

# Canada's largest metropolis quietly comes of age

By PATRICK JOHNSTON

There is no place like home, so the old adage goes, especially after spending a fair piece of time away and establishing a separate life apart from that part of the world associated with childhood. Home, after being away, with all its familiarity but looked at with fresh perspective can seem as interesting as any far-off land.

Home for this writer is, or was, a chilly metropolis at the top of the St. Lawrence waterway. With a natural harbor, pre-Columbian North Americans found it not a bad place to get together with other natives and so named the locale "meeting place," or Toronto.

Toronto has been called a lot of things by a lot of people. On the more positive side, Peter Ustinov called it a New York built by the Swiss (positive, that is, only if you harbor good feelings toward either of the two). The rest of Canada, if they say anything that can be printed, sometimes refer to the city diplomatically as "hog town." Hog traditionally referred to the pigs that were brought in from the countryside; it now alludes to the fact that the city enjoys a preponderance of the country's wealth.

People from Montreal don't say anything — they just have parties and throw darts at the CN tower.

Why the hard feelings? For the Montrealer it is easy to understand. When separatists took over in Quebec 16 years ago a lot of business moved upriver and Toronto quickly took over as the biggest city in the country, both in population and in money. Montreal citizens don't like the idea of playing second fiddle to a place they perceive to be boring and culturally inferior.

The rest of Canada sees Toronto as a conservative power center whose interests consistently take precedence over their own.

If anything, Toronto is a study in contrasts. It has a first-rate major league baseball franchise and consistently the worst hockey team in the professional league. It is arguably the artistic center of the country and yet continues to uphold archaic censorship laws ("Pretty Baby" never played in the city and Madonna nearly had her show canceled). The city is noted for its staunch Anglo-conservatism and yet now boasts half a million Italians, over a hundred thousand Chinese and countless other ethnic communities. The WASP has been in the minority for the past decade.

The ethnic influence has made Toronto a city of neighborhoods. The largest Chinatown (there are no less than five in the city) is now the big-

gest in Canada and includes an extensive collection of Vietnamese restaurants not to mention Korean and Japanese shops. "Little Italy" holds one of the most sizable Italian communities outside of the "homeland" and probably flew more red, white and green flags when Italy won the world cup in 1982 than Canadian flags have been flown at any time — ever. Caribbeans snuggle up next to Indians, Greeks control major thoroughfares and the suburbs are filled with second-generation immigrants cashing in on the city's wealth.

In amongst all of this and, indeed, in spite of it, a prosperous Toronto has become the quintessential yuppie city. Neighborhoods that once had family-run vegetable shops and tailors now offer polished storefronts selling organic fast food and designer furniture. Old derelict areas have been bought out, redone, and now sport as many BMWs as they once did heroin addicts.

If your idea of a model city is safety, cleanliness, lots of park space, and plenty of entertainment then Toronto is the place to be. If what you're looking for is a dynamic nightlife, lots of spontaneity, and a raw urban energy, not to mention an agreeable climate, then you'd best go elsewhere. Ball games are quiet, beer stops flowing at

1 a.m. and a long cold winter brings about a pretty sober spirit for five months a year. Toronto had a somewhat puritanical upbringing and old habits die hard.

Still, the city abounds in good restaurants, and has no shortage of interesting sights for the first-time visitor. The Royal Ontario Museum (ROM) is the largest in Canada, the Art Gallery of Ontario one of the top three in the country and, if you're tired of just looking, the Ontario Science Center has a whole assortment of hands-on exhibits you can while away your time on. In the summer the harborfront comes alive with outdoor cafes and live concerts.

If you don't feel like walking you can take it all in at a revolving dining room 400 meters up the CN tower — hopefully free of darts.

The Japanese have not discovered Toronto. Why this is I am not sure. It might be because a modern — flat — metropolis does not fit into their preconceived idea of Canada as a natural mountainous region. Perhaps the answer lies in something a Japanese tourist said to me once after strolling around downtown Toronto one summer afternoon. She returned disappointed saying, "There are no people here."

What's a city without crowds to enjoy it?