

Country Roads: Mont-St-Hilaire hotel bridges solitudes with panache

BY ROCHELLE LASH, SPECIAL TO THE GAZETTE OCTOBER 12, 2012



A blue heron, one of many bird and wildlife species in the marine preserve near Sorel.

Photograph by: Rochelle Lash

Politicos of Quebec, please take note: The Manoir Rouville-Campbell, an appealing country hotel on the banks of the Richelieu River, pulls off the near-impossible challenge of bridging the province's two main cultures, and does so with panache.

Who are the Rouvilles and the Campbells, and how did a Scottish Tudor mansion become a landmark

of Quebec's Chemin des Patriotes, a road that celebrates a citizens' uprising against the British in 1837-38? The Manoir's marketing director, Michelle Robineau, invited me to dinner to find out.

To make the Manoir's 300-year-old history short: In 1694, French King Louis XIV granted a settler in New France the Seigneurie de Rouville on the banks of the Richelieu River. Two hundred years later, that pioneer's descendants built a great French-style mansion but went bankrupt within a few years. In 1850, a British army officer, Maj. Thomas Campbell, took over and transformed the grand house into its current red-brick Scottish Tudor style.

Now marking its 25th year as a hotel, Manoir Rouville-Campbell is still a glorious place with gorgeous grounds, great cuisine and formal salons filled with ornate European antiques. Guests have a choice of 24 rooms and suites of various levels of comfort and styles: lofts with mezzanines for families, cosy country-style rooms with pine furniture and handsome suites with traditional decor.

The hotel fronts on Chemin des Patriotes, the main thoroughfare that runs through Mont-St-Hilaire, but the back of the building – oh, the back! – is a beautiful spread facing the Richelieu River. As if to reflect Quebec's dual heritage, formal English and French gardens flourish in two distinct sectors of foliage and flowers that have little in common, but grow side by side.

Long known as an idyllic wedding locale, Manoir Rouville-Campbell has made some changes, reaching out to bon vivants who would like fine food combined with a jaunt to the countryside. Not counting possible traffic delays, the hotel is an easy 30-minute drive from the South Shore bridges, so lunch, dinner, Sunday brunch or a quick overnight are all within reach.

Chef Jean Lapierre, who once worked for the private Atwater Club in Montreal, cooks up what he calls evolutionary cuisine.

"We're always keeping up with the times, using market-fresh products in an almost urban style," he said. "I stay true to my classic French background, but I bring in new technology like sous-vide, or rare ingredients like hand-foraged mushrooms."

The dining room, Le Clan Campbell, has a wonderful view of the gardens and the Richelieu beyond, with pleasure boats passing and the sun setting on the water. It's possible the outdoor terrasse, heated with lamps, will stay open until the end of October, and it's a fine place to dine.

The menu features such gourmet dishes as magret of duck, braised lamb shank, guinea fowl and bouillabaisse. Here, a romantic, gastronomic experience will set you back about \$45-\$60 per person for dinner or \$25-\$30 per person at lunch.

But the hotel has also created a more accessible \$15-\$30 all-day menu in Le Pub Campbell, with casual fare like mussel chowder, burgers made with grass-fed beef, fish 'n' chips and onion soup flavoured with beer from Chambly.

For dessert, there are classics like lemon meringue pie or strawberry cheesecake, but the heavenly flourless, dense Silk Chocolate Cake was the one that got me.

Committed to seasonal fare and a party guy par excellence, Lapierre has organized two oyster evenings with his pal Marc Bardier, who holds the Guinness World Record for oyster shucking. The pair will showcase oyster chowder and main courses, bivalves on the half shell, with a salad bar and those great desserts. (Nov. 15 and 29, \$69 per person.)

When I visited Manoir Rouville-Campbell last month, the season had passed for swimming and boating. But the timing was perfect to explore La Route du Richelieu, a newly mapped 265-kilometre tourism trail that follows the Richelieu River — with 38 stops significant to Quebec history, culture, commerce and ecology.

La Route follows the Richelieu River from its confluence with the St. Lawrence River at Sorel, upriver to the U.S. border and Lake Champlain. There's no doubt about the river's rich history. It was first explored by Samuel de Champlain in the early 1600s and was later named for Cardinal Richelieu, right-hand man to King Louis XIII of France.

La Route du Richelieu of 2012 winds through various towns: St-Jean-sur-Richelieu, Chambly, Beloeil and Lacolle on the western shore and Mont-St-Hilaire, Iberville and Sorel-Tracy on the eastern. There are 38 stops on the map. I chose an 80-kilometre route from Rouville-Campbell that took most of the day.

My stops included: No. 29 on the map, the inspirational Maison national des Patriotes, a small museum of artifacts of daily life and arms used by the Quebec citizens who fought against the British in the Rebellion des Patriotes of 1837-1838; and the eco-centric Centre d'interprétation du patrimoine de Sorel Tracy, which runs boats tours of Lac-Saint-Pierre, a marine wildlife habitat where visitors can observe herons and eagles, as well as turtles, fish and other aquatic animals.

rochellelash@rochellelash.com

Twitter: [@rochellelash](https://twitter.com/rochellelash)

© Copyright (c) The Montreal Gazette

[Previous](#)

[Next](#)



A blue heron, one of many bird and wildlife species in the marine preserve near Sorel.

Photograph by: Rochelle Lash

