

Bowdens

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RUSTIC LUXURY: A view of one of the cabins at the Quintessence hotel in Mont-Tremblant, Que.

Exclusive hotel set to open in Mont-Tremblant

By **KEN BECKER**
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MONT-TREMBLANT, QUE.

Sean O'Donnell is at the wheel of his 1909 mahogany motorboat, the quintessential vehicle for the new Quintessence hotel he has built on the shore of Lac Tremblant.

"I hope to make it the first five-diamond hotel in Quebec," the proprietor says just weeks before the September opening of what promises to be the most exclusive property at this already chic mountain resort that attracts two million visitors a year.

"I view us as complementing the resort — not competition — a luxury product that is not offered now."

About 5,000 beds — in condos and hotels, including an upscale Fairmont and Westin — are sprinkled throughout the popular ski and golf resort in the Laurentians, northwest of Montreal.

"But I started to see a need, that a more and more affluent clientele required a more personalized, more private, accommodation," says O'Donnell, who has been in Mont-Tremblant for the past 10 years.

Quintessence has only 30 rooms — all large suites, all with views of the lake, balconies outside, and wood-burning fireplaces and over-sized jacuzzis inside. Two enormous "presidential suites" have private terraces, with outdoor hot tubs and fireplaces.

Making the stay memorable

Guests will also be treated to some services that O'Donnell hopes will make Quintessence memorable. A "wood concierge" will light the in-suite fireplaces at an appointed time, so guests returning from a day of skiing get a warm welcome.

Massage therapists will be on-call from the hotel spa, for in-room rub downs. The resident pastry chef will personally concoct chocolates for pillows on the king-sized beds.

The head chef, hired from the famous Beaver Club at the Fairmont Queen Elizabeth in Montreal, will direct the kitchen for the 80-seat La Quintessence restaurant and adjacent clubby lounge. A sommelier will help guests navigate the selections in the 6,000-bottle wine cellar.

A separate honeymoon cabin is in a pine grove at the edge of the property, where discreetly placed bales of hay regularly attract visiting deer. At the nearby private dock is the gleaming mahogany launch, looking like the centrepiece of a Monet painting, for sunset champagne cruises on the lake.

O'Donnell, a partner in the \$18-million investment, will not always be driving the boat. "I'll basically be the host," he says. It's a role he's played most of his adult life.

Owner of nightclubs and restaurants

Born in Montreal, O'Donnell, 44, worked in bars and restaurants while going to St. Francis Xavier University in Nova Scotia. When he returned to Quebec he bought his first nightclub in the Laurentians. Since then, he's added restaurants and clubs in Mont-Tremblant.

"When I was 20," he says, "all my friends came to my clubs and we hung out together. Now, it's my friends' kids who come — and they call me 'sir.'"

Quintessence — named for the mysterious "fifth element," added to earth, air, fire and water — is more in tune with his current lifestyle. "I love Tremblant and want to be here for the next 20 years," he says. "I'd eventually like to have five Qs around the world."

He calls the hotel Q. And while building a reputation, it will be offering standard suites at less than \$300 a night and the presidential suites starting at \$1,000. It also plans a Friday night oyster bar and wine-tasting special (\$39.95), Sunday brunch, and several getaway packages.

For more information, phone 1-819-425-3400, 1-866-425-3400;
Web site, www.hotelquintessence.com.



FEAST FOR THE EYES: A view of the lake at the Quintessence hotel in Mont-Tremblant, Que.