

# BARSTARRETREAT

:: HOTEL ARTS FUNKY COSMOOPOLITAN RAW BAR, AN URBAN LOUNGER'S SANCTUARY

**Interior Designer ::**  
McKinley Dang Burkart Design Group  
**Food & Beverage prepared by ::**  
Chef Duncan Ly and the team at Raw Bar



Setting foot into Hotel Arts and its restaurant/lounge Raw Bar, one quickly realizes that we're not in Kansas anymore. Nor Calgary, it seems. No, stepping into this newly-converted, once-aged hotel feels a lot like stepping into a hotspot straight out of Miami's South Beach, or perhaps somewhere in London or Paris. Either way, this seems a far cry from Cowtown.

It is becoming rather difficult to define Calgary anymore. Cosmopolitan or cosmopolitan? Hick town or slick town? Is there any sense in trying to define it anyway, when the outside world quickly evaporates and relents as you get wrapped up in Raw Bar's warm and stylish embrace? It's equally difficult to make a clear delineation between restaurant/lounge/bar in this case—by design, of course. For the sake of brevity, we'll stick with "lounge" for the remainder of the article, even though the word seems a little confining.

In what can only be hailed as yet another sign that Calgary is indeed a changed city, this boutique hotel arrived on the scene two years ago. In this case, however—in marked contrast to the other big-city hallmarks of traffic snarls, higher crime rates, and short fuses—Hotel Arts/Raw Bar is an indicator that Calgary has been growing in some very positive ways, as well.

Aside from creating a decidedly stylish and unique hotel within the city, the design elements (by McKinley Dang Burkart Design Group) of Hotel Arts and those within Raw Bar were intended to create a consistent, seamless feel between the hotel itself and the lounge. The overall es-

sence of both hotel and lounge can best be described as modern without being minimalist, offering coolness without sacrificing comfort.

Touring the rooms—from the standard guestroom suites to the luxury rooms to the "Rock Star" suites—the consistency is evident: the same drapes that line the windows and walls of Raw Bar can be seen behind the headboards in each room; the floors in the suites' bathrooms are the same as those of the lounge; and the espresso-dark wood is ubiquitous, from nightstands to bed frames to the walls of the lounge.

The lounge's dimly lit entrance is discreetly set just off the main lobby of the hotel. Inside, the emphasis on style is quickly evident. The first thought is that somebody has put a *lot* of thought into this place. Looking up, down, or straight ahead, there are artistic flourishes everywhere.

Most of the walls are covered in dark, floor-to-ceiling oak. Recessed into the wood are softly lit pieces of original art or sculpture, including pieces from locals Bradley Harms and Vic Cicansky. This recessed effect adds depth to the room, and »





highlights the artwork nicely.

Between the sections of the wooden walls, there is ample room for natural light provided by clear floor-to-ceiling windows, which overlook the pool area. A look at the umbrellas and contemporary wood deck furniture outside reveals the "South Beach with a Tuque" aesthetic that Fraser Abbott, the hotel's Director of Sales & Marketing, advises they were going for when designing the hotel and lounge overall.

Turning the attention skyward, the ceiling is blanketed with a red sculpture that is fused with six massive plaster pillars that punctuate the room. Random red and clear LED lights dot the ceiling structure, which, according to Nicole Sifton, Research and Design for Torode Realty, "provide the sparkle to the center of the room" and evoke a feeling of being under the stars. To round out the overhead artistry, a striking glass sculpture comprised of dozens of oversized glass goblets clumped together (created by local artist Christopher Boha) hangs over the bar area.

Looking down, in part just to make sure that our feet haven't landed us in Europe by

some freak time-travel accident, the floor is a kind of plank-style porcelain tile in graphite grey. It seems purposefully neutral and understated. Your attention's focus is clearly meant to be directed upwards, either to your intimate discussion or to the scenery on the walls.

Finally, the seating is a mixture of long, upholstered benches that line certain walls, and half-back and full wing-back chairs in a rust colour, covered with a crypton velvet fabric. Mark Wilson, the hotel's general manager, points out that the full wing-back chairs provide an insulating effect, allowing for a feeling of privacy even if the room is filled to its 282-person capacity. This diverse seating is centered around dark bamboo-lined tables, also of various sizes and shapes.

The cumulative effect of all this attention to seriously artistic and rather luxurious design leaves one feeling very comfortable, save for the mildly confusing feeling that we've somehow forgotten where we are. ☺

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