

# Auberge d'Andromède a great place to hit the hay

BY ROCHELLE LASH, SPECIAL TO THE GAZETTE AUGUST 13, 2012



Gina Hallée, an accomplished rider, and her husband, Gilles Leclerc, a French-trained chef, run Auberge d'Andromède.

**Photograph by:** Auberge d'Andromède

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Horses and haute cuisine are the unlikely but delightful combination of specialties at Auberge d'Andromède, an inn in the Mégantic region.

Gina Hallée is an accomplished rider, trail guide and teacher who organizes vacations on horseback. Her husband, Gilles Leclerc, is a chef who trained in France and cooks up dinners of delicacies like foie gras, duck and venison. Together they work 24/7 to create an unusual, rural guest experience at their Auberge d'Andromède. Their work has paid off. The inn won the 2011 award for Eco-Tourism and Adventure Travel from Eastern Townships Tourism.

They both hail from the mountainous Mégantic region at the far reaches of the Eastern Townships and they chose a beautiful hilltop site for their farm that is close to both of their home towns. Hallée's great-grandparents were among the founders of the nearby village of Lambton in the mid-1800s. Leclerc's family goes back at least three generations in the town of Lac Mégantic. When I arrived at Andromède, Hallée was in a corral astride a frisky, young horse with the pedigreed name of Ringo

Starr Bonanza Frost. Sporting chaps, spurs and a cowboy hat, Hallée trained her mount and eventually she got what she wanted.

You, too, can have the pleasure of riding, but you can expect a mostly obedient, quiet horse. For beginners, Hallée suggests a two-hour trail ride with a mini-lesson before leaving. Hallée leads advanced riders on adventurous, rugged excursions that last a few days, riding about 25 kilometres or seven hours a day, and bedding down at private houses along the way. Andromède's tack room is equipped with both Western and English saddles and bridles, although Hallée finds Western more practical for trail riding because you can hang your knapsacks and water from the saddle horn.

Nothing triggers sore muscles like a green cowpoke's first day on horseback. Andromède has built-in cures for your equestrian-induced aches and pains. You can have a long soak in the indoor hot tub and then a deep, relaxing massage by Hallée, a woman of many talents. She is certified both as a riding instructor and as a massage therapist.

"People really love the combination of riding and a massage afterward and some of the beginners really have sore muscles," Hallée said.

"But new riders are in shape from other sports, it is not so bad. I simply help them to release the stiffness."

After the horses are fed and turned out, Hallée slips into a long hostess dress and Leclerc fires up the stoves to prepare dinner. They both started out as organic farmers so they grow their own edible flowers, herbs and vegetables that thrive in Mégantic's chilly climate and heavy soil – greens, squash, potatoes, carrots, beets and cabbage.

After ridin' the range, a massage meltdown and a copious dinner, it's time to hit the hay. Andromède has three rooms on a second floor, one in the attic and two in a separate building. The accommodations are simple and homespun. Andromède is a gentle jumble of collectibles, plants, furniture and beds covered in plain cotton spreads. Still, the glorious views of the valley are luxurious. And remember, it's the cowboy life.

*Rochelle@rochellelash.com*

### **If you go:**

Courcelles, in the Mégantic region, is a three-hour drive east of Montreal, or two hours from Magog, via Highway 10 east, and Routes 114 and 108 east.

Auberge d'Andromède: 418-483-5442, [aubergeandromede.com](http://aubergeandromede.com), 495 Rang 6, Courcelles, Mégantic.

Price: Including breakfast, dinner and wireless Internet, \$165 for two, for one night. Add \$30 for two for foie gras course. For non-guests, dinner Thurs.-Fri.- Sat: \$38-48 p.p. It's bring-your-own-wine. Equestrian Vacation for Lovers Package: includes one night, breakfast, dinner, and a two-hour trail ride, \$232 for two people, including guide and horses.

Andromède also offers packages with massages, cooking classes (May-October), visits to Parc National du Mont Mégantic and ASTROLab.

For Mégantic information: 800-363-5515, [tourisme-megantic.com](http://tourisme-megantic.com)

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