

In the hot seat
Hotelier Isadore (Issy) Sharp at home in Toronto: 'We have a multipurpose city. It's never lost its neighbourhoods'

Opposite
Progressive, liveable, dynamic... finally, the spotlight is on Canada's cultural capital



CANADA SPRY

Toronto has not always had good press – not least from Canadians themselves. But even the locals have to admit that the place they love to loathe is having a moment.

Mark Jones reports on how the city is being rebuilt, and meets key figures in this renaissance. Photographs by **Lorne Bridgman**



Clockwise from below

On neighbourhood watch: Toronto resident Richard Florida; a landmark hotel is reborn: the Four Seasons; its lobby gets creative

Richard Florida is perhaps the leading urban theorist of our time. He defined the Creative Class and described how inner cities are being transformed by the highly mobile workers of the knowledge economy. In his latest book, *Who's Your City?*, he argues that certain personality types are drawn to certain cities and neighbourhoods. Richard Florida chooses to live in Toronto.

Jane Jacobs was perhaps the greatest urban theorist of the late 20th century. Her 1961 book, *The Life and Death of Great American Cities*, argued that tower blocks and expressways were strangling neighbourhoods. She took to the streets to stop the zealot planner Robert Moses from doing just that to her Greenwich Village home. She won. She saved New York. Then she moved to Toronto.

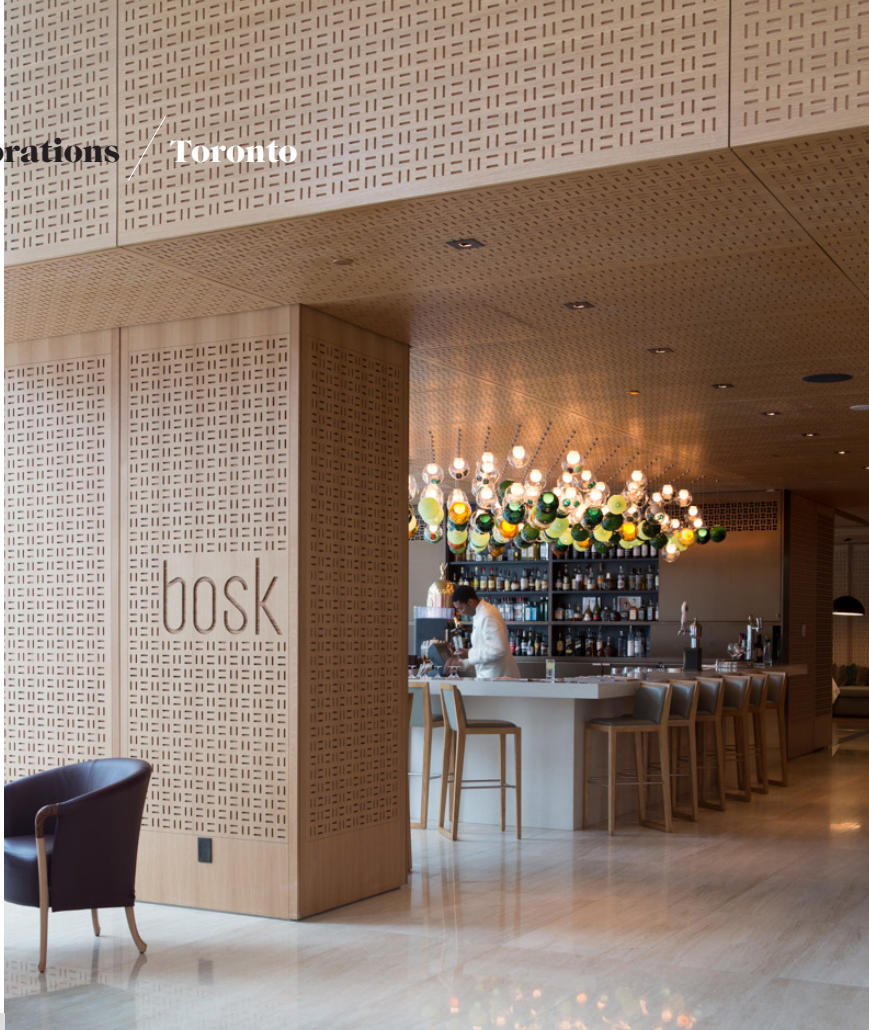
Isadore ('Issy') Sharp is perhaps our greatest living hotelier. The Four Seasons group he founded has 90 hotels in 36 locations. Its first property was a downtown motel in a seedy district – in Toronto. Its latest property is an 81-storey hotel – in Toronto. When Bill Gates and Prince Alwaleed bin Talal took a controlling stake in the Four Seasons as it went private in 2007, Sharp insisted on a clause that the head office should stay where it was as long as he was around – in Toronto.

Yet Toronto somehow escapes the list of the world's great cities. Other Canadians can't stand the place, suspecting their commercial centre gets far too much attention and money. One journalist who spent a year there wrote that 'its streets were clean, its residents polite, and its public amenities were in perfect order. Nonetheless, I wouldn't care if I never laid eyes on the place again'.

The Welsh travel writer Jan Morris, meanwhile, said living in the city was like 'capturing second place in the lottery of life'.

Second place. What a curse. A dynamic eastern seaboard town, but not New York. A shining city on a lake, but not Chicago. A very liveable, progressive place to be, but not Vancouver.





THE GOLD RUSH: TORONTO'S LUXURY HOTEL BOOM

THE SHANGRI-LA

The lobby, with its very expert cocktail bar, is already one of the places to be seen downtown. The Shangri-La was a huge hit in Vancouver – expect it to re-create the success here. From £295. shangri-la.com/toronto/shangrila

THE FOUR SEASONS

The five-star group reopens in the land of its birth with its most contemporary look yet. From £320. fourseasons.com/toronto

THE TRUMP INTERNATIONAL TOWER & HOTEL

Extravagant in every respect, the Trump heralded the new gold rush in Toronto upscale hotels with its grand opening last April. *British Airways offers three nights at the Trump International Hotel & Tower Toronto from £1,129 per person.** ba.com/toronto, +44(0)844 493 0758

THE RITZ-CARLTON

Plush and businesslike with maybe the best spa in town and a sexy outside terrace. Positively ancient in modern five-star Toronto terms – two years old in February 2013. *British Airways offers three nights at the five-star Ritz-Carlton Toronto from £959 per person.*** ba.com/toronto, +44(0) 844 493 0758

AND FOR A CHANGE FROM ALL THAT MARBLE... THE GLADSTONE

Funky Victorian red brick with 37 rooms designed by different artists serves as a gateway to Toronto's hippest district (or it was last week). From £120. gladstonehotel.com/hotel



Red brick and red hot
Hipsters and artists flock to the Gladstone Hotel; while at the Shangri-La it's all about the cocktails (top)



Now the curse is lifting. Maybe the good guys are coming first.

Sharp's new Four Seasons, in Yorkville, is just the latest landmark new hotel to open. The Shangri-La and Ritz-Carlton both opened in 2012. Toronto is having a moment – building up rather than boarding up. There's a boom in creative architectural projects that's transforming its utilitarian city centre and once ordinary suburbs. As the financial world's head was buzzing with crazy schemes, Toronto protected itself from the worst of the financial crisis by those unglamorous – I'm almost tempted to say 'Canadian' – virtues of prudence and common sense. This is its reward.

Issy Sharp lives, as even the super-wealthiest Torontonians do, in an expansive but not overly ostentatious house. His is in a northern suburb of Toronto overlooking the Rosedale golf club.

'In the winter, of course, this got covered with snow and everyone could use it,' says Issy Sharp. 'I'd come up here as a kid and learn to ski. It was the far limits of the city back then.' In the summer months the club was way off limits for Sharp. It was WASP central for Toronto's successful and moneyed. Sharp was a poor Jewish kid, the son of Russian immigrants.

As we talk, we gaze out of floor-to-ceiling windows, which look down on the golfers as they pace the manicured fairways. Yet Sharp doesn't see Toronto's success as measured in the acreage of steel and plate glass; or his own as a fight against an entrenched Anglo-Saxon elite.



TORONTO IN THE PICTURE

Local film-maker Dale Hildebrand asked 24 cinematographers to shoot for 24 hours in hundreds of spots all over town. The result is a 47-minute portrait of Toronto - am to pm, birth to death, with street and aerial views - an exploration of the cultural pulse of the city in a series of elegant, often wide-angled shots.

AND ON VIEW...

The Toronto Islands are a short ferry trip from the harbourfront. 'Go for dinner at the Rectory Cafe outside, walk along the boardwalk and then get the ferry back at night to see the skyline,' says one starstruck local.

'Toronto has always been a city of great diversity,' he says. 'There's very little discrimination. It's a city of minorities: Italian, Portuguese, Jewish, Chinese. In fact, where I grew up, a Jewish ghetto, is now dominated by Chinese - but it retains its own character. As the immigrants are welcomed, they each form their own community.'

'We have a multipurpose city, with business, commerce and neighbourhoods coexisting. It's never lost its neighbourhoods.'

One of those neighbourhoods is Queen Street West. A couple of miles from the swishness of the new downtown, this is the kind of neighbourhood development Richard Florida and Jane Jacobs' books celebrate and champion: the organic kind.

You start at the Gladstone Hotel, where an owner with an art obsession has created an oddball place with a studenty café (its fish tacos, by the way, are the best I've ever had anywhere), theatrical public areas and 37 rooms designed in different styles by 37 different artists.

Turn left out of the hotel and you have art galleries, dime stores selling reconditioned washing machines, cafés and bars, and dozens of funky vintage shops. You wander off the main drag through laid-back residential streets to Ossington, where the fashionable bars and



Clockwise from this picture

Art Gallery of Ontario; vintage vibe in modern threads: Philip Sparks Tailored Goods, Ossington; Parts & Labour in Parkdale; restaurant of the moment with a nod towards Ossington's utilitarian past





restaurants have been springing up so fast the city has had to impose a moratorium on new ones opening.

And that seems to me to be a very characteristic Toronto play. Don't push it too far. Stay wary and self-critical. You hear it when people say Sharp's new hotel is too tall and shiny – out of character for Yorkville. You hear it when they're arguing about the next landmark project in the theatre district – a new art gallery and condo hub by Frank Gehry in his signature collapsed-cardboard-box style on King Street West.

Gehry is perhaps the leading contemporary architect of our times. But his reputation – nor even the fact that his Art Gallery of Ontario was described in the *Toronto Star* as 'the easiest, most effortless and relaxed architectural masterpiece this city has seen' – won't protect him from a critical reception. It's started already. 'The last thing this area needs is another one of Gehry's titanium trailer-park nightmares,' said one local on the *Globe and Mail's* website. Frank Gehry shouldn't be surprised. He is, after all, from Toronto. ■

On the table
Bellwoods Brewery: where locals queue for artisan beers and shaved Brussels sprouts



GO ON THEN...
DESTINATION: TORONTO

FIND IT AT BA.COM

British Airways flies to Toronto from London Heathrow. Flight time: about eight hours.

COLLECT THOSE AVIOS

As an Executive Club member you can earn up to 21,318 Avios when you fly First to Toronto return. Or redeem your Avios – just 40,000 will get you there and back*.

FOR THE REEL TORONTO...

Watch a clip of Dale Hildebrand's 24-hour Toronto film project *T O in 2 4* at bahighlife.com, where you can also read our full interview with Issy Sharp.

TORONTO'S FAMOUS CITIZENS ON HOW THEIR CITY'S THRIVING



MICHAEL IGNATIEFF
Author and University of Toronto academic

'My Toronto is the university at its heart: music ringing out over Philosopher's Walk from the practice rooms at the Faculty of Music, the great labs producing scientific research, the students in my human rights' class teaching me, as I teach them, how to be a free thinker.'



DAVID LISS
Artistic director and curator, Museum of Contemporary Canadian Art

'They say that Toronto is a city of neighbourhoods and people. I'm fortunate to live in The Junction, an up-and-coming area that is socially and economically diverse and manages to retain a community feel. It has interesting, independently owned shops, excellent restaurants, great bars and a lively street culture. I work in the West Queen West Art + Design District, the city's trendiest neighbourhood – it's too cool for me to want to live there but it's an inspiring place to spend time.'



KATIE PRETTI
Artist
'Bloordale is my favourite neighbourhood. I love Holy

Oak café for coffee. I crave their toasty almond tea and Zocalo for a quiet wholesome dinner – it's all about deconstructed sandwich plates with locally sourced ingredients. 3 Speed is my local and the best bar in town – it's always busy. I'm surprised to meet people who don't know we have islands. For me, a trip to Hanlan's Point makes the season official. As soon as I get on the ferry, the smell of the water and

the sound of the gulls make me feel like I'm on vacation.'
katiebondpretti.com



JEREMY LAING
Fashion designer

'I love Toronto's vibrant

downtown culture, with its thriving food, music and art scenes. While many North American cities have seen their cores abandoned, Toronto has always maintained a vital and magnetic centre, in part because of highly concentrated ethnic and residential neighbourhoods peppered throughout the heart of the city.'



ATOM EGOIAN
Stage and film director

'My first apartment was in Kensington

Market, and it's still my favourite place to hang out on a beautiful afternoon. There's a special vibe to the area that hasn't changed in decades. I love having a beer on the patio at Ronnie's Local 069, and ordering a grilled cheese from across the street. They'll actually bring it over. I cherish my memories of shooting my first feature in the market in the early 80s when they still sold live rabbits and chickens in the street. It really expresses the multicultural fabric of the city in an authentic and fun way.'



AARON CARPENTER
Captain of the Canadian Rugby Union Football Team

'I love watching baseball at the massive stadium The Rogers Centre – I'm a big fan of the Toronto Blue Jays. In summertime the atmosphere is great. It has a retractable roof and it's nice to have a few drinks and a bite to eat while watching the game in the sunshine.'

ADDITIONAL REPORTING: JANETHE BUTT, PHOTOGRAFIS; ENVI/17; OLIVIERA; DAVID CHAN; TINA FOWDEN; LAUREN BURNS; COADY; KATIE PRETTI; GETTY IMAGES. *AVIOS EARN AMOUNT ESTIMATED IS BASED ON THE MAXIMUM EARNING OF A GOLD MEMBER. MINIMUM EARN IS 14,212 AS A BLUE MEMBER. REDEMPTION AMOUNT IS BASED ON ECONOMY JOURNEYS WITH 40,000 AVIOS AND MAY INCLUDE TAXES, FEES AND CHARGES AT THE TIME OF BOOKING.