

Country Roads: Estérel reopens with new options for living large

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BY ROCHELLE LASH, MONTREAL GAZETTE JANUARY 4, 2013



The new "emotion" wing of the Esterel Resort in the Laurentians, which opened in late December 2012, offers stylish lakeview suites.

The newly recreated Estérel Resort is calling all bon vivants.

Estérel was a leading light when it originally opened near Ste-Adèle 50 years ago. It was a lakeside dazzler with modern architecture and a swanky lifestyle, the first truly contemporary resort in Quebec. As the swinging '60s took off, Estérel shattered the folksy traditions of the Laurentians' lumbering log hotels and cosy Swiss-style chalets.

Fast-forward to 2013. The hotel has reopened with its initial panache and several new options for living large. The 105 condo-suites of a wing bestowed with the name "emotion" — yes, with a lowercase e — opened one month ago and a wing of 95 called "Evolution" — this one with a capital E — opened two years ago. They're linked by impressive lobbies and corridors with soaring glass walls, white ceramic floors, mellow woods and designer furniture in contrasts of soft brown chenille with splashes of tangerine leather.

"Both sections have different personalities," said Shawn Zarbatany, who is a partner behind the rebirth of the resort that his grandfather founded. "Evolution's suites are more grown-up, with dining spaces. I imagine a couple sipping wine, listening to Frank Sinatra. The 'emotion' units are trendier. I see friends doing tapas and martinis."

That's high concept. To me, the two hotel sections are quite similar, very modern and functional with fireplaces and kitchenettes — except that Evolution is decorated in whites, blues and browns, and the newer "emotion" is done in stylish subtle charcoal laced with orange. Both sections stretch along

tranquil Lac Dupuis, at least for guests willing to pay a little more for water views.

The lakeshore is so close that the water almost laps up to the patio level and it creates a peaceful setting in any season.

Estérel's food and wine scene is booming with three new experiences for bon vivants. The new Bistro 260°, so named for the panoramic lakeviews, is the place for lobster salad, duck wings, burgers and crab cakes. Also new is Rok, where patrons sizzle their own Kobe beef and giant shrimp on a hot Japanese-style stone brought to the table. The stone is a good conversation piece, it's low-fat and you can cook your meat bleu, rare, medium or well-done. At l'Ultime, gastronomes dine on such delicacies as quail with foie gras, wapiti tartare, seafood cappuccino, followed by elaborate renditions of lamb, duck, filet mignon or milk-fed veal.

Estérel continues its epicurean explorations with its elaborate wine operation. It is the only hotel in Quebec to have SAQ Signature Service, where wine connoisseurs can sample the good stuff in a leisurely manner, and then walk, not drive, to their guest rooms. Sommelier Jean-Sébastien Tremblay helps high-end clients snare private imports at the SAQ's virtual shop and then stores their collections in individual cellars-for-rent. Tremblay also is planning tastings of cognac and Scotch on Fridays and wine on Saturdays, starting next week.

While I swirled a robust red-by-the-glass from the Niagara Peninsula, I perused the wine list and wondered who is forking over \$300 for a bottle of wine? Just then, three private helicopters floated over the lake, ferrying some of the region's cottagers back to Montreal. So, proof that there is a market for purveyors of the good life.

The sommelier Tremblay told me of a young couple lunching in Bistro 260° who ordered a \$368 Echézeaux from Jayer-Gilles, 2009, to wash down their burger. Some of Tremblay's other favourite pairings include: the \$345 Margaux, a Château Rauzan-Ségla, 2001, to go with Rok's Kobe beef filet; a \$210 Puligny-Montrachet 1er cru Les Combettes, Burgundy, from Étienne Sauzet, 2009, to pair with the lobster dish at l'Ultime; and a 2002 vintage Cristal Champagne from Louis Roederer, \$550 a bottle, to enhance the subtle flavour of oysters.

Wine appreciation is a growing indoor sport, and it's all part of Estérel's goal of being independent of Quebec's capricious weather.

"We don't want people to cancel their ski vacations or golf weekends because of a bad forecast," Zaratany said. "On the contrary, they can come to the Laurentians and have a fun escape with attractive rooms, good food and wine and our new pool system."

To that end, the hotel has opened The Lido, a stunning Nordic-style spa with whirlpools and heated outdoor swimming pools, all steaming in the cold winter air. You can don a bathrobe and dash outside, where you can steep in dramatic hot tubs that are built around blazing fire pits.

A soak in a bubbling hot tub is gleeful and exhilarating, but you can't call yourself a bon vivant if you

don't spoil yourself at Estérel's Amerispa. It offers about 20 massages, body treatments and facials. But I recommend a manicure or pedicure, or both, because the lounge for those treatments is built dramatically over the lake and it's a soothing, meditative setting.

It's easy to fall in love with this refined lifestyle. But you are destined for short-term visits. All of Estérel's 200 condos were sold within weeks of being put on the market.

IF YOU GO

Ville d'Estérel is a 70-minute drive from Montreal via Highway 15 north and Route 370 east

Estérel Resort: Ville d'Estérel: 888-378-3735, 450-228-2571; including cross-country ski and snowshoe trails, skating on Lac Dupuis, The Lido Nordic spa, rates start at approximately \$179, Mon.-Fri., for garden view with fireplace and kitchenette, up to \$389 for a one-bedroom executive suite with lakeview, patio hot tub, full kitchen. With breakfast and dinner, that's \$318-528 for two. Two-bedroom suites available. Rates are higher on Saturdays and lower on Sundays; there is a 50 per cent discount for a third night.

Amerispa Estérel: 450-228-8302 (direct), 866-AMERISPA / 866-263-7477, www.amerispa.ca; manicure, \$48, pedicure, \$58, combo-express, \$62.

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