

# By golly, the old dowager looks good

## \$20 million facelift complete . . . King Eddy's set to compete

By John Brehl Toronto Star

After umpteen delays, the gussied-up old King Edward Hotel will start accepting guests Tuesday for rooms, meals and drinks.

And, by golly, the old fellow or the grand old lady, whichever gender applies, does look good.

Scores of forest green and gold striped awnings shade — the first floor windows and the indoor carpeting pile is as high as an average man's eye.

The venerable dowager, reclaimed from skid road at renovation costs of something between \$20 and \$30 million, reeks of luxury — and money.

Trust House Forte Ltd., which runs 800 other hotels around the world, including the Pierre in New York and The George V in Paris, will operate the 78-year-old but virtually new hostelry for its Toronto owners.

They intend to be a world class five-star hotel, mainly for businessmen of the highest level who are used to being spoiled on their travels.

### Spoiling yourself

But you can be there for the historic first days, if you wish and if you can pay the freight, starting at \$85 for a single room (phone in the bathroom, marble of course), or meals with wine in the range of \$100 for two, or a Canadian Club and water (spring, not tap, naturally), for \$3.75. Plus tax. Base of one and a quarter ounces of liquor.

Rooms are available as are dining reservations.

It's not opening a day too soon. For staff, who seem to be getting a mite edgy. Or, for the media.

Every reporter with an ounce of nostalgia in his veins has done stories about the grand old place, the miners with donkeys who once hung around its lobby, the guests like Pavlova and the Beatles, and Liz Taylor and her lover, Richard Burton.

The old King Eddy — down at the heels but full of stories like the tenancy of lawyer Frankie Nasso, who moved in for a weekend after he graduated from law school in 1945 and stayed until 1972 — closed in 1978.

After a couple of changes in ownership, it wound up for \$6.3 million in the hands of Trans-Nation Inc., a development and investment firm owned by two Toronto men.

They've sunk more than \$20 million into refurbishing it. It was supposed to open in April but couldn't, then May 8, mid-May, May 30, June 8.

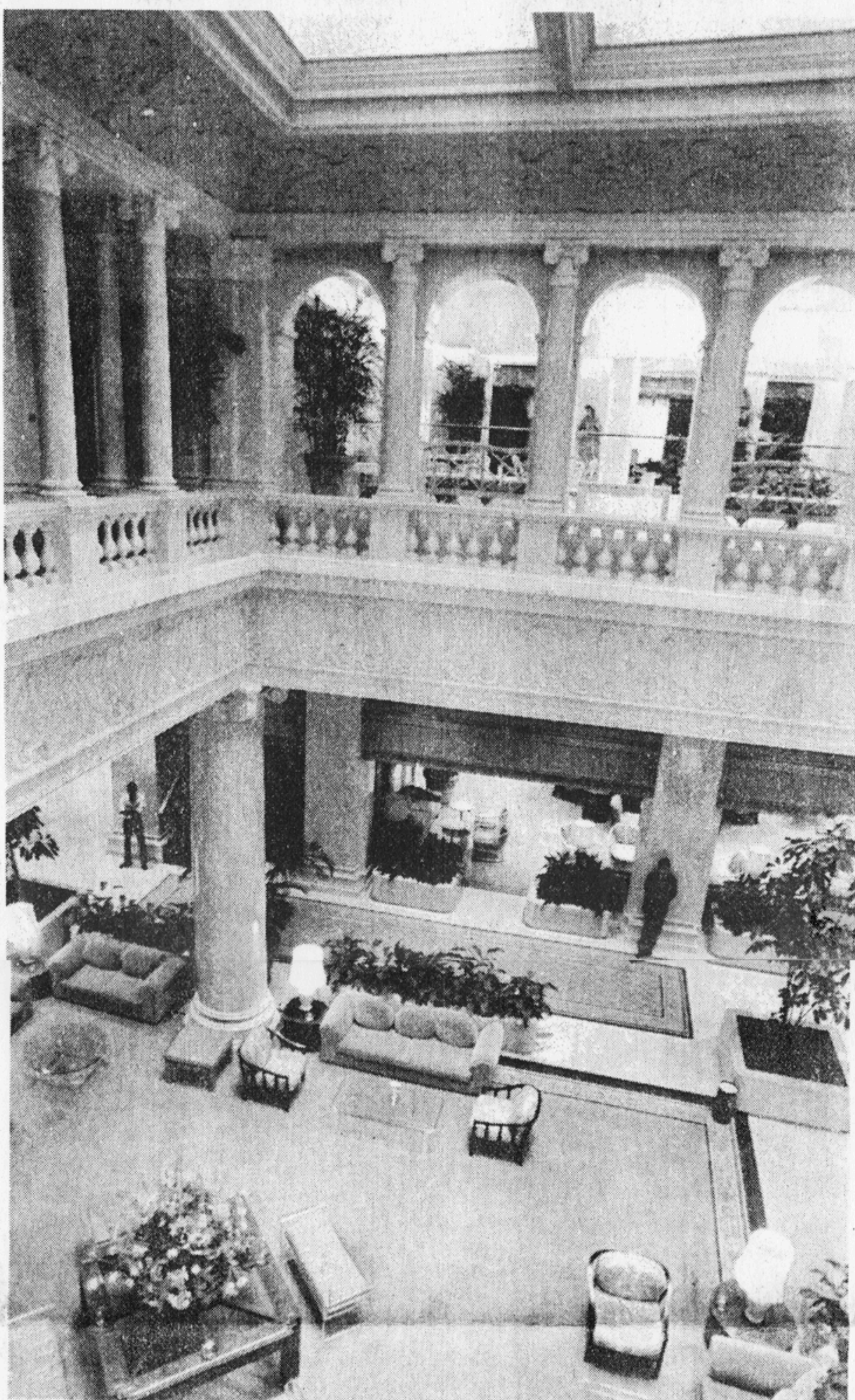
There has been some confusion. Yesterday, a man came in with a suitcase, expecting to register for the reservations he'd made for 24 persons for Sunday.

He wouldn't give his name to a reporter but said he was "very unhappy . . . I wasn't notified." He was assured, he said, of temporary accommodation elsewhere for himself and his bunch. But he was unhappy.

### Nothing splashy

Dennis Reed-Lewis, the hotel's director of sales, says nothing splashy is planned for the opening. The hotel will open, low-key, and make its way presumably into the hearts of the folks it is catering to.

If you loved the old hotel, there's a bit of old King Eddy left. Geographically, the lobby's a lot the same, though much more plush. The giant chandelier is gone but there are plenty of big crystal chandeliers throughout the building. The whole lobby roof is one big



The sun shines through: One big skylight over the lobby of the King Edward Hotel makes the palatial marble pillars gleam in sunlight. The

78-year-old dowager hotel has been refurbished at a cost of more than \$20 million and she opens for business on Tuesday.

skylight. That's nice. There's marble everywhere.

The former magazine stand at the west end of the lobby is now the lobby bar. It and the lobby, originally slated for antique furniture, instead has very comfortable, very plush "homey" chairs and couches, sort of Forest Hill or Rosedale homey.

The Victoria dining room is gone, replaced by the Victoria Cafe, which might be the coffee shop in an ordinary hotel.

Most of the Oak room is now kitchen and the plush Chiaro's, the dining room, where the peacock mirrors cost \$20,000. Off the entrance to Chiaro's is a wine-tasting room, where you can determine if you like what's suggested for your table.

The old Crystal ballroom on the top floor is shut and empty. Goliwog's is gone for kitchen space, and the first floor Times Square bar is now the Consort Bar, with 18 foot high windows overlooking King St.

There's no Pickwick Room, where many drank and ate cheaply, and there's no basement cafe-

ria nor Greg Clark, rest his soul, breakfasting there.

But the King Eddy is plush again. To find out how plush, read on.

□ What are the room rates? They start at \$85 single, \$100 double, \$300 for a one-bedroom suite, \$1,875 for the Royal Suite, which is really five one-bedroom suites taking up one half the ninth floor. The Royal Suite has five bedrooms, five living rooms, five bathrooms, two fireplaces and a total of about 3,000 square feet — twice that of many homes. The Royal Suite components can be rented separately, starting at \$325 nightly each.

□ What's in my single room? It includes a color television, phone in the bathroom, naturally, a bath lotion.

□ Are they sold out? No. Reed-Lewis expects it to operate at 65 to 70 per cent occupancy for the first month or two.

□ Is there a weekend package? Yes. Two people can have two nights and three days, breakfast both days, a bottle of champagne, fresh flowers in the room, for \$235.

□ Meals? In the Cafe Victoria, din-

ner might start with smoked salmon and heart of palm, at \$5.50, followed by the soup of the day, \$2, or a watercrss and endive salad, \$3, fettucini at \$6.25, coquilles \$1, Jacques at \$11.50, or beef tenderloin at \$14.50, or sirloin steak sauteed at \$16 or other things. Cheapest entree is half a roasted chicken at \$9.

The gourmet dining room, Chiaro's, won't open for another week. It will specialize in French and northern Italian food, and its price list wasn't available yesterday.

□ And drinks? Ballantine Scotch and water, a dry Tanqueray martini, Wiborowa vodka and mix, are all \$3.75. Courvoisier is \$4, a Bloody Caesar \$3.65, a standard-sized bottle of Dom Perignon champagne \$105. Wines go up to about \$200; the house wines red, Cuvee Speciale, (red) and La Gamme (white) are each \$13 for 750 millilitre.

At those rates, the tax may be higher than a big night out a couple of decades ago.

□ How many rooms are there? One hundred and ninety, plus 30 suites. That's a reduction from the old hotel's 470.

### No permanent guests

□ Has anyone arranged to live in the hotel full-time, as they did at the old place? No. Nor have any corporations taken rooms or suites on a long-term basis. The first reservation for the \$1,875-a-day royal suite is in August, for a corporate board of directors' meeting.

□ What names should I know? Roberto is the maitre de in Chiaro's. Eugenio (last name Chinigo) formerly of the Leonardo da Vinci in Rome, is the concierge. He'll arrange your theatre tickets, limousines, restaurant reservations, etc. In Rome, he found a doctor to fly to the U.S. alongside ailing Liz Taylor.

Everything is special, but nothing is really unexpected in the concierge trade, he says.

□ What's the first function at the hotel? You could say the media preview scheduled for Monday. One hundred and fifty invitations. But the 3M company enjoyed an affair the other day.

□ Who will go down in history as the first guest? Who knows?

First come, first registered, Reed-Lewis says. If the press asks on Tuesday, he likely won't tell.

"There's the question of privacy," he says. "Maybe they won't want to be named."



Venus de Milo: That's her name honest, and she's a hostess in the King Eddy. It is wooing those plump in pocket who expect pampering

and the hotels owners have hired masters at the art of accomodation from the world's luxury hotels to deliver the goods.