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Is Hogtown ready for an upscale 'urban resort?'

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Can a spa be sexy?

Apparently so, as G-Spa at Hotel Gansevoort in New York proves.

Glossy red walls, lounge lighting, and a unisex steam room all suggest perhaps more than a back massage is on offer at the Meatpacking District's hippest hotel. The spa menu is innocent enough, though, with holistic treatments worked into the standard beauty fare.

But get this: three nights a week the spa converts to a nightclub. Hydrotherapy pools illumine the floors. The elevated mani-pedi area becomes banquet seating. And curtained massage rooms transform into private cabanas where Veuve Clicquot champagne, Grey Goose vodka and sushi are served.

"It's wicked," comments Mazyar Mortazavi, principal of TAS DesignBuild. Mortazavi and his family firm are behind a number of local condo projects including Giraffe, M5V, DIA and Zed. Latest on the drawing board is Gansevoort Toronto, a 150-room, 35-storey hotel, spa and condo residence. The project is slated to open at 318 Richmond St. W., between John and Peter Sts., in 2011. A series of "hanging gardens," devised by award-winning Teeple Architects, is configured so that "practically every suite is a corner unit," Mortazavi describes.

Over refreshments at The Spoke Club in Toronto last week, he makes a compelling case by his appearance alone.

"The intent of bringing The Gansevoort to Toronto is not to try to be New York," says Mortazavi, immaculately outfitted in a slim grey suit and floral enamel Paul Smith cufflinks. "It's to bring in a brand that is unique and innovative."

Gansevoort hotels are positioned as "urban resorts" that tailor amenities to a city's mood. Gansevoort South, which opened in Miami this year, has a 25,000-square-foot David Barton gym and a 50-foot-long shark tank in the lobby.

Gansevoort New York, on the other hand, has a minuscule gym with no celebrity-trainer affiliation but boasts a rooftop pool with underwater lights and music, and a lounge with panoramic city views. Another New York Gansevoort is expected next year at Park Ave. S. and 29th St.

Toronto's specifics are still being devised, based on this city's "socio-nuances," Mortazavi says.

"We will offer the same quality of rooms and the same uniqueness of experience as The Gansevoort, but not the same experience."

One difference will be Gansevoort Toronto's holistic approach to design and sustainable living. Enviro-friendly mechanicals, lighting, automation controls, toiletries and linens will be chosen to attain silver certification from LEED, the Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design rating

system.

But hotels are about meeting needs and whims, and Mortazavi will have to improve upon the uneven service that is the downfall of many hip hotels. I stayed at Hotel Gansevoort for two nights during New York Fashion Week last month, one night on them, the other on me to the tune of \$675 (U.S.) plus taxes. The taupe-on-taupe room with airport-lounge decor was comfortable enough, and there were nice little surprises, like a desk stocked with Post-it notes and paper clips. But there were annoyances like a promised *New York Times* that didn't materialize on either morning.

The location is stellar, though, right across from the fashion hangout Pastis bistro and walking distance to many designer showrooms. And the frenetic bar scene and lively elevator rides made the solo trip less lonely.

"Gansevoort Toronto won't be for everyone because it will have an attitude," Mortazavi admits, praising other downtown T.O. projects like The Ritz-Carlton and Shangri-La for those who have more conventional tastes. "Gansevoort is for early adopters, for people with foresight for change. It's for the Prada and MiuMiu crowd, as opposed to those who wear Armani and Hugo Boss."

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