

# Spiffy King Edward cosies up to new lovers

BY BEVERLY GRAY

NAMED PERHAPS for the company she kept, there is no question about the gender of The King Edward Hotel. It is as female as Elizabeth Taylor, whose visit there, with her six messy little dogs and Richard Burton, fills one paragraph in its lively history.

The hotel has always cherished its female guests. In its early days (it opened in 1903) many of them were local ladies. They came by horse and carriage, with mountains of baggage, sometimes to escape the rigors of spring cleaning, sometimes for a special social function.

They came into the hotel through a door marked Ladies Entrance, which did not open into a beer parlor, as such a sign would have indicated a generation later. Rather, it led to a Ladies Reception Room, to save them from having to line up along with coarse men to register at the regular desk. They went immediately to their rooms to rest after the stresses of a drive from Rosedale or Forest Hill, while maids unpacked and pressed their clothes, and a discreet man-servant spirited away empty trunks and took charge of their pet dogs.

(Refined and ultra-proper as all this sounds, it is said that when one of these ladies left, a housekeeper checked the room for any "accidentally" missing items, the value of which was added without comment to the bill, and paid, again without comment, by the lady's husband.)

For many years, The King Edward reigned pretty much supreme among Toronto's hostels, and its fame was international. The register bore distinguished names: Rudyard Kipling, J. Pierpont Morgan, Pavlova, the Duke of Windsor, the

Archbishop of Canterbury, Caruso, Jack Dempsey.

Then the city's business and social core moved west and north, and The King Edward slipped into seediness. It was bought and sold and bought again, until one developer planned to knock it down and put an office building on the site. The Toronto Historical Board rescued it by declaring it a historic monument.

Prospects were grim. Like a sad old woman with straggly hair and runs in her rayon stockings, she stood on the corner, waiting, empty-eyed, for something to happen. When something did happen, like so much else in the immoderate life of The King Edward, it was monumental: it was bought in 1979 by Trans-Nation Inc. for \$6.8-million, to be reno-

rugs. The rugs you do walk on are in muted shades of mushroom, or grey, or beige; much of the furniture is mushroom, or patterned in rose and beige, with accents of dark brown velvet.

"This is no place for petty practical economies," said Mr. Rickard when I asked about the cigaret- and stain-resistant tweed rugs and figured upholstery used by so many hotels. "When we can't clean our rugs or upholstery, we'll just replace them. However, there is something about the atmosphere that makes people more careful than they sometimes are."

Along this line, I tried to imagine a drunk being obnoxious in the Consort Bar, and failed. Even if he could afford it, at \$3.75 for a shot of Scotch or \$2 for an im-

blue was when it replaced the deep emerald green of many years.) Gone are the toasted rolls, served in their own silver dish, kept hot over a flame. Perhaps the new room, light and airy, in shades of beige and cream, exemplifies what has happened all over the hotel: the drapes have been pulled back to let the sunshine in. From the lobby, where the 100-foot skylight has been revealed after gloomy ages covered by brown paint, to the delicate elegance of the Lobby Bar, or the crystal chandeliers of the Vanity Fair Ballroom, emphasis is on light, the old marble pillars and high ceilings complemented now by pastel colors instead of the voluptuousness of deep colors and heavy velvet.

The entire dining scene has changed. The main dining room now is Chiaro's, pronounced as you please: "We answer to a k or a ch," said Mr. Rickard. It is a gracious room, in muted shades of grey and gold with black accents, and the old peacock mirrors around the walls, four of them, each with a proud peacock etched into the glass; they cost \$20,000.

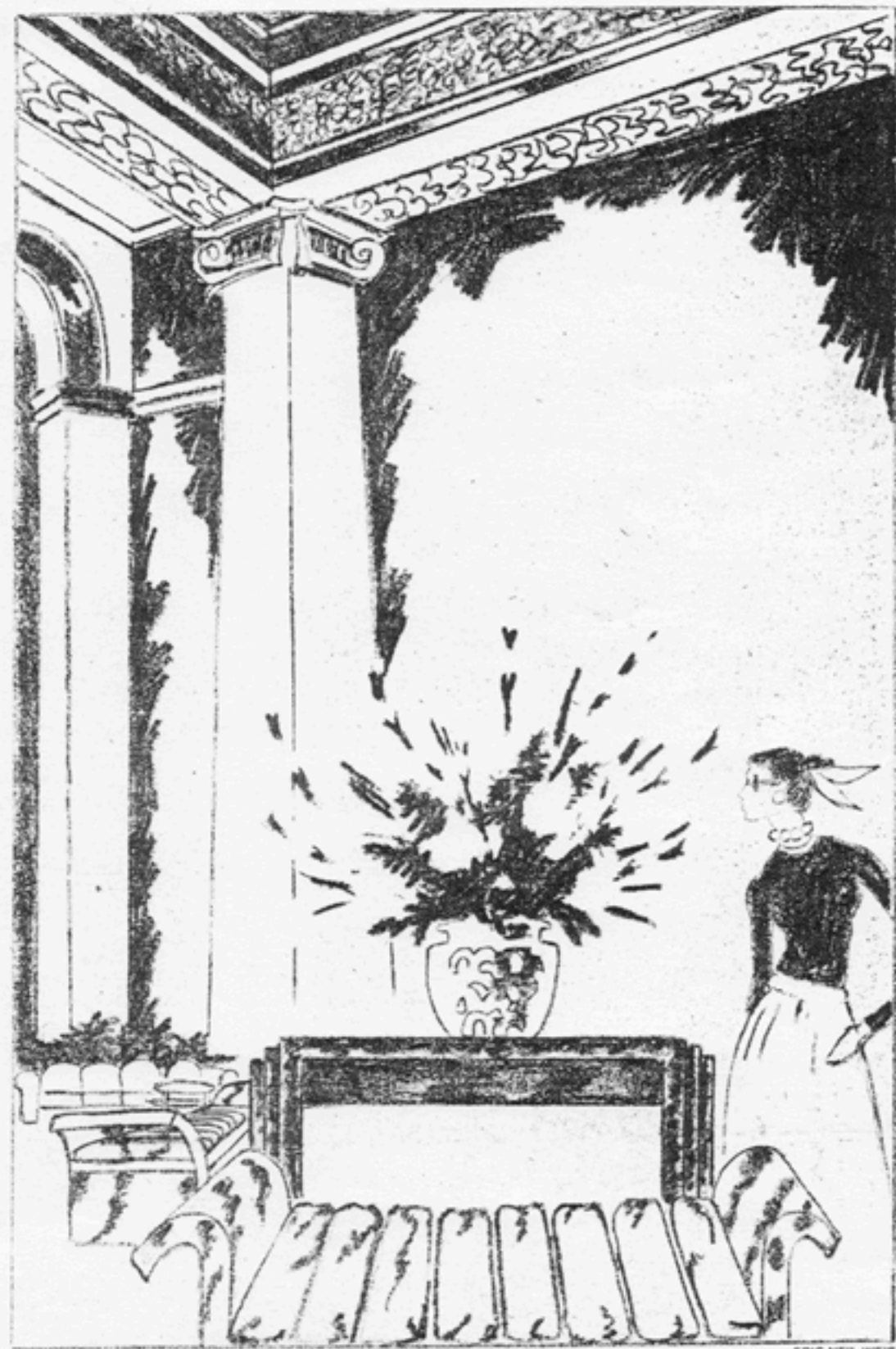
Just outside Chiaro's is a wine-tasting room, a small room lined with mirrors and bottles behind glass doors, where diners make sure the wine they have chosen pleases them. (It would be a shame if it didn't; they will be paying anything from \$12 for a bottle of Mateus Sogrape to \$125 for a bottle of Meursault, 1978, Cuvee Jehan-Humbert le Cru.) "It's just an extra touch, and people like it," said Maitre d' Roberto, who has come to Chiaro's after 10 years at Winston's.

Meals are not cheap, either; The King Edward is not competing with McDonald's. (It insists, by the way, on a capital T in its title; look up King Edward Hotel in the telephone book and you are referred to The King Edward Hotel; in seven pages of hotels listed in the yellow pages, The King Edward is the only one with a capital T.)

At lunch in the Cafe Victoria, you have a choice of eight hors d'oeuvre, including smoked Ontario pheasant at \$4.75; four soups; four salads; four "petites entrees," one an omelet with mussels or sorrel or snails and nuts, \$6; three pastas; six meats, from half a roasted chicken for \$8.75 to sirloin steak, \$13; three fish, including sliced salmon sauteed with rhubarb puree.

Lunch in Chiaro's includes eight hors d'oeuvre, from avocado and scallops "perfumed with lime juice" for \$6.25 to shrimp cocktail with lobster sauce, \$7.25. There are soups and pastas, omelet with morels in cream sauce and lobster bisque, \$6.75; three kinds of fish, including mullet at \$14 and sole meuniere at \$18; five meats, from \$12 to \$17, and salads.

Dinner in Chiaro's includes eight cold hors d'oeuvre, five soups, four salads, two pastas, and six kinds of fish, from lobster medallions at \$17.50 to turbot at \$22; seven meats, from veal at \$17 to filet of



Main lobby

beef foie gras, cooked in a crust of salt, for \$48 for two. The Cafe Victoria has an after-theatre menu that includes pork and veal pate in crust and aspic for \$3.75, Coquille St. Jacques Marseillaise for \$4.75, soups, sandwiches, salads and omelets.

If you go hungry, it's not The King Edward's fault.

As for the new rates, a far cry from the days when you could get a room at the hotel for \$1.50 a night — they don't seem to daunt anyone.

"We have been surprised by the demand for our most expensive accommodation,"

said Mr. Rickard. "We have 30 suites, and often they are all occupied." Suites cost \$190-\$300, rooms \$85-\$145 single, \$15 more double. The Royal Suite, which takes up half the ninth floor, was occupied, so I couldn't see it. It costs \$1,875 per night, and has what to me is the supreme luxury, a fireplace in one of its five bedrooms. (For the price you get privacy — management declines to divulge the names of the occupants.)

My room, while it had no fireplace, no bidet, was nice enough, with its baby tree, its remote-control televi-

ciless enough, still don't send one forth to face the world utterly defeated, the way fluorescent lighting does.

Waste baskets have hidden qualities. Plain, square plastic, if someone drops a lighted cigaret in one and starts a fire, the basket melts and folds in on itself, extinguishing the blaze. Against this bugaboo of fire, The King Edward has taken elaborate precautions.

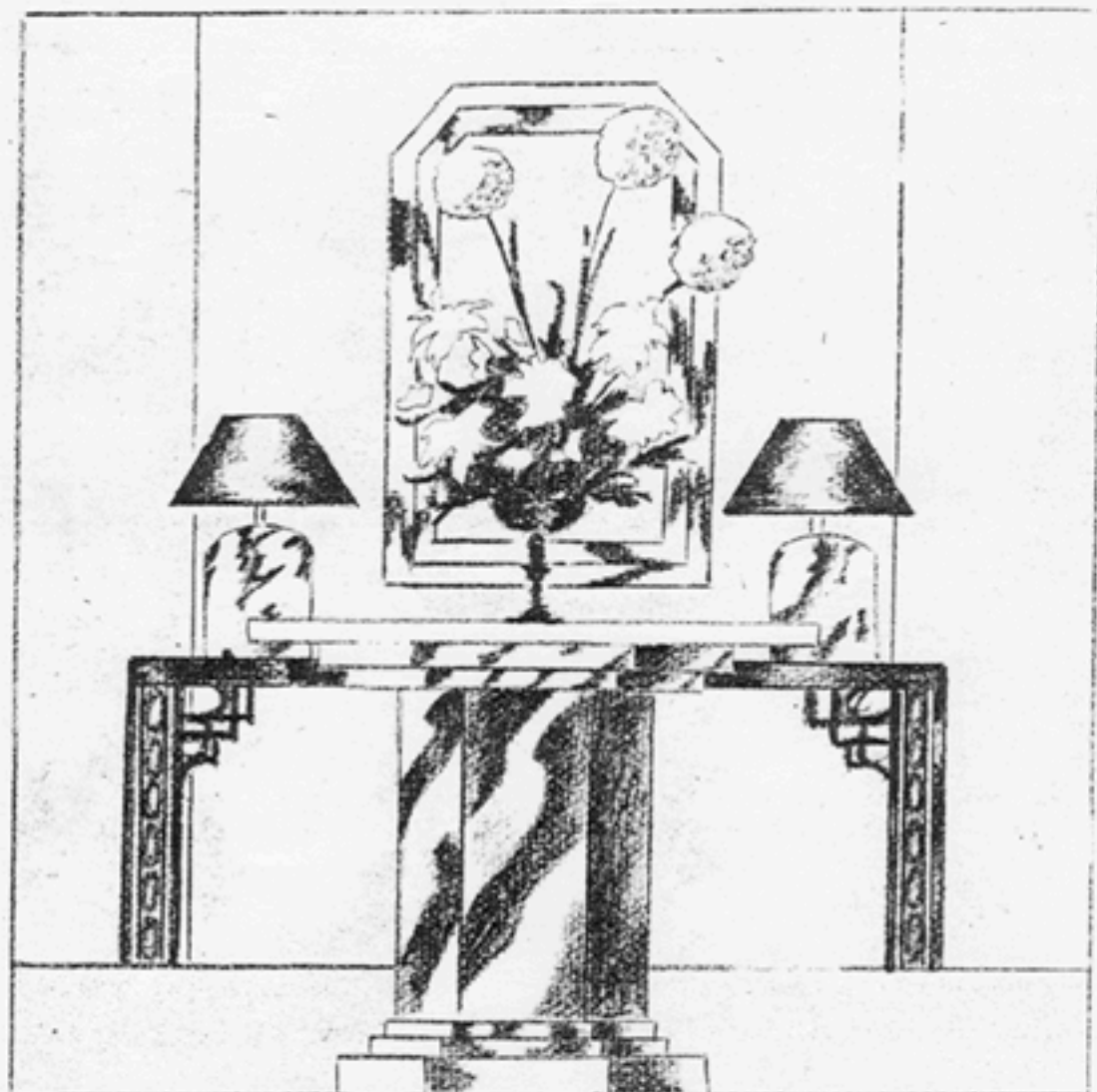
"We had a real alarm the other morning," Mr. Rickard said. "Fortunately, a false one, but we didn't know it at the time. It was

at breakfast time, and the Cafe Victoria was full. When the alarm rang, the receptionist announced calmly, 'That was the fire alarm. Will everybody please quietly leave the dining room, turn left at the door and out onto the street.'

"Within seconds the room was empty, the fire trucks came, found it was a false alarm, and everybody went back to their tables and finished breakfast. It turned out a truck driver had left his delivery truck parked, engine running, with the exhaust right at a fire detection outlet and that set off the alarm. Actually, we were quite pleased it happened. Everything worked perfectly."

An outsider expects everything to work, but it takes a myriad of tiny details to make it work. Details like the signed Gladstone print in my room, like the magnificent bouquet in the lobby — "Yes, they're real," said Mr. Rickard, wincing a little as someone fingered a petal to make sure. Or the concierge, originally from Rome, latterly from Cairo; when I asked if he could translate a line of Arabic type for me, he said, "No, but I'll find someone who can."

Perhaps that is the hotel's prevailing attitude, the attitude that makes everything work.



Outside Chiaro's