

MOVIN' ON UP

ADDING THE
\$40-MILLION JOSIE HOTEL
WAS A GAMBLE RED MOUNTAIN
WAS WILLING TO TAKE.

BY MARK SISSONS

Red Mountain near Rossland, B.C., is not a place of ostentatious wealth. There are no cold-bed mansions sitting seldom used, no affiliation to Epic, Mountain Collective or Ikon passes brotherhoods. And there's no chain-store-riddled pedestrian mall running through its heart. Just plenty of big mountain fresh pow and peeps who know how to power through it, on-piste and off.

All of which makes it feel somewhat incongruous that I find myself seated here at Red in a trendy-looking hotel lounge sipping a blueberry mojito while picking at a plate of grilled avocado, crumbled feta cheese and toasted seeds collectively called a Monashee Green Salad. The Velvet Lounge's name may connote suds and strippers, but the atmosphere at The Josie Hotel's in-house watering hole is anything but seedy. With its trendy cocktail menu, artisanal nosh and sophisticated atmosphere, it feels more Yaletown than small town. And that's precisely the point.

The first ski-in/ski-out hotel built in Canada in more than a decade, The Josie opened last November at the base of Red, single-handedly raising the luxury bar in the most unlikely of locales—an old-





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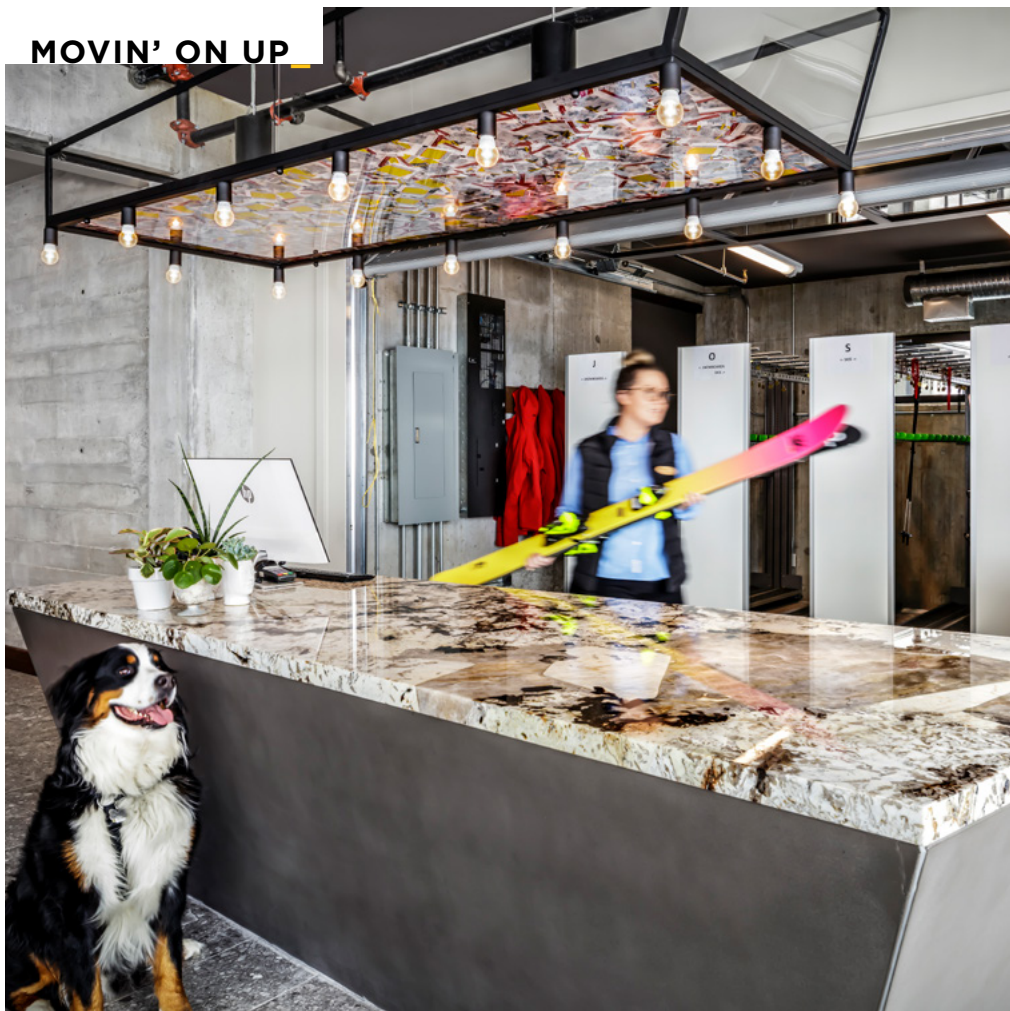
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school, community-run Powder Highway ski resort with no high-speed lifts, no Starbucks, no Lululemon outlet and zero tolerance for fancy resort posturing. A five-storey high, 106-room, concrete-and-glass \$40-million roll of the

real estate dice, The Josie was conceived as a partnership between Noble House Hotels and Resorts, operator of 18 luxury boutique hotels across North America, and Houston-based William Cole Companies, a boutique, full-service private real estate development company.

Why gamble on building a luxury hotel in a relatively isolated blue-collar ski resort with few amenities located more than a two-hour drive from the nearest accessible airport in Spokane, Washington, and close to a three-hour drive from Kelowna down notoriously unreliable Hwy 3B? Because The Josie actually fits with Red Mountain's broader strategy to preserve and protect what is here in terms of the ski experience: the friendliness, openness, value and sense of community, according to Howard Katkov, the Californian real estate developer who bought the resort in 2004.

"This hotel at a ski resort anywhere would be a big deal," Katkov says as we share a catered dinner at Dean's Cabin, one of the many cozy,

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rustic cabins nestled within the resort's boundaries a snowball's throw from the new girl on the block. "There aren't many four-star hotels being opened at ski resorts," he adds. "We speak to the 40-something adventure family that also appreciates a beautiful hotel."

Joining us is William Coles's managing director, Spencer Clements, a soft-spoken Texan who bears a striking resemblance to George W. Bush. Clements, who has flown up from Houston with his family to experience for himself the hotel he spearheaded, is as reflective as he is proud of his new baby.

"What swept me up was the independence of this place, its pioneer spirit," he says, explaining that his team chose the name Josie after one of Canada's most prolific silver mines in the 1890s. Its owner, the Rossland pioneer prospector and serial entrepreneur, R.E. Lemon, sentimentally named his motherlode mine after his favourite sister, Josie, who accompanied him out west.



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The Josie's lux slopeside digs are welcome but only a distraction to the real reason people visit Red.

Photo: RYAN FLETT

"Women like Josie Lemon, who lived here back in the late 1800s, had a higher sense of purpose and social order," Clements says. "To celebrate that feminine spirit of pioneer perseverance, we named this hotel The Josie."

"You won't find any faded photographs of Josie Lemon on the walls of her namesake hotel," adds Clements, "because we didn't want to get that literal with it and put her picture on the wall. Josie is the muse, the feminine mystique. But it's more about what she did, the pioneer spirit. That's what we're celebrating here."

Whether Clements, Katkov and their ownership partners will also strike it rich with the slopeside Josie Hotel remains to be seen, but they get full points for the audacity of their vision. I'm greeted by cheerful valet parking attendants as my shuttle bus pulls up to the hotel's impressive portecochere. Inside the lobby, whimsical chandeliers that resemble bushy tree branches hang over refurbished chairlift seats, leather sofas, parquet flooring and a glass fireplace. No deer antlers, moose heads or crossed snowshoes hang from the walls; everything feels slick and modern.

Each day I hand off my skis and boots to the on-site ski concierge, who will have everything dry and ready to roll the next morning. Designed by architect Song Chia of Fab Studio and Design DMU, I feel like I'm in Whistler, Vail or Aspen, not Rossland.

“Rossland is very accepting and age neutral...you don't get slotted into a niche or a group or a perceived demographic.”

The Josie's cuisine is also impressive. From his glass-walled kitchen facing the Velvet's upscale restaurant, Executive Chef Marc-Andre Choquette oversees the preparation of his French-influenced menu sprinkled with dishes like pork miso ramen, Kushi oysters, baked sablefish and confit rabbit pappardelle pasta, all sustainably sourced from local farmers and producers. You can still get a steak, rack of lamb and a burger, too. It's Friday night and the dining room is already packed.

It's only when I look out the restaurant's floor-to-ceiling windows that I'm reminded of where I am. Directly across the road is Red's utilitarian day lodge, a former gold mining compressor building. Its top floor houses Rafters Tavern, the dive bar infamous for après-ski No Shower Happy Hours. Towering over it is a mountain with four skiable peaks that's more than half the size of Whistler Blackcomb yet only receives about one-fifteenth of its annual skier-visits.

With The Josie as my convenient base just steps from the lifts, I set out to play in the powder. Day one starts with a full-on cat-skiing adventure across the eight peaks that make up Big Red Cats' 7,800-hectare tenure. The next day, I explore Red's refreshingly uncrowded runs with mountain host Mike Ramsey, a transplanted Torontonion who relocated to Rossland post-retirement.

"Rossland is very accepting and age neutral," says Ramsey as we ride the Motherlode chair to the summit of Granite Mountain. "By that, I mean that you don't get slotted into a niche or a group or a perceived demographic. It's all about why you're here as a person and what you do recreationally versus what you've accomplished, or what your vocation or financial status happens to be."

Whether or not The Josie's upscale offerings will be enough to overcome its location in a relatively small, geographically isolated market remains to be seen. But I have to admire the bold gamble it took to build it at all. In a place synonymous with a pioneering spirit and a willingness to take huge risks, the audacity of vision that The Josie represents would have made her namesake proud. 🏂