

Country Roads: Lessons in romance at new Nicolet hotel

Life coach Steve Maltais is the man behind *Séduire et se séduire*. We might call it Romance 101

BY ROCHELLE LASH, THE GAZETTE JANUARY 11, 2013



Hôtel Montfort in Nicolet is a smart new hotel in a former monastery that's been given a \$6-million makeover.

It's a month from Valentine's Day and the pressure is on.

You know all the obvious techniques for expressing your love. The flowers, the chocolates, the candlelit dinners. But chocolates sweeten your love life only for minutes, dinner eats up a few hours and the flowers tend to wilt after a few days.

Life coach Steve Maltais has a more lasting approach. He is the man behind *Séduire et se séduire*, which translates as Seduce and be Seduced. We might call it Romance 101.

Séduire et se séduire is a series of French-language seminars based on Maltais's self-help book (*Les Pelleteurs de Nuages*, 2012). They teach people how to develop a likeable demeanour that will attract others. Sounds sexy, but Maltais says his clients are seeking better personal affairs in both business and love. The theory is that, if you take his course and do your homework, your new-found skills will last for life, and so will your relationships. The next seminar, just in time to polish up for Valentine's Day, will be held on Feb. 2-3, in French, the language of amour.

Maltais starts off his sessions addressing the art of touching and the relation of space between people. His advice is to avoid getting too close to someone you have your eye on. He also explores the physical package that we present — eyes, clothes, odours and more. Opening lines and first impressions are critical. And, apparently, there are both differences and similarities between men and women as to how they make themselves attractive.

Maltais holds his learn-to-seduce seminars at a fine new establishment, the Hôtel Montfort in Nicolet, on the south shore of the St. Lawrence River about two hours northeast of Montreal. The Montfort is a striking, creative hotel in a former monastery named for Montfortian monks who built their cloistered retreat in 1925 for prayer and study. It's a choice location, with century-old trees scattered on the lawns, the front of the hotel facing the Rivière Nicolet and the rear overlooking a farmer's field and summer gardens.

The ascetic lifestyle of the clergy has vanished and the Montfort now is an appealing place to enjoy the good life. After a \$6-million makeover, it has been transformed into a hip, stylish hotel with an imaginative design that incorporates some original architectural features such as arched windows and stone walls. It also has added an indoor pool, sauna and hot tub.

The thick oak door that led to the monks' basement kitchen now houses a wine cellar with very creditable choices. The old refectory has been turned into the dining room, Ô Réfectoire. Gee, is nothing sacred? The former chapel is now a banquet room and the venue for Maltais's seduction seminars.

Outdoors, where monks once strolled in contemplative meditation, Hôtel Montfort has carved trails for cross-country skiing and snowshoeing. The dogsledding huskies shatter winter's silence with their howls and yelps, and children shriek with delight aboard the rollicking rides on the B-12, a large, lumbering 12-passenger snowmobile. The crowning glory of the monastery's resurrection is Terrace du clocher, or Bell Tower Terrace, a rooftop patio with a hot tub that is open year-round. The giant copper bell that once called the clergy to prayer is the design centrepiece of the outdoor space.

Montfort's owner, Denis Beaubien, is a builder who also owns hotels in La Malbaie, Gatineau and Shawinigan. He sticks to what he knows best and he has left Montfort's food and beverage service to a local restaurateur and chef, Marise Hunter. Ô Réfectoire has an ambitious menu of starters such as tartars, a beet and arugula salad, garlic confit with cheese fondue and lobster ravioli, plus mains of bison, steak, lamb and duck.

Montfort's decor stands out for its simplicity and spare lines. The lobby is a minimalist lounge swathed in subtle earth tones with twin chartreuse sofas for pops of colour. The 51 guest rooms and suites are serene, also done in white and shades of grey and brown, with beds covered in linen. The unique aspect is the artwork — murals of handwritten poems and colourful images created by artist Francis Pelletier. Prints of the works are available at the hotel's gift shop, which also sells jewelry and crafts of Quebec artisans.

But what's to do in Nicolet? You can keep the faith at the Musée des religions du monde, which has

an exhibition on the world's largest religions as well as a sculpture garden dedicated to Quebec's heroes. The hotel also is a 15-minute drive from Lac St-Pierre, a UNESCO marine wildlife habitat famous as a feeding ground the greater snow goose during the spring and fall migrations.

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IF YOU GO: Nicolet is a 90-minute drive from Montreal via Highway 20 east to exit 196 or South Shore Highway 30 to Sorel and Route 132 east.

Hôtel Montfort: 855-293-6262, www.hotelmontfort.ca; 1141 rue St-Jean-Baptiste, Nicolet. Ô Réfectoire: lunch on Thurs.-Fri.; dinner on Thurs-Sat. Vegan and children's menus available.

Price: Rooms on Mon-Thurs., \$120-160 for two; Fri.-Sat. are higher; Sundays start at \$105, all incl. breakfast, indoor pool, sauna, hot tub and roof terrace whirlpool. Family Package starts at \$137 for two adults and two children under 18. The Gaming Package includes a \$10 gift card for Loto-Québec's Salon de jeux in Trois-Rivières.

Séduire et se séduire: Feb. 2-3, March 16-17, May 4-5 and continuing; 866-293-2259, 819-293-2259, www.lespelleteursdenuages.com; one night, two-day seminar with eight hrs. per day, two breakfasts, two lunches and one dinner, \$590 p.p., dbl. occ. or \$650 for one. Single-day Saturday (no overnight) with eight hours of seminars, breakfast, lunch, \$286 p.p.

Musée des Religions du Monde: 819-293-6148, www.museedesreligions.qc.ca; 900 boul. Louis-Frédéric, Nicolet.