Look Ma, No Speed Awings

for pics and placements – and to sign up for next year's event.

Boutique Mystique

B.C. has some of the best in the world, but what, exactly, *are* boutique hotels?

"A boutique hotel is a cross between a bed and breakfast and a hotel," says Lise Magee of the Listel Vancouver, one of a growing list of elite B.C. boutique hotels. "You have the privacy and service of a hotel and the distinctive character of a B&B." Indeed, the Listel's top-level Museum Floor is a First Nations cultural odyssey, with original paintings, artifacts and carved cedar headboards. On the hotel's Gallery Floors, guests wake up in a mini art studio lined with one artist's masterpieces – like the Art Nouveau suite's luscious fruit and vegetable still lifes by Carmelo Sortino.

Originally inspired by small, intimate inns in Europe, North American boutique hotels took off in the 1980s and '90s when a few visionaries eschewed the prevailing cookie-cutter hotel concept for a more individualized experience. Ranging from less than 100 to almost 500 rooms, however, these boutique properties are a testament to "small" being in the eye of the beholder. Vancouver's sumptuous 89-room Wedgewood (recently rated the best hotel in Canada by *Condé Nast Traveler*'s Readers' Choice Awards), for example, lies a few blocks from the brand-new 97-unit Opus Hotel and hip 233-room Pacific Palisades. Rounding out the spectrum are Victoria's elegant 64-room Magnolia Hotel & Spa and Kelowna's casually splashy 102-unit Manteo Resort. *–Sheila Hansen*

Piqued by boutiques? *Check out the Listel's Coastal Cool package (from $239) for one night on the Museum Floor, dinner at the Liliget Feast House and admission for two to the UBC Museum of Anthropology (www.listel-vancouver.com); the Wedgewood's Theatre package (from $269), for one night's stay, theatre tickets and breakfast in the cozily chic Bacchus Restaurant (www.wedgewoodhotel.com); and the O La La! Opus Romance package (from $329), for one night's stay, French champagne and le petit déjeuner (www.opushotel.com).*

Photographs: (skier) Dan Toulgoet, (mask) Listel Vancouver, (painting) VAG/Trevor Mills