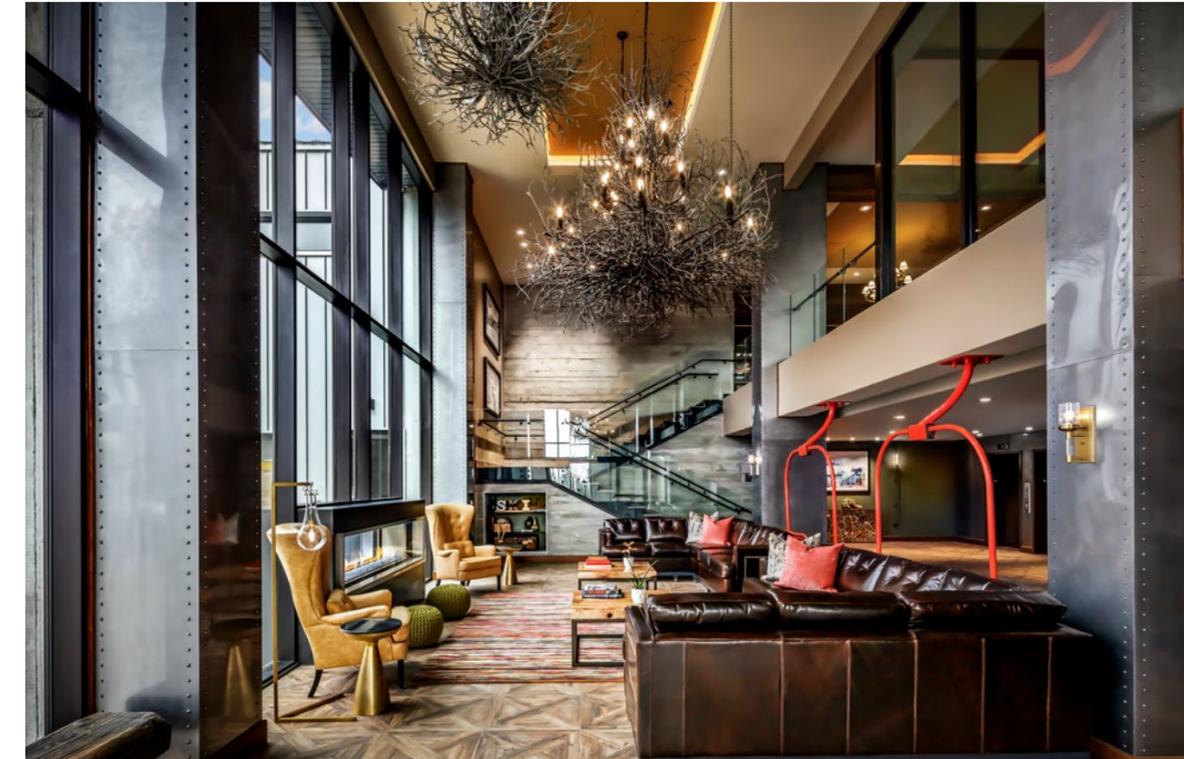




Photos: The Josie is the first ski-in, ski-out hotel to open in North America in a decade.



The Josie Hotel

Ski-in, ski-out lodging at RED Mountain Resort in Rossland, B.C.

Writer **Claudia Cusano**

June Campbell, a retired school secretary, is in her skiing stance at the base of RED Mountain Resort's Silverlode Chair, waiting for the clock to strike nine. In her eighties and no longer with an office to report to, "Grannie June", as the lifties endearingly call her, is the first to ride the chairlift up the mountain—every day. In Rossland, British Columbia, a West Kootenay town of roughly 3,800 residents, skiing isn't merely an activity; it's a way of life.

In the middle of downtown Rossland is a bronze statue of Olaus Jeldness holding a pair of skis. Jeldness moved to what was then a quaint mining town from Norway in 1896, and is credited with pioneering competitive skiing in Western Canada. What brought him to Rossland was the

mining work; he stayed for the same reason most do to this day: the powder. Those who come don't ever seem to leave.

Rossland—located seven hours east of Vancouver and just 15 minutes north of the U.S. border—is perhaps one of the most Canadian towns in Canada, but it doesn't have a Tim Hortons. Instead, it has an independent vibe that is fostered by its budding community of young and old. Spend one night hanging out and drinking at the local gastropub, the Flying Steamshovel, and you'll sense why residents don't want word to get out about their wonderland. (Imagine Whistler back in the day, before it got Starbucks and opened for big business.)

In Rossland, as one resident mentioned, "The good skis live in the locker. The road

skis are for us to go home." Located near the Monashee and Selkirk mountain ranges along the acclaimed Powder Highway, the town has legendary status among skiers and snowboarders. "Steep and deep" is the slogan in these parts, where, after a night of snowfall (and it snows a lot), "Twenty centimetres of fresh pow is nothing anyone's going to wake up for when it's been a good season," comments the barista who makes my coffee. RED Mountain has bragging rights as the home turf of Olympic skiing greats such as Kerrin Lee-Gartner and Nancy Greene, and it played host to Canada's first ever World Cup ski race.

There was skiing in Rossland before a chairlift was built. And the first single-seater, realized in 1947, was constructed using the same mechanics found at the nearby mine. Today, the chairlifts still move slowly (locals say anything faster could spoil conversation), but you can tear down 3,850 acres of untouched terrain on 119 runs.

Last winter, RED Mountain debuted the Josie, its new boutique hotel (the first ski-in, ski-out hotel to open in North America in a decade), named after one of

the most valuable mines in the town. It's the closest thing to waking up on the slopes without actually sleeping on the chairlift. The \$40-million property was built by Texas-based William Cole Companies and is managed by Noble House Hotels and Resorts. The hotel blends contemporary with cozy. There's a spa, a fitness facility, and ski concierge services, as well as the Velvet Restaurant, where chef Marc-André Choquette serves up locally inspired home-style cooking. Back in the day, Jeldness was known to host mountaintop tea parties (it's a good bet the brew was spiked). If he were alive today, it's almost guaranteed he'd have moved his tea parties into the Josie to share in the comfort and care the hotel has brought to town. "My hope and desire is to ensure the vibe of Rossland is felt in this hotel," says Paul Girardi, guest services manager at the Josie.

Rossland is the place where the shredding is great, the lift lines are short, the terrain is fast, and the hospitality is salt of the earth. It's the kind of place where eccentric characters live storied lives (ask any member of Friends of the Rossland

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Range Society—a community-based volunteer organization—about the late Cookie L'Ecluse). "No friends on powder days" (the Alpine expression about winter enthusiasts ditching their posse to get first tracks on a powder day) is "All friends on powder days" at RED Mountain, as there is more than enough powder to go around. The crowd favourite après-ski is at Rafter's, a lively hangout on the top level of the day lodge at the base of the mountain, where worn hardwood floors and timber rafters serve as the backdrop for happy hour.

While newness has been afoot in Rossland recently, RED Mountain is committed to not losing the down-to-earth spirit it is known for; in past years, locals and RED fans all over the world had the opportunity to own part of the resort via equity crowd-funding.

No matter the day of the week, Grannie June—outfitted in her retro onesie and sporting Dynastar skis—will be in her pole position a few minutes before nine. Don't be deceived by her octogenarian status; she'll bomb past you on the hill. ●