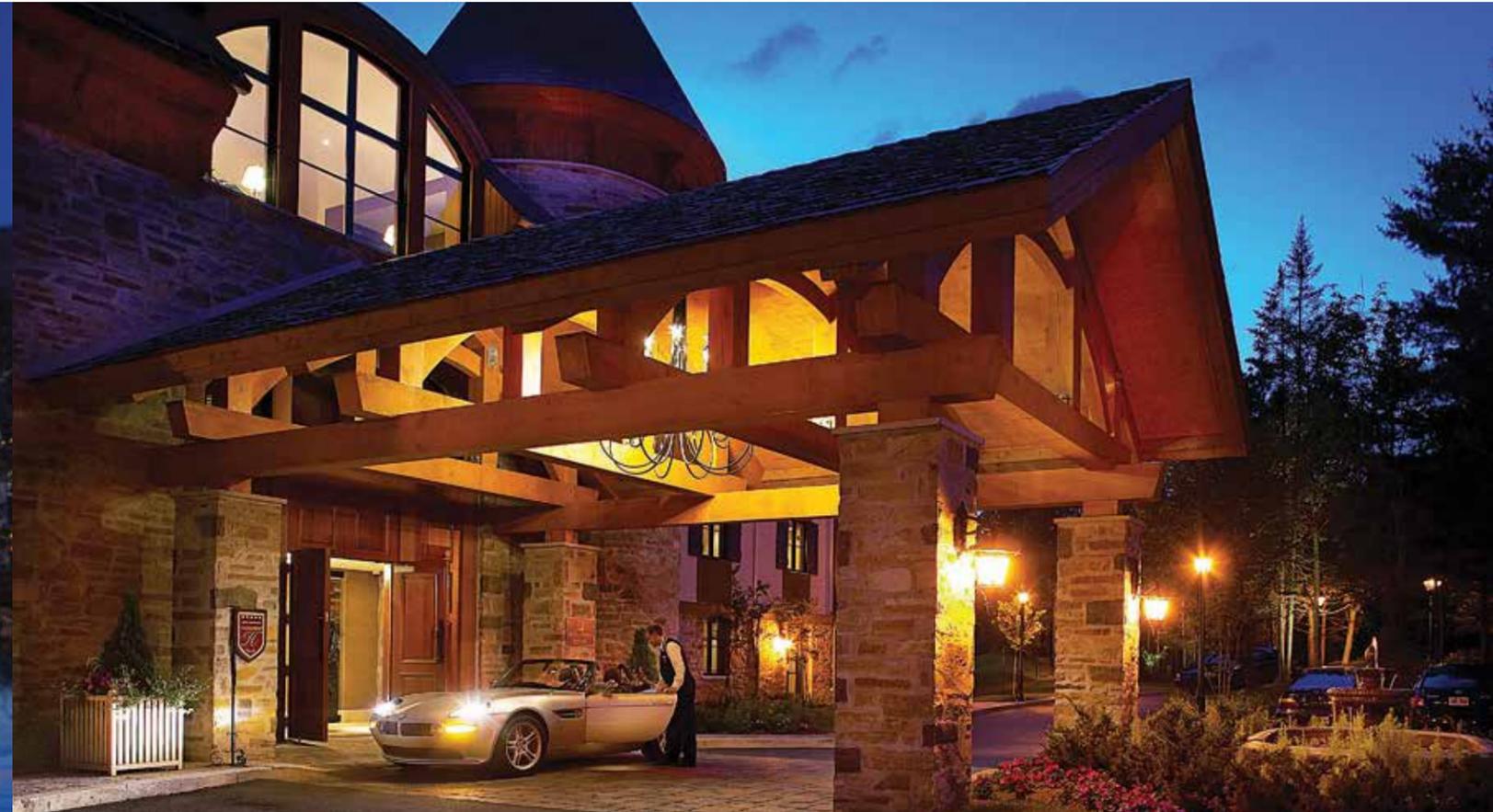
BY SUSAN SEMENAK

IT'S COLD AND GREY IN THE CITY, but here at Mont Tremblant, Quebec, the sky is blue and the air is crisp. Curled up in an easy chair before the massive fireplace in the upper lobby at Hotel Quintessence after a walk through the woods, it's impossible not to fall in love with winter.

A 30-room luxury boutique hotel on the shores of Lac Tremblant, Hotel Quintessence is 90 minutes north of Montreal and just steps away from the Mont Tremblant ski resort. But it seems miles from everything.

It has the feel of an Old-World country manor with its wood-paneled spaces, a fire crackling in every room, and breathtaking views of the lake, forests and mountains from every window in the hotel. "Imagine you have a wealthy uncle with an incredible house up in the country and he's invited you for the weekend," says Michel Tremblay, the hotel's general manager. "The atmosphere here is warm and welcoming, luxurious but not stuffy. And we are here to make you comfortable."

The five-star hotel was designed and built to embrace the natural elements—fire, water, earth and air—which surround it. And that it does. In winter, when it is cold enough and the ice is thick enough, hotel staff clears a patch on the lake for ice skating, setting a scene that 19th century artist Cornelius Krieghoff would surely have painted. On the stone terrace, the staff keeps a fire burning in a pit surrounded by Adirondack chairs, where guests huddle under woolen blankets, sipping mulled cider or smoking cigars. ☞



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The 11-year-old building is an imposing lodge with a rugged granite, fieldstone and wood exterior, set on an old family estate with landscaped grounds that slope gently toward the lake. Indoors, the ambience is contemporary country, a blend of rustic and refined.

Montreal interior designer Patty Xenos, whose portfolio includes the Residences at the Ritz-Carlton, the Fairmont Le Château Frontenac and the Queen Elizabeth Hotel, drew inspiration from the outdoors and from historic rural retreats. She created large, open gathering rooms with cathedral ceilings and polished wood millwork and set clusters of leather wingback chairs and richly upholstered sofas and armchairs around massive stone hearths. Then she wove in touches of Old-World elegance, such as the Swarovski crystal chandelier in the lobby and a 4,000-bottle wine cellar with vaulted ceilings and stone walls in the wine bar.

Tremblay says Quintessence welcomes two kinds of winter guests. The first is skiers who head straight for the hills, returning at the end of the day. “We take their ski boots away

and get out their slippers so they can head up to their rooms, where the wood-fire concierge is sure to have stoked the fire and warmed the room for their arrival,” Tremblay says.

For those who don’t downhill ski, there’s snow-shoeing, cross-country skiing and sledding.

The other kind of guest, he says, never leaves the hotel, preferring the crackle of a fire and the allure of a good book. That kind of guest spends the day reading, relaxing and enjoying therapeutic treatments—massages, facials, pedicures—at the hotel’s spa.

In the evening, both sets come together to linger over dinner at La Quintessence Restaurant, where Chef Georges Laurier creates classic French dishes with Nordic influences made from local ingredients.

Tremblay says there’s a fifth element at work at Hotel Quintessence. It is the one after which the hotel is named, defined in ancient and medieval philosophy as the essence of a thing in its purest form. “You feel quintessence here as harmony and happiness,” Tremblay says. “It’s something people tell us over and over again.”

