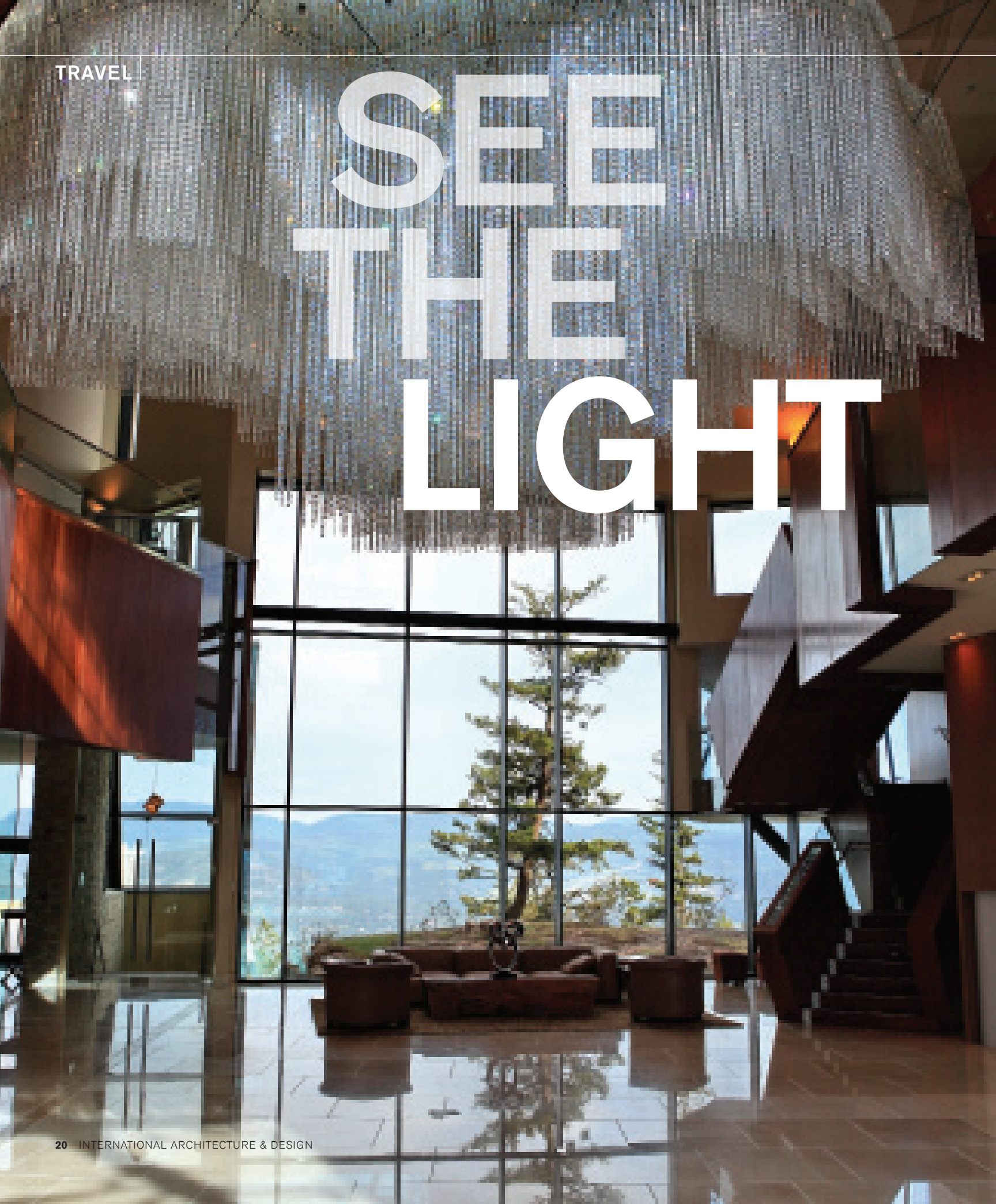


# SEE THE LIGHT



**AN AIRY, MODERN STRUCTURE, TUCKED INTO A GRANITE HILLSIDE AND WRAPPED IN FLOOR-TO-CEILING VIEWS, IS THE NEWEST AND LARGEST ADDITION TO SPA RESORT CULTURE IN CANADA. YOU'LL COME TO UNWIND, PARTAKE, AND EXPLORE THE RESPLENDENT SETTING—AND DEPART A REVIVIFIED VERSION OF YOU. BY IAN CRUICKSHANK**

The light started as a flicker in the distance. Our vehicle had just turned off the road fringing Kalamalka Lake and began climbing, cutting across the pastoral Coldstream Valley and toward the peaks of the Monashee Mountains in the north end of the Okanagan Valley. As we headed west, the twinkling, now rainbow-hued, intensified. “Look, look, there it is!” someone blurted out. His excitement was infectious.

Our group of travellers, even the jaded among us, were bedazzled as our car pulled around the last granite curve to turn into the entranceway of the Sparkling Hill Resort.

Even before its official opening in May this year, Sparkling Hill has been attracting a lot of attention, and not just because of the price tag—an eye-popping \$122 million to build—nor the panoramic mountain, lake, and vineyard views. Perched on the granite face of a mountain ridge, this luxurious 152-room, four-storey resort is an architectural showstopper, inside and out. And when the sun hits the prisms of its three-storey glass atrium in just the right way, the shimmering light is visible from 20 kilometres away.

The vision for all this—the first European-style wellness resort in Canada—came about nearly a decade ago, when Hans-Peter Mayr, while on vacation, found a scenic 72-hectare (178-acre) property overlooking Okanagan Valley. When he returned to his native Austria, Mayr convinced a fellow Austrian to underwrite the resort—Gernot Langes-Swarovski, a scion of the famous crystal family.

Besides financial backing, the Swarovski connection also offered design inspiration. More than \$10 million worth of crystal was incorporated into the resort’s design—in the chandeliers, chairs, and floating stair handrails, even the edging on the signs on the washroom doors. Along with crystal faux fireplaces, the suites feature crystal-studded ceilings, allowing guests, with the flick of a switch, to transform their room into their personal planetarium, replete with a night sky of twinkling stars. Two-person soaker tubs—manufactured by Kohler especially for the resort—are strategically positioned against the floor-to-ceiling lake-view windows.

The centrepiece for Sparkling Hill, however, is at the hotel entrance—an atrium



Lounge area for the sauna and steam rooms

Despite the spectacular views outside, crystal almost steals centre stage at the Sparkling Hill Resort in Vernon, B.C., starting with the mammoth multi-tiered chandelier in the grand lobby (opposite page) and the giant asymmetrical glass atrium atop the hotel entrance (this page, top). The \$122 million resort’s premier attraction, however, is KurSpa, a 40,000-sq.-ft. European-style wellness centre with a serene lounge area (above) leading to themed saunas, scent-infused steam rooms, and “experience” showers.



THE SPA TREATMENT ROOMS OFFER VIEWS OF THE LAKE AND MOUNTAINS OR OF THE PREDATOR RIDGE GOLF RESORT NEARBY.

range from thunderstorm to tropical rain, and stalls infused with scents of orange, mandarin, and eucalyptus. At the Kneipp Waterway, bathers avail of “water-stepping” thermotherapy to expand and contract their blood vessels while wading knee-deep through a stream of alternating warm and cold water.

The spa’s signature treatment is the cryotherapy cold sauna (the only one of its kind offered in North America), comprised of three small chambers, set to graduated temperatures, from cold to very cold to downright glacial: -15°, -60°, -110° Celsius (5°, -76°, -166° Fahrenheit). After their blood pressure is taken (and waivers are signed), intrepid spa enthusiasts are ushered in wearing regular gym clothes and running shoes, and—for extra protection—provided with cotton gloves, surgical mask, and headband. Throughout the maximum time of three minutes in the deep freeze, spa attendants keep a close watch. The science behind cryotherapy is that extreme cold applied to the body increases blood flow and reduces swelling and pain, such as those associated with rheumatoid arthritis. Another benefit is the overall rejuvenating effect.

For guests who prefer leisurely pursuits that involve degrees unrelated to temperature, the outdoor infinity pool awaits. Besides more of Sparkling Hill’s 360° vistas, the pool gives the delightful illusion that its edge drops off toward picturesque Lake Okanagan. ●



**WHERE**

Sparkling Hill Resort  
888 Sparkling Place, Vernon, B.C.  
1-877-275-1556; sparklinghill.com  
Rates: deluxe rooms, \$195-\$430, three penthouse suites, from \$500

**EATING & DRINKING**

The resort’s 250-seat PeakFine restaurant has a daily-changing menu of four-course meals. The more casual Barrique & Java serves morning coffee and pastries (try the chef’s signature Viennese apple strudel), wine and tapas at twilight, and a light menu from dusk to dawn. Take advantage of Sparkling Hill’s proximity to the picturesque Okanagan—Canada’s wine capital—and its more than 100 wineries.

**GOLFING & SKIING**

Among the world-class golf resort destinations in the Okanagan is Predator Ridge, which opened a new course in June, designed by Doug Carrick. Other golf courses of note: Tobiano in Kamloops; Okanagan Golf Club, Tower Ranch, The Harvest, and Gallagher’s Canyon, all in Kelowna; The Rise in Vernon; and Fairview mountain in Oliver. In winter, ski hills in the area include Silver Star in Vernon, Big White in Kelowna, and Sun Peaks.

**GETTING THERE**

Direct flights to Kelowna are available from Toronto, Calgary, Vancouver, Edmonton, and Seattle. Kelowna International Airport is a 25-minute drive south of Sparkling Hill.



Herbal sauna



Cryotherapy cold sauna



Serenity room



The resort’s many amenities include the outdoor infinity pool (top); more than 100 treatments available at KurSpa (above), including its signature revitalizing cryotherapy cold sauna; and guest rooms and suites (opposite page), all with spectacular views.

replicating a giant Swarovski crystal. Spanning 13 metres (42.5 feet) and rising almost 17 metres (56 feet) above the second floor, it’s an asymmetrical steel-framed assembly of 15 triangular glass panels of different dimensions, angled at different planes to create three apexes—a glittering structure that catches and refracts the abundance of light.

“Crystal is the people’s diamond,” says Andreas Altmayer, the creative force behind the resort’s crystal theme. “This combination of reflections from both natural and artificial light is characteristic of Sparkling Hill. The wonderful thing about crystal is that it enchants and sparkles so diversely. Its appearance and intensity change according to the weather, time of day, and the season.”

The biggest drawing card for Sparkling Hill is still to come: KurSpa. At 3,700 square metres (40,000 square feet) and with 48 treatment rooms—all with views of either the lake and mountains or the Predator Ridge golf resort close by—it is the largest spa in Canada. But size alone is not what makes it a standout; it’s the more than 100 innovative, unique spa treatments that will likely entice guests to return to the resort. There are myriad steam rooms and saunas, as well as “experience showers” with settings that



Guest suite



Penthouse suite