

Sutton inn aims to be a home away from home

BY ROCHELLE LASH, SPECIAL TO THE GAZETTE JANUARY 20, 2012



The D&K Auberge Lounge on the main street of Sutton is an industrial-chic getaway overlooking the Sutton River.

Photograph by: d&k auberge lounge, d&k auberge lounge

Sutton is gradually changing from a charming, quiet tourist town to a charming, quiet tourist town with several hip venues. The latest is the D&K Auberge.Lounge.

The name “D&K” has made a circuitous route from a vintage television show, *Green Acres* (1965-71), about city folk who moved to the country with hilarious results. It starred Eva Gabor as a displaced glamour girl who fed livestock in an evening gown and diamonds, and Eddie Albert as a big-city lawyer turned gentleman farmer. They were the Douglasses and their rural pals were the Kimballs, thus the Ds and the Ks. Life was full of amusing pratfalls and country mayhem around Hooterville.

“That is the way it is with us,” said Elizabeth Labbé, the most hands-on of the four owners of D&K. “We are two city couples who fell in love with Sutton and decided to try our hand at farming and small-town business.”

The other new innkeepers are Josée Perreault, an executive with Oakley, her husband, Christian Dubé, who works with Cascades, the Quebec paper company, and Elizabeth’s husband, Louis-Thomas Labbé, an insurance broker.

Move over, Eva Gabor. The Labbés raise chickens in summer and have won awards for their maple syrup. Perrault and Dubé cultivate blueberries and make wine at their *Domaine Perdu*, a vineyard in Sutton.

For the new communal project, the D&K Auberge Lounge, the foursome tore down the old general store on Sutton's main street, across from the Info Sutton office, and constructed an industrial-chic getaway built of spruce and steel. It's part B&B, part après-ski lounge and part café-bistro. Tall and narrow to fit the available slice of prime "downtown" space, D&K overlooks the Sutton River, which runs through the village. It also is crowned by a cupola, which is arguably the highest point in Sutton, so anyone willing to climb the stairs will have a rare view of Mt. Pinnacle, Mont Sutton and the town below.

The inn's lodging concept is a little unconventional. It has eight rooms, all two-level with cathedral ceilings. There is a bedroom on the main floor and a second, open-plan bedroom on the mezzanine. Each unit is designed for four – families, groups of friends or two couples – but best if you're not worried about privacy between upstairs and downstairs. Everything is fresh, new and compact. It's meant to be a convenient, moderate-budget getaway.

The lounge is a show-stopper of design, with curvy club chairs in colours of vanilla and chocolate and low cubist tables grouped around a fireplace. It's all atop stylish concrete floors and set against a backdrop of garage-style doors that will open in summer to al fresco terraces. A sleek bar doubles as an open kitchen.

D&K's food is more homespun than haute, but it is filling and inexpensive, considering the stylish surroundings. There is no chef, but there is a server who puts together tapas-style plates or warm dishes that were prepared earlier in the day.

"It's a very 'today' idea of grazing," said Labbé. "It's not dinner, but perhaps we could say comfort food or après-ski fare."

You can make a light meal out of such appetizers as charcuterie, cheeses and foie gras. The main courses are mostly mini-casseroles of shepherd's pie, confit de canard or mac 'n' cheese, all from the home kitchens of "Mrs. Douglas and Mrs. Kimball." Even Sutton's Mayor, Pierre Pelland, contributed his recipe for a seafood dish. The families brainstormed about cocktails and came up with *Le Coco Beach*, a vodka and fruit juice mix, and *Le Montréal*, a seething mix of vodka, tequila, rum and gin.

Auberge D&K aims to be a home-away-from-home for regular visitors to Sutton. Its Loyalty Package is tailored to guests who want to store their sporting equipment – skis, snowboards or bicycles – in the basement locker room for as long as months at a time.

After a slow start to winter, Mont Sutton is almost in full swing. Indoors, the expanded, renovated Tucker Bar features a potent new hot toddy of coffee, liqueurs and whipped cream. The new Divas on Skis is a great buy every Thursday until Feb. 23, with lift tickets at \$25 for women, plus an outdoor yoga class in ski boots and a 15-minute chair massage. If you take a snow lesson at the cut rate of \$37, part of the fee – \$2 – goes to the Quebec Breast Cancer Foundation.

With about 50 per cent of its trails carved through the woods, Mont Sutton depends heavily on natural

snow. It's best to check conditions before counting on conquering the new glades – the double-black Extase and Seduction and the intimidating triple-black Crocodile and Entonnoir.

Sutton en Haut, a terrific network of trails through the woods, also has opened for cross-country skiing, snowshoeing and winter hiking, but it all depends on the weather. This is an exceptional enclave of private land that has been turned into an outdoor centre with a warming hut, rentals and a map of trails.

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If You Go

Sutton is a one-hour, 20-minute drive from Montreal via Highway 10 east to Exit 68 or 74.

D&K Auberge Lounge: 855-311-0005, aubergedk.com, 25 rue Principale south, Sutton. Lounge-bistro open Wed.- Sun., 11:30 a.m.- 9 p.m.

Price: \$199 for two people on Fri.-Sat. for a two-bedroom unit with two king-sized or four twin beds, including continental breakfast; it's \$169 for two on Sun.-Thurs.; \$25 for each extra person (maximum occupancy, four). For January opening special, deduct 20 per cent.

Ski-Dodo-Ski Package (Mon.-Thurs.), with lodging, breakfast and 1.5 days at Mont Sutton, \$99 p.p., double occ., or \$85 p.p. triple occ., or \$75 p.p., quad. occ. For two nights and 2.5 days of ski-ride, that's \$169 p.p., for doubles; \$159 p.p. for triples, or \$149 p.p. quad.

Tourism in Sutton region: 800-565-8455, infosutton.com

Mont Sutton (ski-ride): 866-538-2545, montsutton.com; adult ticket: \$62; vertical of 460 metres; terrain: 230 acres.

Sutton en Haut: 855-334-6464, suttonenhaut.com; adults pay \$13 for ski, \$5 for snow shoe. Rentals available.

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