

COMMERCIAL DESIGN

The Okanagan (Finally) Gets a Hip Hotel

The Kettle Valley Beach Resort chills out with the full Ace treatment.

By Neal McLennan / January 4, 2023



Writing about wine for this magazine means signing on to do the hard work of checking out the ongoing march of new wineries in the Okanagan (because someone has to do it). The downside to this task is that

accommodation in the interior lags drastically behind the wine industry and region in general, which means there are scant cool places to rest your weary (fuzzy) head.

That's why we're always over the moon when some new place with style shows up. When the late Nick Bevanda designed [a modern annex to the Penticton Lakeside Resort](#), we were definitely psyched. And we nearly [lost our minds](#) when Ned Bell, Kate Colley and partners reopened the Naramata Inn a few years back. But those are only two spots in a valley that measures roughly 200 kilometres from north to south. And yes, there are a handful of really cool guesthouses at wineries that fit the bill (we're looking at you, Liquidity), but for an area that sees reams of tourists, it's always been in dire need of more cool, contemporary lodging.



The lakefront outside the Kettle Valley resort.

So when we heard that Vancouver businessman Brent Lokash had purchased the dowdy waterfront Crown Motel in downtown Penticton, it piqued our interest. We had the inside scoop thanks to Calgary architectural designer Jocelyn Ross (full disclosure, my sister-in-law and designer of [this showstopper](#)) so knew Lokash was contemplating the Ace Hotel mould for his newly acquired Okanagan diamond-in-the-rough—its

mid-century 1960-shell was primed to be reimagined as a design-forward, young and hip 30-room lodging. A few years ago, Lokash commissioned [Architect of the Year](#) alum Anthony Robbins to design one of the most striking homes on Point Grey Road, so he was coming to the project with, at bare minimum, an appreciation of contemporary design. Budgets would be controlled, but Ross is no stranger to working with limitations (I am, after all, notoriously cheap and she's designed three of my interiors).

The first step was for the pair to walk the site to take stock. Like most classic roadside motels, the Crown orientated towards the parking lot, which resulted in an outdoor space dominated by concrete—hard-edged, utilitarian and utterly lacking in charm. Lokash envisioned a more chill, relaxing spot, but one that didn't eschew functional design. His idea was to appeal to a new kind of traveller—one who still wanted to tour wineries, but who might do so on a bike (cycling is one of Lokash's passions) instead of a car.



The Crown Motel was previously big on concrete. And yellow.

For Ross, their site tour identified two major steps required to ensure the outdoor space fell in line with Lokash's vision. The first would be easy: paint. "The exterior was covered in a peachy yellow hue that screamed 1980, but I knew a simple coat of clean white would help bring back some of the mid-century style that was hiding underneath," she says. To pair with clean white, she chose bold doors in Benjamin Moore Hale Navy in a nod to the nearby waterfront.



The white facade brings some mid-century swagger back to the place.

Step two would require a leap of faith: "We decided we needed to get rid of the pool." While axing a proven draw like a pool might seem counterintuitive for a motel, Ross knew that the unfortunate combo of pool and parking meant that any chance at creating a relaxed, communal outdoor vibe would be virtually impossible. The property sits literally across from the water so, in her view, guests would be more likely to go for a dip in the lake than sit on a lounge chair beside a ho-hum pool.



Probably better than a motel pool.

And with that, construction began. Soon, the outdoor area was transformed into a modern mecca of firepits, pergolas and comfortable seating atop pea gravel for a communal outdoor desert oasis with some stellar help from Diane Ransom's team at Red Bird Landscapes and Edible Gardens. Local craftsman Jim Semple, along with Epic Cycling duo Tamara and Darcy, crafted cedar planters and wood stump side tables for all the balconies to create tiny design moments at each door, while Adirondack chairs mingle with airy contemporary seating near each unit.



The “before” on the guest rooms.



And the “after.”



And the bathrooms “after.”

One of the keys to the interior facelift was to ensure that the space didn't end up so precious that its target demographic would be priced out. Despite the fact that the motel was dated, Lokash and Ross had hoped to rehabilitate some of the furniture and fixtures. But decades of neglect meant it all had to go. When Ross then examined the empty guest rooms, she noted that the flooring was entirely inconsistent. Some had beautiful original 1960s hardwood while others featured laminates—highly

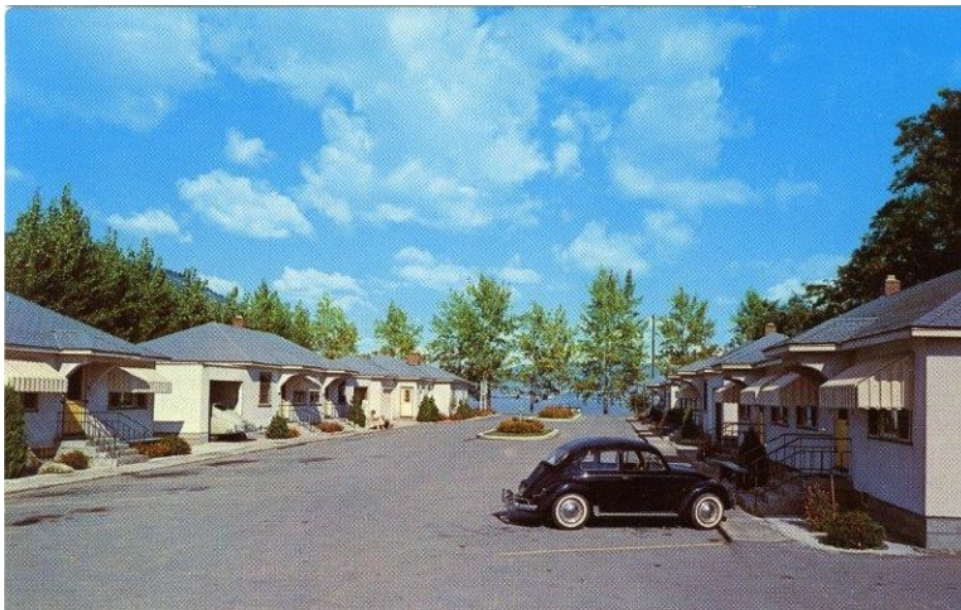
functional for a beachfront property, but not terribly warm and welcoming. Her first inclination was to rip it all out and start anew, but being mindful of endless trips to the landfill and budget allocation (that would now need to accommodate all new fixtures and furniture), she opted instead for large colourful hand-tufted Kilim rugs from India that tied the rooms together visually without requiring major demolition.



Kilims now anchor the floors in all the suites.

Rooms now channel that laidback beach vibe of modern coastal surf town. White walls painted in Benjamin Moore Chantilly Lace are counterbalanced

with dramatic blue feature walls in Benjamin Moore Buckland Blue. Walls above the beds are artfully dotted with handwoven baskets sourced from Africa while bathrooms underwent a modern lift with freestanding vanities in matte black metal. And while no two rooms are the same, they all dovetail together with texture (nubby accent pillows, brass reading lamps, handmade fringed throws) and colour and pattern. For art in each room, Ross selected vintage photographs of mid-century Okanagan life from the Penticton Archives and had them transferred to 3' x 4' canvas in a nod to the building's history.



One of the vintage shots of Penticton that grace the walls.

On the functional side, push and pull extended to the rooms with kitchenettes. Ross briefly toyed with kitting out these few suites with high-end European products, but opted instead for simple stainless steel appliances from a local business so they could devote the budget to TVs—the splurge-worthy Frame by Samsung, whose low profile doubles as framed art when not in use. Rental bikes (and kayaks) are now on offer—bike storage and bike wash stations, too—with cycling tours provided by [Epic Cycling](#) (the management team themselves are Ironman Canada finishers, so tips and routes are always at-the-ready).



Frame TV's and vintage art anchor the new guest rooms.

For food that would power the active vibe, Lokash turned to Penticton industry veterans Nicole and Tyler Gable, who's Villa Rosa has been a mainstay in town since 1996. The pair worked with Ross to create the airy relaxed vibe that is the adjacent [Socialē](#) where Chef Dan Vichitthavong creates an Italian-driven menu to power you up the next climb.



Bikes and bites, Penticton style.

“It now feels young and inviting,” says Ross. But all the design savvy in the world is for nought if no one buys into your ethos. Luckily the Crown—now reborn as the Kettle Valley Beach Resort—was a monster hit in its inaugural season this past summer. The exact customer Lokash hoped for—active, but looking for some laidback style—had clearly been waiting for this resort to appear. All it took was a duo with some vision.



Build it and they will come. By bike.

Kettle Valley Beach Resort

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kettlebeachresort.com