

Food is highlight at delightful B&B on Ile d'Orleans

BY ROCHELLE LASH, SPECIAL TO THE GAZETTE MAY 19, 2012 12:16 PM



Auberge la Grange de l'Île, a bistro and inn in a 150-year-old barn, is a treasure on Île d'Orléans.

Photograph by: Pierre Fortin, Auberge la Grange de l'Île

Auberge la Grange de l'Île is an almost-secret treasure on idyllic Île d'Orléans.

I say “almost” because the residents of the island are crazy about Grange’s dining room, but beyond that, the inn is not terribly well known.

Île d'Orléans is a getaway for vacationers who seek tranquillity in a historic setting, with splendid views of the St. Lawrence River. This pastoral, picturesque island flourishes a 15-minute drive north of Quebec City, across the Pont d'Île at Montmorency Falls. The Chemin Royal, a 72-kilometre scenic road, circles the island, passing through the villages that have sprouted since Jacques Cartier first touched land in the 1500s. Taking a leisurely cruise, by car or bicycle, you see bucolic farms that are the source of the island’s nickname, “garden of Quebec” and tiny villages with quaint B&Bs and imposing stone churches. Île d'Orléans is decidedly traditional. It has no traffic lights or supermarkets and its best known businesses are tourism and roadside farm stands.

Auberge la Grange de l'Île, a delightful inn and bistro with a fresh, modern style and superior cuisine, is updating the scene.

Amélie Bilodeau and her husband, Pierre Fortin, bought a 150-year-old barn – la Grange – and

overhauled it to the tune of \$650,000.

Now, it's a thoroughly delightful getaway with eight cheerful guest rooms and a stylish, contemporary bistro.

Hidden from Chemin Royal, Auberge la Grange sits on a hilltop overlooking its own farmland that rolls gently down to the St. Lawrence River, roughly opposite Montmorency Falls.

Bilodeau is the chef. Fortin is a commercial photographer who also works around the inn as everything from sommelier to general hand and chief gardener. They rent out their fields to farmers who grow strawberries, one of the island's most successful and popular crops.

La Grange's modern, B&B style rooms feature queen beds, small flat-screen televisions, desks and mini-refrigerators. The decor is spare and modern, but there are spaces of colour and interesting art that bring it to life. Some of the rooms have views of the St. Lawrence River.

It's the food that is the highlight. Bilodeau describes her cuisine as bistro-international. She studied in Quebec City and did internships in Italy and France.

"France gave me the way I work with meat, the cuts and the cooking time, and Italy gave me a desire to make the food really taste, with herbs and spices."

Her new summer menu is well priced, with a Mediterranean accent and Quebec flavours and produce: braised leg of lamb, pork braised in maple and beer, smoked salmon pizza, cod with tomatoes and basil, chicken with olives and lemon and La Grange's standards: AAA Angus filet mignon, baby back ribs and mussels and fries.

A delectable Sunday brunch features main courses cooked to order, for example, omelettes with smoked salmon or prosciutto, eggs scrambled with cheese and hams or crepes with apples and brie.

Bilodeau also gives cooking classes, teaching a world beat of such tantalizing dishes as Spanish tapas; Middle Eastern couscous and tabbouleh; Mexican salsa and quesadillas; Thai coconut soup and curries; Indian lamb biryani; and special cuisine themes such as barbecuing, pizza, vegetarian food, the art of fish and guaranteed-to-please chocolate desserts like fondant, mousse and cheesecake.

Grange de l'Île co-ordinates visits to Espace Félix Leclerc, a small museum dedicated to the Quebec singer, writer and political activist. Leclerc lived and worked on Île d'Orléans and called it "une fleur dans l'eau" (a flower in the water). The Espace's music performance space, La Boîte à Chanson, will showcase Louis-Dominique Lévesque May 26, and Richard Séguin June 1-2, (418-828-1682, felixleclerc.com).

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If You Go

Île d'Orléans is a three-hour drive from Montreal via Highway 40 east past Quebec City to Exit 325.

Auberge la Grange de l'Île: 418- 828-9926, lagrangede

ile.com; 1517 chemin Royal, St-Pierre, l'Île d'Orléans. Open Wed.-Sun.

Price: \$125 for two, including breakfast (\$135 on Saturdays with Sunday brunch); Room No. 1 costs \$185 (\$205 on Saturdays) and has two queen-sized beds for two or four people; 15-per-cent discounts on visits of three or more nights.

Four-course dinner, \$26-33. Brunch, \$8-16. Cooking classes, three hours, approximately \$60, including recipe booklet and meal (minimum six people).

Île d'Orléans Tourism: 866-941-9411, iledorleans.com

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