

Hotel La Ferme helps complete Le Massif project

BY ROCHELLE LASH, SPECIAL TO THE GAZETTE JUNE 7, 2012



An artist's drawing of the new Hôtel La Ferme in Baie St. Paul, affiliated with the Train of Le Massif de Charlevoix.

Photograph by: Le Massif de Charlevoix

Charlevoix has a new three-ringed enterprise led by tourism tycoon Daniel Gauthier, a former Cirque du Soleil executive.

Hôtel La Ferme in Baie St. Paul, opening June 21, is the third and most recent step of a master plan orchestrated by Gauthier, president of Le Massif de Charlevoix and the man who is changing the face of tourism in the region.

The \$300-million, approximately 10-year project encompasses: 1) Le Massif ski area, which is adding such attractions as a summer gondola and new hiking trails; 2) the Train of Le Massif de Charlevoix, which travels a scenic route through mountains and along the St. Lawrence River; 3) Hôtel La Ferme, two blocks from Baie St. Paul's main street. It was in this town that Gauthier and a fellow busker named Guy Laliberté founded a quirky little show in the 1980s that would become the Cirque.

All three components of Le Massif de Charlevoix play on the best of the region, particularly its rich harvest of gourmet foods and its spectacular tableau of impressive mountains, craggy cliffs, quaint villages and the St. Lawrence's rugged coastline. Yet, the new ventures are contemporary and high-tech, part of Gauthier's fresh approach to appreciating nature.

Hôtel La Ferme's complex consists of its own train station, 145 widely varied guest rooms in five pavilions and a conference space for 500, all built around gardens and a public square with pathways

down to a pier.

Guests can choose from three restaurants with three price levels: Les Labours for gourmet dining, Le Café du Marché for quick market-fresh bites and Le Bercaill, a bar-lounge. The guest rooms also will have broad appeal, ranging from budget-

conscious dormitory rooms with four single beds to deluxe lofts with lots of amenities and king beds. One truly distinctive feature of La Ferme will be a market that specializes in the famous produce of Charlevoix: veal, cheeses, foie gras, wine and beer. A spa is scheduled to open at the end of summer.

Gauthier's all-embracing vision ensures that even getting to Baie St. Paul is part of the fun. The Train of Le Massif de Charlevoix took its inaugural 140-kilometre run in September 2011, resurrecting a scenic rail route that had been all the rage from 1919 to 1959. The train departs from a newly built station at Parc de La Chute Montmorency, on the northern tip of Quebec City, and runs to Le Massif ski area in winter. In summer, the train travels to Baie St. Paul and La Malbaie, another vintage vacation town on the St. Lawrence River. Smooth, sleek and ultra-modern, the train is decked out with deluxe interiors, large panoramic windows and such high-tech toys as iPads and video streaming. Besides the fabulous riverside views, one highlight is the gourmet cuisine catered by La Malbaie's landmark hotel, Fairmont Le Manoir Richelieu.

The train has three circuits for this summer, with various combinations of meals and stopovers. (See the If You Go box for details.)

Gauthier's first step 10 years ago was to reshape and resurrect Le Massif, the downhill area that had been known mostly to connoisseurs as a quirky mountain that transported skiers via buses instead of lifts. Now Le Massif has a high profile due to its many superlatives: a striking setting overlooking the St. Lawrence; the longest downhill vertical drop in Eastern Canada (770 metres); and the super-steep run, La Charlevoix, which is a training centre. In summer, the mountain will run its gondola for sightseeing and hiking and is planning to have a rail shuttle from Baie St. Paul by autumn that also will serve winter skiers who are staying at Hôtel La Ferme, which is about 20 kilometres away.

Baie St. Paul is best known as an art centre. Its grand land- and seascapes have inspired many of Quebec's greats, such as René Richard, Alfred Pellan, Jean-Paul Riopelle, Jean-Paul Lemieux, Marc-Aurèle Fortin, Clarence Gagnon and Louis Tremblay, as well as A.Y. Jackson of Canada's Group of Seven.

The 30th annual Symposium International d'Art Contemporain, a summer event produced by the distinguished Musée d'Art Contemporain de Baie-Saint-Paul, will gather 12 artists from Canada and overseas. The artists paint and sculpt while art-lovers watch and ask questions about technique and style. "The interaction is what makes it exceptional," said the symposium's director, Jacques Tremblay. "It's not an exposition. It's art in action." This year's artistic director is Serge Murphy, a sculptor from Montreal.

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If You Go

Baie St. Paul is a 3.5-hour drive from Montreal via Highway 40 or Highway 20 east to Quebec City and Route 138 east.

Hôtel La Ferme: 877-536-2774, lemassif.com/ferme; 50 rue de La Ferme, Baie St. Paul.

Price: Opening specials will start at \$135 for two, June 21-July 22, without meals. After July 23, four levels of rooms: dormitory (\$49 p.p., four beds per room); classic (\$175 for two people, queen bed); superior rooms (\$199 for two, queen bed, with view of mountain, garden or river); loft (\$245 with king bed, workspace, living room, balcony). Prices are approximate and will decrease Oct. 16-Dec 21.

Train of Le Massif de Charlevoix: 877- 536-2774, lemassif.com/en/train.

Discover Baie St. Paul Package (Thurs.-Sun.): adults, \$175; children 6-17, \$140; 5 or younger, \$70 (overnight at The Farm is optional), breakfast on the outbound and tapas on the return. Train departs Montmorency Falls Station at 9:45 a.m., arrives Baie St. Paul, at 12:15 p.m., and returns at 3:30 p.m.

Escape to La Malbaie Package (Wed.-Sun.): adults, \$275; children 6-17, \$220; 5 or younger, \$110. Train departs Montmorency Falls at 9 a.m., arrives Baie St. Paul at 11:30 a.m., departs for La Malbaie at 3:30 p.m. for a 15-minute stop, returning to Montmorency by 8:25 p.m.; includes breakfast and gourmet dinner (overnight at The Farm is optional).

Dinner Cruise: (Thurs.-Sat.): \$119; Train departs Montmorency Falls at 7:30 p.m. and returning at 11 p.m., including gourmet dinner (No overnights possible).

Symposium International d'Art Contemporain: 418-435-3681, symposium-baiesaintpaul.com, Aug. 3-Sept 2.; free admission to the Municipal Arena. Musée d'Art Contemporain de Baie-Saint-Paul, 418-435-3681, macbsp.com, adults, \$7, with discount for juniors and seniors.

Baie St. Paul tourism: 418-435-4160, baiestpaul.com; Charlevoix region, 800- 667-2276, tourisme-charlevoix.com

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