

S T Y L E W E E K L Y  
**TRAVEL**

**TREMBLANT**today



Two enormous 'presidential suites' have private terraces, outdoor hot tubs and fireplaces.

# Quintessence of pampering

STORIES BY LIZ FLEMING

I was the victim of one of those terrible Prince and the Pauper things at birth and somewhere, there's a princess who's got my throne. Until I figure out where she is, I'm staying at Hotel Quintessence in Mont Tremblant. I'll get better service than she does in the castle!

Quintessence, Tremblant's first upscale boutique hotel, offers guests the kind of luxurious pampering that makes you want to weep at the very thought of checking out. With just 30 rooms and a staff so eager to anticipate your needs they're almost clairvoyant, Q, as it's lovingly known, is the perfect all-season retreat for anytime the world is getting to be too much.

Just a three-minute walk from the lively Tremblant Village, Q is in another world. Tucked discreetly into the woods on the shore of Lac Tremblant, the hotel feels like a country manor house, miles from anyone or anything.

A fire roars in the hearth as you walk through the carved wooden doors and a subtle scent of cloves and cinnamon lingers in the air. Check in at a discreet, polished wood desk, not across a counter. No one asks your name because, of course, they've been expecting you.

By the time your room card is in your hand, your baggage has been magically transported and a fire is blazing in your fireplace. A charming Q staff member appears to show you the treats that await you in your room.

From the enormous king-sized bed draped in the kind of puffy, down-filled

comforter that makes you think "hibernation" to the cosy loveseat and chairs surrounding the fireplace, this room is designed for snuggling. The soft wool carpet hugs your toes, and the huge leather ottoman in front of the fire quietly murmurs "old money."

I'm never, ever leaving, you vow. And you haven't even seen the bathroom yet! From the minute you set foot on the heated tile floors, you know this is a bathroom to die for. Step into the shower, and bring three or four of your friends — there's plenty of room, and two shower head systems. One takes care of the actual business of washing you, while the other is a spa-style "rain shower."

You're a bath person? Well ... Q truly is heaven then. At first glance, the bathtub looks like an oversized, claw-footed antique. Look closer, and you'll discover a state of the art Jacuzzi-style tub with more features than you can shake a loofah at. Program the speed at which you'd like the jets to massage your tush, add some wave action and set the temperature to keep you warm and cosy all the while you're in the tub. This is a bath-lover's Nirvana.

But there's more. Remember that blazing fire? Slide open the wooden divider doors between bath and bedroom, and slip into the suds in the glow of the firelight, with a view of Lac Tremblant just beyond. (You'll never run low on kindling ... the firewood concierge keeps you well stocked.)

All this, and just 30 rooms? Who came up with this?

Sean O'Donnell, owner of two of Tremblant's most successful restaurants, Le Shack and La Forge, is the mastermind who convinced 25 investors that what the area needed was a luxury boutique hotel.

After announcing his plans, O'Donnell had all the money he needed ... in less than 90 minutes.

Those in the know in Tremblant weren't surprised. Everyone understands that Sean O'Donnell has the Midas touch.

"People don't just invest in his projects," explains Herb Ratsch, VP of Product and Marketing, Resort Reservations Network Inc., a company that provides web-based promotions and bookings for Tremblant's many attractions, "They invest in Sean."

Even the most cursory look around Q bears testimony to O'Donnell's uncompromising emphasis on quality. The wine cellar boasts 5,000 bottles of the finest wine and a charming sommelier to help you make your selection, the

## Beyond the slopes

It's been 15 years since my husband and I were last at Tremblant. Wow! Then, it was a ski hill. Today, it's Quebec's premiere winter resort, voted No. 1 in eastern North America by *Ski Magazine*.

With 94 runs, 625.5 acres on four mountain faces, and a vertical drop of 645 metres, Tremblant is simply a skier's paradise. But it isn't just the skiing that's bringing people to Tremblant in droves.

*Ski Canada* magazine also gave the resort top honours for: restaurants in the village, restaurants on the mountain itself, and service. Where once there were simply lift lines and snow, there is now a picture postcard village that could have been plucked from the Swiss Alps. Restaurants, shops, bars, Tremblant has it all ... right at the base of the hill. It's the celebration that never ends.

The resort slogan — *joie de vivre* — couldn't be more appropriate. Even if skiing isn't your thing, at Tremblant, you'll have the winter weekend of your life. We sure did.



### Snowshoeing delights

"And now," said Yves, our snowshoeing guide as he pulled a machete of truly horrifying proportions out of his pack and deftly slashed off a few branches, "we will taste a treat from the forest. Chew this bark."

We chewed ... and chewed ... and chewed. Like I said, the guy had a big knife. At first, the bark tasted just like ... well ... bark. Maybe dirt too, but mostly bark. Just when I'd begun to look for a discreet spot to spit my little treat, my mouth suddenly filled with a wild burst of spearmint.

The bark chewing trick was just one of the many amazing things Yves showed us on our two-hour snowshoeing trek. We saw gentle deer glide through the bush, marvelled at bear claw marks on the trees, and even peered into a porcupine nest. (Did you know porcupines feast on bark, get together with a few friends under a rock overhang, poop a big pile and nestle into it for the winter? Aren't you glad I shared that little piece of Yves trivia?)

Easier than it looks, and using equipment that's as simple to don as a pair of hiking boots, snowshoeing has one truly wonderful virtue. It gets you moving and keeps you really warm.



### Hit the spaaaaah!

OK ... so you've been to spas. Done the massage thing. Hung out in the hot tub. No matter how well-spa'ed you imagine yourself to be, the Spa Scandinave in Tremblant will open your eyes ... and your pores ... in ways you've never considered.

THE  
BOUTIQUE  
HOTEL  
comes to  
Tremblant



On-site extras include a restaurant, exercise room, fully equipped spa and 5,000-bottle wine cellar.



Quintessence has only 30 rooms — all large suites, all with views of the lake, balconies outside, and wood-burning fireplaces and oversized whirlpool tubs inside.

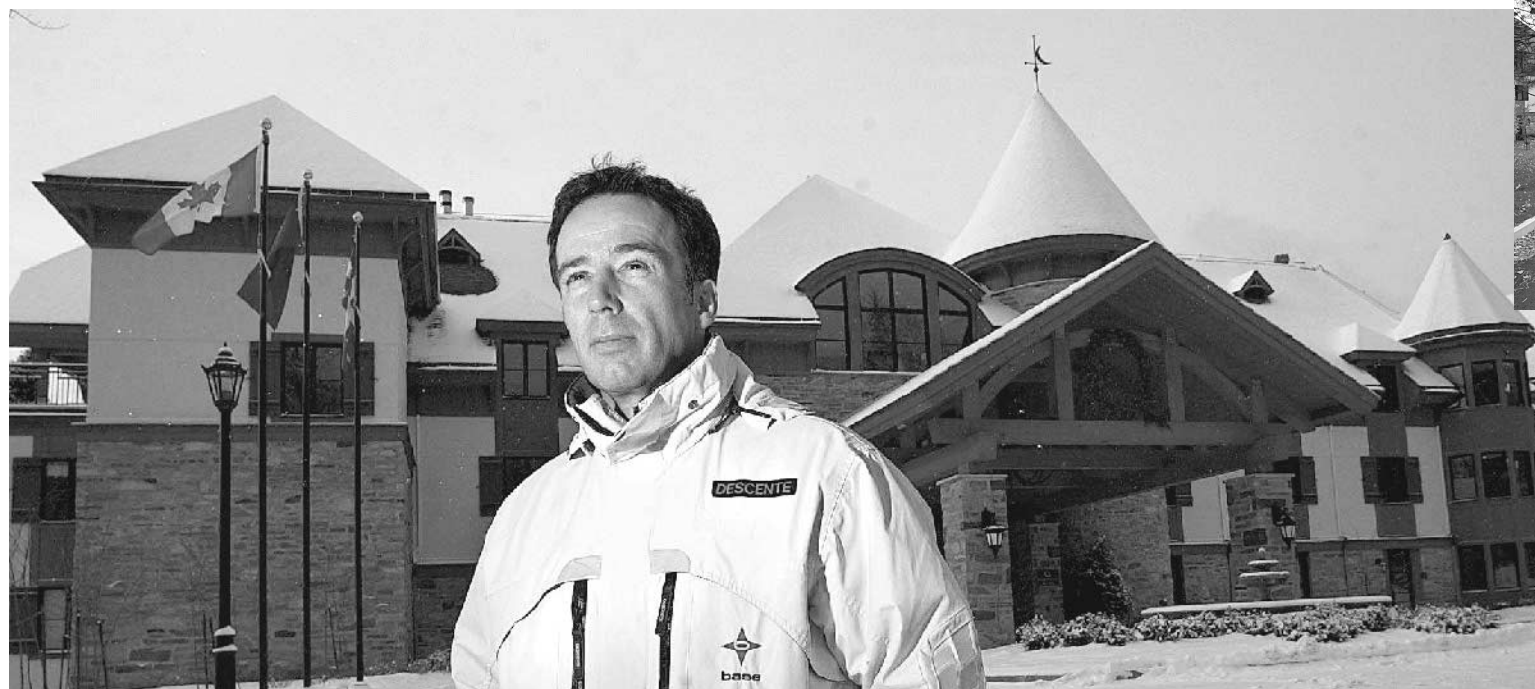


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# TREMBLANTtoday

## If you go



PHIL CARPENTER, CANWEST NEWS SERVICE

Quintessence owner Sean O'Donnell is known for having the Midas touch in the Tremblant area. He also owns two of the ski-and-golf resort's most successful restaurants, Le Shack and La Forge.



Tremblant can be a pretty cold spot ... there's no denying that bracing fact ... but you'll survive just fine if you bring the right gear. Expect to wear a hat and warm mitts, whether or not you hit the hills, as well as a pair of ski pants and a warm jacket. The wind can bite right through a pair of jeans. To enjoy the wonders of the spa Le Scandinave, you'll want your bathing suit ... towels are provided. A word to the wise: bring your own flip-flop sandals. The brick walkways that leads from sauna to hot tub to river, etc. can be pretty frigid. If you're planning to do more than simply ski, be sure to make contact with the Activity Centre as soon as you arrive in Tremblant to book your dogsled ride, your ice-climbing adventure or whatever catches your fancy. Guides must be booked in advance and you don't want to miss out.

### How to get there

If you're driving from Ottawa: Cross over to Hull, then take Highway 50 to Highway 148 south. At Montebello, turn onto Highway 323 north. At Highway 117, head south to Sainte-Jovite and follow the signs (Highway 327) to the resort. Distance: approximately 150 kilometres. Don't feel like driving? Contact your local ski shop to ask about Tremblant excursion buses. Staying at Q? The hotel will be pleased to send a car to pick you up and drive you to the hotel ... for a price. Just ask. Have friends coming from Toronto? An innovative new air service picks passengers up at a private terminal near the Pearson terminal in Toronto and takes them on an hour-plus flight in a speedy little Dash 8 to the new Tremblant International airport, just 30 minutes drive from the hill. Step off the plane and into the log-cabin theme terminal where you'll be greeted by the uber-friendly airport president, Serge Larivière who'll give you a lovely glass of honey wine and a huge smile. For more information, contact Tremblant Central Reservations at (800) 620-6925 or visit [www.tremblant.com](http://www.tremblant.com). Prices range from approximately \$250-\$400 per person round trip, depending on the season.

### What it's going to cost:

Here's a random sampling of the activities available and costs involved: Dogsledding \$99; sleighride \$32; tubing \$15; ice climbing \$79; snowshoeing trek \$49; airplane tours \$63; La Source adult pool/gym combo \$18/day, children \$12/day; Le Scandinave \$36/person/day. For a complete list of activities and their costs, contact the Tremblant Activity Centre at (819) 681-4848 or visit [www.tremblantactivities.com](http://www.tremblantactivities.com). Accommodations at Quintessence Tremblant sur la Lac Resort Hotel begin at approximately \$139/person/per night and include breakfast. To make reservations call toll free (866) 425-3400 or visit [www.hotelQuintessence.com](http://www.hotelQuintessence.com)

More Tremblant: See facing page, E14

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staff in the dining room are so enthusiastic about the menu choices they describe that you feel seriously disappointed not to be able to consume the entire lineup. (Everything is wonderful, but don't miss the exquisite lineup of Québécois cheeses and the buttery Caribou steaks ... unforgettable.)

Even the tiny number of rooms was O'Donnell's idea. "We had to work with the natural topography of the property ... the last on the lake ... so the size of the hotel was dictated by the space available. We could have had 50 smaller rooms, but we wanted 30 spacious ones." (The rooms at Q range in size from 700 to 1,726 square feet.)

A soft-spoken, unassuming man who describes himself as "shy," O'Donnell is anything but when it comes to getting what he wants. In fact, the opening of Q was delayed by several months because O'Donnell refused to compromise on any aspect of his dream.

"It was a very difficult time for us," he reflects. "We had already hired our staff ... we had a number of important events planned and guests booked, but it just wasn't ready. And we weren't willing to have it be less than we'd planned."

Since its opening a few months ago, Q has hosted a number of very satisfied customers



Quintessence is 'the fifth element added to the other four (earth, air, fire and water) to form the universe. The element represents purity, soul and spirit.'

— from the pharmaceutical company that brought its dazzled top reps for a retreat-to-be-remembered, to the gentleman from Italy who booked over the Internet, planned to stay a few days on route to Montreal, and ended up spending his entire time in Canada at the Quintessence. The hotel was sold out for late December and early January and is booking quickly for the weeks to come.

The year-round appeal of the place certainly has much to do with the luxurious facilities, the small but beautifully appointed in-

house spa Sans Sabot that offers its signature, in-room massages, and the delicious offerings of the dining room and wine cellar ... but Q is more than that. The true magic of the place lies in the complete dedication of the staff to ensuring that you get exactly what you want.

"We want people to feel that this is their home ... so we make sure they have everything they want," says O'Donnell. "For example, we have a group coming in next month who want to play shinny on the lake. When they arrive, we'll have the rink shovelled and the hockey sticks ready! It's details like that that make us special."

Will there be Qs?

Sean O'Donnell smiles. "The investors want to create other Qs ... in other parts of the world. Everyone has a suggestion! But for now, I want to concentrate on making this Q the best it can be. People who know the difference, know what they're getting here and that's what's important."

What they're getting is the quintessence of the luxury hotel experience. And what exactly does Quintessence mean?

According to Latin scholars, quintessence is "the fifth element added to the other four (earth, air, fire and water) to form the universe. The element represents purity, soul and spirit. It is believed to be the substance of what heaven embodies."

If there's a heaven on Earth, Q might just be it.

# Beyond the slopes

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Brace yourself, baby. This spa's not for faint-hearted! The Spa Scandinave runs hot and cold. And we ran too ... from hot to cold and back again ... and again ... and again.

We heated up in a eucalyptus-scented dry sauna, in a cloud-filled steam room and in a bubbling hot tub, complete with a pounding, steaming waterfall. Between each heating, we raced into the frigid air to splash in an ice-cold swimming pool, and duck into a frigid waterfall.

We even made the mad dash down a flight of icy wooden steps to the river, where a body-sized hole in the ice awaited. Fools that we were, we took the plunge, survived and now have lifetime bragging rights. With a full range of massage therapies also available, this is a spa experience like no other.

### Getting to La Source

Had it with the hills? If you've seen enough snow and ice for one day, swap your parka for a bikini and dive into the steamy splendour of La Source, an indoor/outdoor swimming adventure centre in the heart of the village.

With a ski rack outside and an enormous

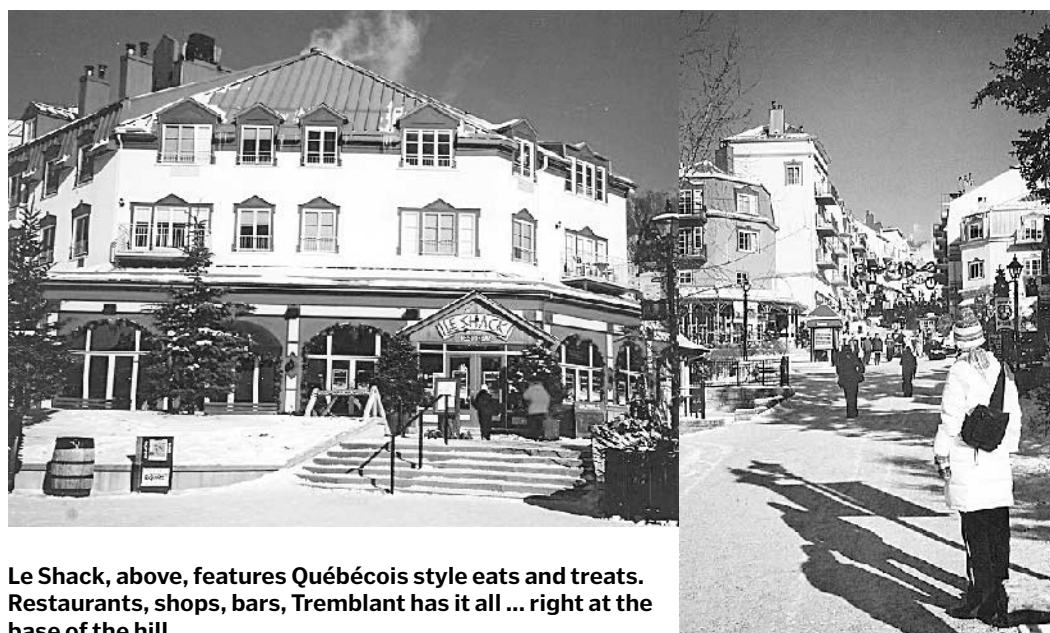
azure blue pool inside, this is an outstanding way to escape winter ... right in the heart of a ski resort. Complete with slides and Tarzan ropes for the kids (and those who think they're kids) and an outdoor hot tub for the braver souls in the group, La Source also features an impressive gymnasium/workout room with a wide variety of fitness machines and equipment.

### Dancing

Le Pet'it Caribou, Tremblant's most happening bar, voted No. 1 in Eastern Canada by *Ski Canada Magazine*, has a life of its own ... a life that pulsates madly until 5 a.m. most nights. With the super-extroverts clamouring for their chance to dance on the bar and the rest of the crowd doing a sort of group mambo on the floor below, this is the place to be when the sun goes down. It's steamy, it's loud and it's not to be missed.

### Dining

From the cute and cosy Crêperie Catherine that features every kind of sweet and savoury crêpe imaginable, to the après-ski fun and Québécois style eats and treats at Le Shack, to the elegant fine dining of La Forge (where



Le Shack, above, features Québécois style eats and treats. Restaurants, shops, bars, Tremblant has it all ... right at the base of the hill.

you can have the best mussels west of P.E.I.), to the intimate ambiance and incredibly enthusiastic service of La Grappe à Vine, Tremblant is bursting at the seams with fabulous food.

The best part? No matter how elegant the food, the atmosphere in every restaurant we visited was uniformly relaxed and casual.

### The Activities Centre

You've skied, and snowshoed, and spa'ed

and splashed around at La Source ... now what? Visit the Activities Centre at the base of the hill and book an afternoon of snow tubing (just like the water variety, but on a hill), dog-sledding (you even get to pick your team and drive!) sleigh riding (think cosy blankets, horses and hot chocolate) ice climbing, flight-seeing and more.

The staff is friendly, knowledgeable and accommodating. Tell them how active (or not!) you want to be and what your entertainment budget is, and they'll set you up.