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Queen Victoria Hotel

Preparing for a new wave of tourism at 45

Hospitality Training and School Directory

Georgian Court Hotel

Winning travellers' hearts with their
commitment to comfort

*Jim Muir, President,
Clique Hotels and Resorts.*

Taking Hospitality to a Higher Level

*Going beyond customer expectation in every way:
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Two years after Vancouver's Georgian Court Hotel was bought, renovated and brought back to life, the downtown property is enjoying its new position as a small luxury hotel catering to the busy corporate and entertainment market. Purchased in fall of 2008, the 180-room property was renovated over the course of the next year, and completed in time for the Vancouver 2010 Winter Olympic and Paralympic Games. The lobby, public areas and meeting facilities were all upgraded, as was the exterior of the building. "It used to be very dark inside, almost like a gentleman's club atmosphere," says General Manager Gary Collinge. Dark woods and stone were replaced with lighter marble and glass. Ramps were added and exterior sidewalks replaced. A large water feature was installed in the lobby, and several others were added along the exterior sidewalks. Even the guest rooms, which had undergone extensive renovations about a year before the hotel was purchased, were upgraded with soft furnishings and new conveniences. "We added duvets, triple-sheeting, 37" flat-screen TVs and new throw pillows," says Collinge. Lap desks are on their way into every room, too. All these changes replaced the dark-and-somber feel with a sense of openness, comfort and luxury.

The lobby and public spaces might have changed, but the name stayed. When the Georgian Court opened in 1983, it was affiliated with KLM Airlines and was designated a Golden Tulip property. The property is now owned and operated by Mayfair Hotels and Resorts, which holds

Boutique Luxury, Corporate Style

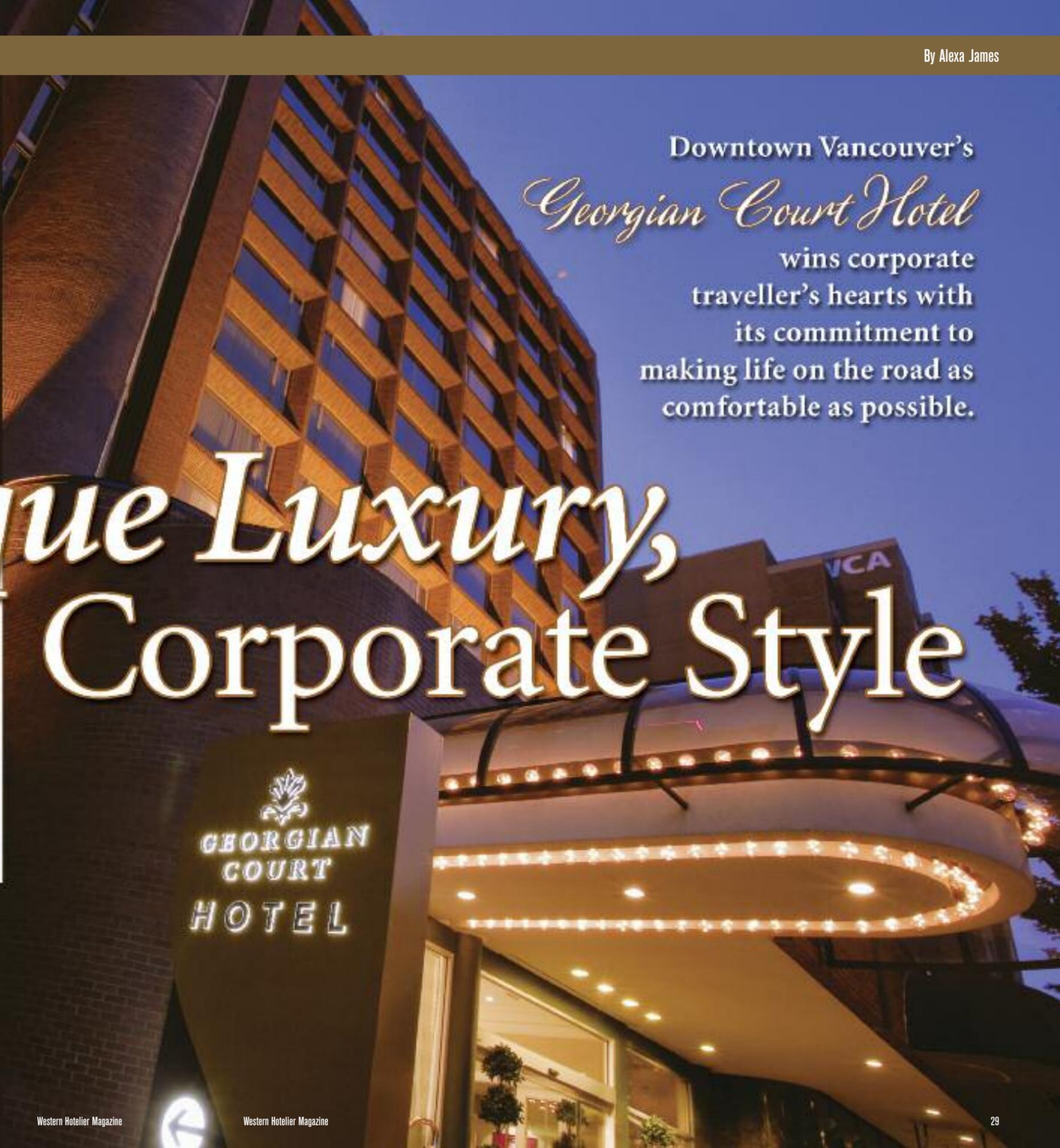
Downtown Vancouver's
Georgian Court Hotel
wins corporate
traveller's hearts with
its commitment to
making life on the road as
comfortable as possible.



13 lower mainland and Vancouver Island properties in its portfolio, including the Best Western Carlton Plaza in Victoria, Hampton Inn and Suites in downtown Vancouver, and the Holiday Inn on the North Shore.

The reasons behind the rebranding of Georgian Court? "We wanted to truly be a luxury boutique hotel," explains Collinge. "We wanted to differentiate our property and avoid being a cookie cutter hotel. Maintaining our independence has been key because we have the flexibility to offer a variety of service to our guests."

At Georgian Court, the Orchid Floor is a big focus. Eighteen rooms dedicated exclusively to female travellers, the Orchid Floor offers flat irons, curling irons, ladies-only emergency kits, and



upgraded Aveda amenities. Yoga mats, satin-padded hangers and In Style and Holts magazines round out the mix. "We're trying to gear the hotel more toward the woman traveller," explains Collinge. "We're not a big brand name, so we need to be recognized for something else." When the hotel completed its renovations in 2009, Collinge and his (primarily female) management staff put their heads together and came up with the idea. They tested the waters and sought feedback from female travellers, who immediately took to the notion. The response has been overwhelm-

Management meetings take place in a roundtable format once a week. "We try things," he says. "If they don't work, they don't work. If they do, then we run with it." On the operational side, Georgian Court is doing its part to create a greener earth, too, with recycling programs in place, low-flow showerheads, sink aerators and the recent purchase of a garbage compactor to replace the hotel dumpster. "It's nothing out of the ordinary compared to what most other properties are doing," says Collinge. "It's just part of being a good corporate citizen."



ingly positive, says Director of Sales Susan Leung, to the point that sometimes corporate clients can't get a room on the Orchid Floor. "We are considering expanding it to another floor," she says, adding that the management team is also exploring a similar option for men.

Collinge describes the hotel's management style as having an "open door policy." "It's inclusive," he explains of the employee ethos. "Various topics from guest services to operations efficiencies are always on the table, and we're not afraid to try something new. Because we're not a so-called brand, we have a lot of flexibility and can respond quickly to guest feedback and requests."

Shifting its focus away from tours and leisure travel and onto the corporate traveller has resulted in positive spinoffs for the property. Feeling there was a good niche for corporate travel - especially given the hotel's ideal location in downtown Van-

couver, straight across the street from major sporting and entertainment venues - General Manager Gary Collinge and his management staff got down to work, finding ways to offer outstanding value. "We offer a good product to the corporate trav-

Park seawall biking maps - are a big hit, as are the jogging trail maps for all the early-morning corporate runners.

What sets Georgian Court apart is that it's doing all this for corporate travellers while maintaining a strong identity as a luxury property. "We're a member of Small Luxury Hotels of the World," says Leung. "Our standards are sumptuous. SLH is very popular in Europe," she explains, noting that this designation is a deciding factor for many European and U.S. clients. "The vision we had for the hotel fit well with what Small Luxury Hotels is trying to accomplish," says Collinge. "There are no real SLH design or operation "guidelines" as there would be

ly what Georgian Court is. Like any other hotel company that's in the business to satisfy guests, Georgian Court's chief aim is to get as many heads on beds as possible. While the hotel market has been soft these past couple of years, Vancouver's market remains relatively strong due to the Olympics and a number of concerts, plays and conventions. Georgian Court can serve them all. In fact, entertainment bookings make up about 15 per cent of the hotel's business due to its proximity to BC Place Stadium and Rogers Arena (formerly GM Place). "Just last week we had the Wiggles crew staying here," says Collinge. "And before that it was Brad Paisley's road crew." The hotel is a popular convention destination, offering four meeting and banquet rooms to accommodate a variety of events. "We do a lot of corporate training and incentive meetings," says Collinge. Keeping it all going is Georgian Court's sales crew. "We focus on increasing direct sales," says Leung. And have recently hired a new sales manager. "We're targeting corporate business, so we do select advertising in magazines like BC Business. We're working with the CBC as well to do some online advertising as well." Georgian Court is dabbling in social media, but still prefers to funnel its energies toward direct media

eller," says Collinge. "The more little things we can add of value, for example complimentary bike rental, shuttle service around downtown, free wireless internet - are of value to corporate travelers." The mountain bike rentals - complete with Stanley

with some other branded products, like Hilton or Marriott, for example. It's more of a service standard. Each hotel is so different, and so unique. Every member of Small Luxury Hotels of the World must be a unique, luxury full service property." Which is exact-

marketing. Their efforts have paid off, says Leung who adds they were "written up in the Ottawa Citizen and the Vancouver Sun recently," says Leung. Looks like sunny skies ahead for Georgian Court Hotel. ●