

ACE HOTEL TORONTO

Ace Hotel Toronto Design Narrative

Ace Hotel Toronto stands as testament to the quiet but regenerative power that thoughtful architecture and design can have on its environment. Set in the heart of Toronto's historic Garment District – a neighborhood fueled by innovation and industry at the start of the 20th century – the building's character and material palette recall the robustness of the surrounding brick-and-beam factories and warehouses.

As it pays homage to what came before, Ace Hotel Toronto is simultaneously attuned to what is yet to come; the building is a civic space, crafted as a home for creative thinkers from near and far, and represents a long-term investment in the city it serves. Forged from a close, yearslong collaboration between Shim-Sutcliffe Architects and Atelier Ace, the building utilizes materials valued for their intrinsic strength, integrity and tactility, employing the simple and functional to craft something spectacular. The material choices also evoke a particularly Canadian feeling, marking Ace's first home in the country.

Although a new building, the design of Ace Hotel Toronto captures a layered sense of time in order to feel effortlessly at home among its surroundings and, in doing so, obfuscates its own age. One wonders if the structure has stood for one year or 100 years. The project marks a youthful resurrection of the storied area it inhabits – once a manufacturing center that grew into an important artistic hub – inviting neighbors and newcomers to share space, conversation, a meal, a night or simply something new. It's a welcoming place where life happens.

Location / Neighborhood

At the meeting of Camden and Brant Streets, across from St. Andrew's Playground Park – a small but significant downtown green space – Ace Hotel Toronto is set in what was once the city's vital Garment District. Distinguished by many turn-of-the-century red brick factories and warehouses, the neighborhood's rugged masonry and timber structures supported heavy manufacturing which took place inside. Textile production boomed in the early 1900s due to Toronto's strategic positioning and ease of transport by land or water, and the neighborhood along with it. In the 1920s and 1930s, a number of Art Deco-style buildings were erected and stylishly showcased Toronto's emergence as a modern metropolis.

As manufacturing moved offshore, the neighborhood was transformed into a creative hub by musicians, architects, designers and artists who recognized potential in the industrial structures left behind. It became the epicenter of Toronto's art and music scene in the 1970s and '80s, hosting venues such as Cameron House, Horseshoe Tavern and Velvet Underground. Nightclubs thrived in the 1990s, and architecture and design studios in the early 2000s. Most recently, a multi-use building housing innovative new business, living spaces and a European-inspired food hall is set to open in a 1930s-era public utilities building, kitty-corner from Ace Toronto. The neighborhood has always been a place for subcultures to thrive in abundance, where creation is a constant. Ace Toronto seeks to cultivate a communal corner of the city to be shared by all of our friends.

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Facade and Building Architecture

Red brick is Toronto's material, and Ace Hotel Toronto's red clay facade recalls the important role bricks played in forming the city's visual identity. Around the turn of the century, rich deposits of high-quality clay were discovered in the Don Valley. Don Valley Pressed Brick Works was established in the 1890s and went on to press 43 million beautiful red bricks annually during the height of its production. These baked bricks were used to build many of the city's homes and landmark buildings, including Massey Hall, as well as the Garment District's factories and warehouses, many of which were eventually demolished in the 1960s and '70s. A statement of resistance against recent thin and glassy developments in the area, Ace Hotel Toronto's symbolic brick facade reaches back in time to pay homage to the strength and durability of these bygone buildings, allowing the structure to feel a part of its context and engage in a larger conversation.

Entrance and Lobby

The hotel, featuring 14 above-ground stories and four basement levels, showcases a sweeping main entrance – tucked on Camden Street, a quiet side road – with detailing in brick, concrete, copper and wood. Along Brant Street, oversized glass windows spark curiosity, offering onlookers clues as to the intricate spaces within while filling the interiors with abundant natural daylight. Guests enter the lobby facing southward, catching a glimpse of *Horizon Line*, a three-story site-specific art installation designed by A. Howard Sutcliffe and assembled by local firm Two Degrees North. *Horizon Line*, a puzzle of weathered, stained and untreated plywood pieces, abstractly portrays the sparkling waters of Lake Ontario and offers a moment of orientation, situating the viewer on the northern shore of one of the Great Lakes which served as Toronto's point of entry for centuries. Positioned as the threshold to the hotel, the reception desk features glazed brick and warm red oak shelving. The glow of soft light displays a carefully curated selection of retail goods.

A rhythmic series of soaring, poured-in-place, steel-edged concrete structural arches rise from below grade to a level above. Each frame terminates with an oversized industrial steel “knuckle” that transfers the load from the hotel rooms above to the foundations below. Initially set in wood forms, the concrete features the appearance of textural wood grain, mixing and matching material and pattern playfully. The lobby, clad in red oak lining, is hung by slender steel rods from these massive supports, which carve out the boundaries of the space. Intended to feel as if it were slipped into an existing structure, blurring the sensation of time, the lobby's suspension creates the sensation of levity within the massive, muscular space. The lobby flooring is end grain Douglas fir, a nod to industrial fabrication that is echoed above in the guest suites' entrance vestibule flooring.

The lobby is the heart of the building, one meant to be treated as a living room by anyone passing through the hotel doors. Interactive elements, such as a communal work table made by Shaun Moore of Made Design, and DJ booth decorated in colorful concrete discs from Montreal studio Concrete Cat, are intended for the use and pleasure of all. In an area lacking shared spaces, Ace Toronto is a civic building, and its lobby is a shelter for the many.

The Lobby Bar

Nestled between the steel-edged concrete arches, the Lobby Bar takes the form of a wooden tray, hung from the central concrete structure by steel rods. The bar itself, clad in white glazed brick, is positioned

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within the structure's larger-than-life steel knuckles. A striking juxtaposition occurs between small moments over coffee or cocktails set within the tremendous scale of the surroundings. The softer, lighter red oak millwork and park vistas play against the backdrop of imposing concrete walls. Shim-Sutcliffe created bespoke kite-inspired light forms from opaque plexiglass and wood, which hang directly over the bar and gently illuminate the space with a lantern-like glow. The upper portion of *Horizon Line*, visible from the bar's entrance, slowly reveals itself as the observer moves closer toward the work.

This is a casual, comfortable space filled with Atelier Ace-sourced plush, curvilinear furnishings from which to observe shifting morning light and bask in afternoon sun filtering in through the deep-set, wood-framed windows. The bold, structural moments of the surrounding architecture are mirrored in both color and form of the furniture. There is a soulful mix of vintage chairs, lighting and rugs, new rugs manufactured by Odabashian, as well as custom Atelier Ace creations, such as a double-sided sofa and a stool collaboration with Garth Roberts. Texture and warmth, whether felt or observed in the furnishings, were carefully considered to heighten the sensory nature of the space.

Alder [Restaurant]

Alder, Ace Toronto's wood-fired restaurant helmed by Torontonians Patrick Kriss, functions as a grounding element to the light-spirited lobby. Half-buried in the earth, Alder features warming textural elements including laid-in brick flooring and bush-hammered concrete walls. Consisting of both a triple-height space and a single-height space, set beneath the wood underside of the lobby, Alder enjoys a strong shift of scale. Big, concrete structural frames extend from the building's foundations to the lobby level steel knuckles. Alder's banquettes are inserted between these frames so that guests can occupy the spaces between the robust structure, illuminated by Shim-Sutcliffe's custom-designed copper light fixtures embedded into the concrete itself. Additional light fixtures were sourced by Atelier Ace from a variety of Canadian lighting companies. The double-height windows wash the restaurant in natural light during the day and invite the public on the street into the scene below.

Alder's copper and black wood bar offers a starkly different experience – a darker, moodier, masonry-heavy atmosphere. The combination of Alder's banquette, table and kitchen-side seating support an infinitely flexible space that can effortlessly play host to business lunches, family dinners or luxuriously long evenings of intimate conversation. The majority of Alder's chairs are reupholstered vintage, sourced by Atelier Ace to further the building's time-twisting narrative. Atelier Ace also designed the red oak dining tables, sapele cocktail tables and the checker-pattern end grain walnut chef's table, which is situated close to the emanating warmth of the kitchen's open flame.

Tie rod-supported stairs descend from the lobby into the sunken restaurant, passing before A. Howard Sutcliffe's monumental *Horizon Line*. The staircase in front of the mural heightens its drama, establishing a synergistic relationship between the guests, the art and the architecture. The open kitchen, located opposite the installation, and dining room are crafted from earthen materials to echo the rustic yet refined nature of the food served.

The Rooftop Bar

The rooftop bar features both indoor and outdoor lounges and is anchored by two massive brick fireplaces. At the northern and southern ends of the space live works from Montreal-based artist David Umemoto, including sculptural pieces as well as cast concrete murals that call to mind architectural

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details — ghostly impressions that seemingly exist in a multitude of times, appearing both familiar and strange. Atelier Ace prioritized texture and warmth for the bar’s interior design elements, selecting earthly shades of mossy green and terracotta. While the furnishings showcase a cohesive meeting of linear structure and comfort, they are simultaneously spirited and fun — this is a rooftop bar, after all. Toronto design studio MSDS designed custom light fixtures for the bar top and main bar. A lush display of plants moves from indoors to outdoors, where the furnishings adopt a more casual tone, reminiscent of a sun-soaked patio. The deck faces westward, optimizing vistas of Toronto’s downtown skyline, glorious sunsets and St. Andrew’s Playground Park as it evolves throughout the seasons.

Guest Rooms

Nature served as muse for Ace Toronto’s guestrooms. The rooms are evocative of the comforting pleasures of a wilderness cabin retreat only set within the city. Local materials, such as canvas, wood benches, Douglas fir paneling and flooring, and custom and vintage furnishings help to convey a sense of landscape. Rooms feature a cozy, deep-set window bench, which operates as an intermediary space — not quite in the city, not quite in the hotel room — to experience the weather while being protected from it.

For the guest suites, Atelier Ace custom-designed copper headboards with fabric inset, desks and worktables, a cream-top bedside table and copper-framed bathroom mirrors, while the cabinetry was a collaborative effort with Shim-Sutcliffe. Atelier Ace likewise conceptualized pendant, window box and vanity lighting for the guest rooms. Corridor lighting features both Atelier Ace creations as well as wall sconces by RBW. A custom quilt, designed by Canadian artist Kyle Parent and made using deadstock fabric, was inspired by a diversity of heritage weaving techniques and textiles. Rooms feature signature Ace guitars and turntables with collections of Canadian vinyl albums curated by Toronto record label Arts & Crafts.

Guest Room Art

Guest rooms feature two art programs called *Poems from Home* and *Community Canvas*.

Poems from Home was inspired by Toronto’s diverse and vibrant population, celebrating the fact that many of the city’s inhabitants — and indeed the artists in the program — come from somewhere else. Each art piece includes a poem themed around the concept of “home” — as defined by the artist — written either in English or in the artist’s first language. The result is a gorgeous amalgam of poems from all around the world, brought to life by the artists and people of Toronto, seen in guest rooms that global travelers will wake up to and absorb as they head out to explore the city.

For *Community Canvas*, the artists Claudia Gutierrez and Guillermo Trejo have created a collaborative work on 70 pieces of pre-cut canvas shared between the two artists in a sort of call-and-response activation. Guillermo Trejo began by printing on the canvas, using his graphic and bold aesthetic; Claudia then used a dip dye technique she studied at her residency in Oaxaca, Mexico to add an element of softness and fluidity to the prints. The two artists have been collaborators for over a decade, having shown their work together, worked together in art spaces and sat on boards together. This is the first time the two have collaborated on an art piece.

Custom-Designed Elements for Ace Hotel Toronto

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Lighting

To complement Toronto's array of seasonal shifts, lighting is an important means to define spaces and create areas where people desire to linger. The scale of the lobby is majestic, so Shim-Sutcliffe Architects designed a trio of kite-like pendants to bring scale, warmth and focus to the lobby bar. In the restaurant banquettes, Shim-Sutcliffe custom-designed sconce lights that are partially cast-in-place into the concrete structure, with the light radiating from the concrete. They designed a custom light for the elevator, which illuminates the small but important transitional space with a gentle glow. Toronto-based design studio MSDS designed custom light fixtures for the rooftop bar. Within the guest rooms and corridors, all light fixtures are custom-designed by Atelier Ace, with inspiration drawn from vintage lighting design.

Furnishings

Much of the furnishings found throughout the hotel are custom-designed by Atelier Ace and Shim-Sutcliffe. In the guest rooms, window seats were designed to bring the nook-like spaces typical of cabins to the rooms, with views to the park. New York-based MINNA designed custom pillows of shaggy wool for the alcove seats. Toronto-based Euwes is also a collaborator for the guest room window box pillows — Euwes overlaid color on Atelier Ace's design, bringing additional joy to the space.

Bed frames, desks, work tables and laminated bedside tables were all designed by Atelier Ace specifically for the guest rooms, and have been brought to life by local artisans. The custom bed quilt, an Ace hallmark, is a collaboration with Vancouver artist Kyle Parent and was crafted from deadstock fabric. For the public spaces, Atelier Ace designed multiple pieces including a double-sided sofa in the Lobby Bar as well as custom cocktail tables for both Alder and the rooftop bar. The DJ booth was a collaborative effort with Montreal studio Concrete Cat. Garth Roberts, who was born in Toronto, designed custom stools for the Lobby Bar. Montreal-based artist David Umemoto crafted custom concrete panels for the rooftop bar.

Shim-Sutcliffe designed a side table specifically for the hotel, that can be found in the guest rooms and at the rooftop bar. Inspired by the hotel's consistent palette, and the desire to find inventive approaches to traditional materials, the tables combine ready-made clay fireplace pipes of different diameters inside each other, filled with concrete to create a whole.

The Event Spaces

As you move up in the building, from ground to sky, spaces and materials become loftier and thus more airy. While the restaurant on the main floor is low-lit and composed of terrestrial materials, the second floor meeting rooms offer connection to light, openness and expansiveness.

FORM is 1500-sq-ft of private space perched above the lobby and engaged in its energy. Form is highly flexible and made for events, meetings and parties of all stripes. With views of St. Andrew's Playground Park, ample natural light, vintage furnishing and original commissioned artworks, Form is a spacious yet warm place to gather. Both Form and Flow may be used in concert for events and get-togethers that move between both spaces.

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FLOW is a 500-sq-ft gathering space built around a 14-seat PaperStone table designed by Atelier Ace. Overlooking the lobby, Flow features original commissioned artworks and a Japanese garden-inspired outdoor terrace displaying an architectural sculpture. Intended for intimate dinner parties and meetings, Flow is a comfortable room to convene. Both Flow and Form may be used in concert for events and get-togethers that move between both spaces.

INTERSPACE is a 2000-sq-ft subterranean space enclosed by wood and concrete walls. Featuring state-of-the-art acoustics, Interspace offers a pre-function area, private washrooms, coat check and plenty of space to sprawl.