

# Country Roads: Sweet dreams are made of this: an inn devoted to chocolate

BY ROCHELLE LASH, SPECIAL TO THE GAZETTE JANUARY 25, 2013



Auberge La Chocolatière in North Hatley features gourmet breakfasts with a chocolate theme, and a boutique that stocks all things chocolate.

**Photograph by:** Ian Roberge, Special to The Gazette

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Innkeepers Marie-Josée Pelletier and André Vézina believe in life by chocolate.

When I first met the young couple a few years ago, they were packing their knapsacks for the Seychelles Islands. I saw them again recently and they were just back from India and heading to Costa Rica.

Pelletier and Vézina are inveterate travellers, but they also are keen food researchers with a focus on chocolate and the exotic spices that can enhance it. They own Auberge La Chocolatière, a new inn in the Eastern Townships where they receive overnight guests and share their love for chocolate-themed cooking. You might have already visited La Chocolatière d'Hatley, their B&B on rue Massawippi, but they now have expanded to a larger enterprise. They invited me for a tour and a fabulous, unique breakfast.

Auberge La Chocolatière is the old Auberge Rose des Vents, a vintage inn at the heart of North Hatley. Across the street from everyone's fave hangout, Le Pilsen Pub, La Chocolatière overlooks the northern tip of Lake Massawippi and the Massawippi River, the two waterways that give the village its charm.

La Chocolatière has 12 rooms on three floors. Pack lightly, because an elevator is not in your future. The building was built in 1896 and there is only so much you can do. Pelletier and Vézina are gradually working their way through the inn, updating and adding personal touches.

The guest rooms all have private bathrooms, as well as some vestiges of the quaint decor of florals and pastels of Rose des Vents. Pelletier has added new bedding and white duvets that give everything a fresher, more modern look. The rooms soon will have chocolatey labels like Godiva, Toblerone and Hershey, so eventually you can choose your favourite home-sweet-home by name.

The breakfast room is getting a paint job in the colours of praline and dark chocolate. It's bright and friendly, with an inviting coffee bar, a fireplace and appealing modern photographs of their own works of art — creations such as baklava au chocolat, a sandwich of sorbet and wafers and chocolate crêpes.

But don't simply look: eat. La Chocolatière's unique angle is that breakfast is a multi-course affair, with each course starring homemade chocolate treats. It's an unusual morning venture, a bit daunting and so thoroughly delicious that you might never again want bacon and eggs.

Both cooking and serving, Pelletier and Vézina started me off with a fresh, frothy juice blended from green apples and grapes. It's not a smoothie, André was quick to say, because there is no dairy. In fact, it's lighter and perkier than a smoothie. On other mornings, the juice comes in other zingy flavours: pink grapefruit blended with strawberries or mango tarted up with apple.

Moving onto a morning essential: Coffee here is as divine an espresso or café au lait as you can get anywhere, flavourful and aromatic, with expertise drawn from the couple's travels to coffee countries.

The feast begins. La Chocolatière's breakfast amuse-bouche is always something from the oven: home-baked zucchini bread with dark chocolate, banana bread with milk chocolate or muffins with blueberries or with carrots and white chocolate. Still fascinated and not at all ready to slow down, I tucked into the pièce de résistance: a delicate crêpe made with pâte au chocolat and topped with white chocolate ganache and fruit. Okay, it sounds too sweet to be true, but trust me, this is a heavenly dish. On another day, the main course might be waffles, extra-light with a secret ingredient, and crowned with yogurt, bananas and dark chocolate ganache.

For guests who can't handle all the carbs, there are options: scrambled eggs with aged cheddar or crispy oatmeal muesli studded with cranberries, chocolate-coated almonds and quinoa. Both are equally killer.

I have to confess that throughout breakfast, I had my eye on my bottom line and I couldn't help but ask if La Chocolatière's life by chocolate is fattening.

"If you count the calories versus the amount of pleasure it brings, the answer is no," Pelletier said. "Plus, the quality of the chocolate counts, and it's better to savour a small delicacy, as we serve it here, rather than eat a lot as you do with chocolate bars."

Vézina and Pelletier have bought exotic spices for their chocolates, such as vanilla in Madagascar, dried fruits in Dubai, cardamom in India and peppers in Egypt. But they are also strong supporters of local food producers.

Imagine the gift potential for birthdays or Valentine's Day. La Chocolatière's gourmet boutique stocks homemade sprinkles, dark-chocolate fudge, cookies, caramel brittle and artisanal chocolates spiked with flavours from home and abroad: ginger, lemon, lavender, honey, anise, coffee, caramel, maple, pink peppercorns, plus the boutique also is very strong on neighbours' products, such as jams and chutneys from Au Coeur des Saisons in Compton and an apple-coffee-liqueur jam from Domaine Félibre in West-Barnston.

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## **IF YOU GO**

**North Hatley** is a one-hour, 20-minute drive from Montreal via Highway 10 east to Exit 121 and Route 55 south to Exit 29.

**Auberge La Chocolatière:** 819-842-4530, 514-346-9200, [www.aubergelachocolatiere.com](http://www.aubergelachocolatiere.com); 312 de la Rivière, North Hatley. Reopens Feb 1.

**Price:** \$95 standard w/ private bathroom to \$160 for a room with whirlpool tub and gas fireplace, for two, including a chocolate-themed breakfast and welcome cookies, includes television lounge, pool table. Watch for Internet specials. Packages are available with cycling, including bicycles, and dinners at Plaisir Gourmand, a gourmet restaurant ([www.plaisirgourmand.com](http://www.plaisirgourmand.com)).

**Café La Chocolatière:** open to the public on Sat-Sun., 8 a.m. -11 a.m.; prix fixe, \$12.95 p.p.; will be daily after May.

**B&B La Chocolatière d'Hatley:** 819- 842-1604, 514-346-9200, [www.lachocolatieredhatley.com](http://www.lachocolatieredhatley.com), 985 rue Massawippi, North Hatley; five rooms, four with shared bathrooms, \$110-150 for two, including breakfast. Open Thurs.-Sun.

Eastern Townships tourism information: 800-355-5755, [www.easterntownships.org](http://www.easterntownships.org).