

The Old Mill Inn & Spa

Beguiles the senses; enraptures the imagination

by Jack Kohane

Piercing the centuries-old treetops of west-end Toronto, The Old Mill Inn & Spa is the last remaining remnant of a string of early 1800s lumber sawmills that once clustered the shoreline of the roiling Humber River.

Tucked among the majestic maples and pines that drape the slopes of the twisting river valley, the Old Mill's architecture is elemental – a Tudor façade fusing wood, rock, and mortar. Flanking the inn and spanning a dried tributary of the Humber River is a charming, three-arched stone bridge reminiscent of a landscape plucked from the British lowlands. The spirit of the Old Mill is decidedly Old World, exemplified by the inn's motto *Humbria Angliae Pars Anglia Procul* (in the valley of the Humber, a bit of England far from England).





Tucked among the majestic maples and pines that drape the slopes of the twisting river valley, the Old Mill's architecture is elemental – a Tudor façade fusing wood, rock, and mortar, with stunning views of the valley and the picturesque courtyard patio.

Now gloriously remodelled and expanded to create a graceful boutique inn and spa, the six-acre property is renowned among the horticultural hoi polloi for its bountiful and meticulously manicured English gardens. All 13 lavish suites are centred in the historic Old Mill building, offering exclusivity with just four units per floor.

Affording stunning vantage points overlooking the valley and the picturesque courtyard patio, each of the inn's 60 skilfully appointed rooms are bedecked with burnished, rich mahogany and cherrywood tables, chairs, and state-of-the-art entertainment centres. There are all-season fireplaces and double-Jacuzzi ensuites for every guest room; bedrooms, some with four-poster beds, come smartly accented in plumped up queen- and king-size beds layered in lush cotton linens and billowy down-filled duvets with pillows that invite you into undisturbed slumber.

Looking for a closet? There are none. Instead, suites are equipped with steamer trunk-sized upright wardrobes, generous enough to accommodate the accoutrements of a lord, a lady and an entourage.

Almost 80 years ago, the flamboyant Canadian land developer, Robert Home Smith, envisioned a refuge of genteel refinement secluded from the commotion of Toronto's urban sprawl, yet easily accessible for the city's growing aristocracy. His dream, The Old Mill Tea Room Garden, opened in 1914, and quickly became a Toronto landmark for leisure and recreation seekers, exactly as it is today.

"We painstakingly designed the old and new to blend as one," says present-day innkeeper Michael Kalmar, as he escorts guests through the inn's grand fieldstone interior. "In fact, the original oak panelled tea room and majestic dining spaces harmonize seamlessly within the inn's cleverly sculpted new addition. Because this is a property of historical significance, we wanted to ensure that the integrity of the structure and the continuity of turn-of-the-century style complement each other perfectly," he adds. "We believe that Home Smith would be proud of what we've done to his cherished mill and grounds."

The original 2,100-square-foot Old Mill Restaurant is a superb example of 19th century decorative sensibility, laden with slab floors of rough-hewn flagstones quarried right out of the nearby riverbed. The oaken wall trims and exposed overhead beams have aged a deep chocolate, and as your eyes are riveted by the massive central stone fireplace, you are commanded to look up in awe at a 50-foot-high open ceiling of solid British Columbia fir. In 1929, a gleaming hardwood dance floor was also incorporated, so patrons, past and present, could dance the night away to the strains of a live orchestra performing ballroom and swing band medleys.



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Merging with the inn's re-energized design synergy is the Terrace Restaurant, actually a romanticized replica of an English manor banquet hall. Executive Chef Daniel Lamy, trained in Denmark and plying his prodigious culinary skills in some of Ontario's finest dining meccas, prepares a sumptuous menu garnished with the fruits and vegetables of the season. His signature specialities include succulent Maryland crab cake on sweet potatoes with corn polenta simmered in roasted red peppers; and savoury capellini pasta with grilled shrimp and mussels tossed in saffron, doused in sambuca sauce. "My background is preparing classical French cuisine," explains Lamy. "But my technique has since been tempered and broadened with the flavours that hallmark the multicultural elements of this city."

Boasting its own resident historian, who conducts periodic tours along a two-mile stretch of the Humber River Valley for the inn's guests, Keith Sparks' passion is to keep the history of the Mill and its natural environs alive for future generations to marvel at. This spot was once referred to as a veritable Garden of Eden, he smiles. Today, it's still a marvellous escape from the traffic and noise of a modern city, and an idyllic retreat from the stresses of the everyday. It's one of those rare spaces that allows you to get in tune with your inner self again.

Perhaps it's the vitality and collage of life that is Toronto that first beguiles the senses, but a stop at The Old Mill Inn will positively enrapture your imagination.

On site:

- Full-service Spa
- Fitness centre
- Flower and Gift Shoppe
- Walking and jogging trails through the Humber River Valley
- Wedding Chapel
- Banquet and Meeting Facilities

Nearby:

- Tennis courts
- Neighbourhood golf courses
- Trendy clothing shops and funky eateries of the Bloor West Village and The Kingsway
- Pearson Airport
- CN Tower
- Ontario Place/ Eaton Centre
- Royal Ontario Museum
- Art Gallery of Ontario
- Skydome/Air Canada Centre
- Harbour Front

at a glance

The Old Mill Inn & Spa
 21 Old Mill Road
 Toronto, ON, Canada M8X 1G5
 Tel: 416-236-2641
 Toll-free: 866-653-6455
 Fax: 416-236-2749
 E-mail: info@oldmilltoronto.com
 www.oldmilltoronto.com



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