

Country Roads: The Inn at Montpelier's vintage charm is a good thing

Martha Stewart-approved property in Vermont capital speaks of days gone by

BY ROCHELLE LASH, SPECIAL TO THE GAZETTE MARCH 1, 2013



The Inn at Montpelier features an inviting veranda that has seduced Martha Stewart.

Photograph by: The Inn at Montpelier

Decor diva Martha Stewart thought the [Inn at Montpelier](#) in Vermont was so quintessentially New England that she featured it several times in her magazine, Martha Stewart Living.

The inn's inviting porch was what seduced Stewart. It's an expansive, wraparound beauty, a restful veranda with slender white columns and intricate lattice work. Architecturally speaking, it's a fanciful Colonial Revival addition to what originally was a stolid, square Federal building.

The Inn at Montpelier, a vintage treasure at the heart of Vermont's state capital, actually is made up of two rambling manor houses, both originally prestigious homes along a quiet residential street two

blocks from the town's centre. The Yellow House, built in 1820, was the home of a doctor and his family. It's adjacent to the White House, the 1817 creation of a lumber baron. Together, spanning a driveway, they embrace 19 comfortable guest rooms and a half-dozen salons.

Indoors and outdoors, the inn speaks of days gone by with its glass-fronted cabinets, barn-style door latches, curved staircases and intricate woodwork.

There are 10 fireplaces — yup, count 'em, 10 — throughout, which means many cozy corners for reading, writing, chatting or simply watching the snow fall. I visited in winter, so I had only a passing glance at Stewart's favourite veranda. Antiques and old lace are my strongest memories. Plus, there was a close and personal relationship with one of the fireplaces.

Room 12 in the White House was my favourite. It's a spacious corner hideaway with dark antique-style furniture, patterned rugs, wing chairs and a flat-screen television atop an armoire. It's traditional to the max, sporting vintage white lampshades against floral wallpaper. And that working fireplace, all mine.

When people ask about Montpelier, they usually start off with: "Is it like Burlington?" Not really. Burlington has about 43,000 residents and lots of shopping and dining, with a large surrounding area of towns that expands the population to more than 200,000 people. Burlington has a lot of urban trappings, like fast-food outlets, a busy pedestrian promenade with shops and bistros and several chain hotels. By contrast, with 8,000 residents, Montpelier is the smallest state capital in the U.S., and a rather quiet town. It has a strong foodie ethos and a granola crunch to the sprinkling of shops around the intersection of State and Main Sts. But both cities have colleges and lots to do, at least for visits of two to three days.

The highlight in Montpelier is the New England Culinary Institute (NECI), a bonanza for food-lovers. The prices at its various restaurants are reasonable and the service is enthusiastic. Everything is done by teams of professional staffers assisted by the school's interns, so you'll never again have so many fresh-faced waiters helping you. NECI considers the fertile state of Vermont a living food lab, so its chefs use lots of local produce, most of it seasonal and some of it organic.

Assuming you're having breakfast at the Inn at Montpelier, you can plan for lunch at NECI's La Brioche Bakery and Café. A blackboard lists daily fare like roast beef, turkey or veggie sandwiches on homemade multi-grain bread. There also are hearty soups like meatball chili or spicy chickpea with lemon. The menu changes all the time because the students are learning different recipes, but some of the signature desserts are double chocolate chip cookies, fruit flan, pear tartlets, walnut biscuits and opera tortes.

For dinner, student chefs work with pros at NECI on Main, the school's principal dining room, cooking up creative starters like venison dumplings, cheddar soufflé, salmon tartare or crab cakes, and such mains as pecan-crusting salmon, veggie strudel, grass-fed beef or duck breast with white bean ragout, all served à la carte or as part of a \$28-\$33 three-course menu. The students are particularly proud of their new tapas, also offered at NECI on Main: goat cheese galettes, stuffed dates, fried

calamari with gremolata aioli, braised short ribs, spinach empanadillas, lamb burgers and seafood sausages with lemon-caper butter sauce. Montrealers who want to take a leisurely drive to Vermont for the day can fuel up at NECI's Sunday buffet brunch, which gets rave reviews for its omelette station, salads and roast meats.

There is more than food in town. The 16th edition of the Green Mountain Film Festival (March 22 to 31) will attract about 10,000 moviegoers from near and far to multiple showings of 63 films, as well as dance and music performances, literary events, post-screening discussions and parties. The festivities will take place in downtown Montpelier at three venues: the Savoy Theater, Downstairs at the Savoy and a space in the State Pavilion Building. It will be an international fest featuring films from India, China, Australia, Kenya, Europe and North America. Among the Canadian content are several films from Quebec, including *Rebelle* (War Witch), the Oscar-nominated tale of an African girl who becomes a child soldier, directed by Montrealer Kim Nguyen, and the comedy *Starbuck*, starring Patrick Huard and directed by Ken Scott.

IF YOU GO

Montpelier is a two-hour drive from Montreal via Highway 10 east, Exit 22 to Routes 35 and 133 south and Vermont Highway 89 south to Exit 8.

The Inn at Montpelier: 802-223-2727, www.innatmontpelier.com; 147 Main St., Montpelier, Vt.

Price: low-season winter rates until May 31 are approximately \$139 to \$200 for two, including breakfast; rates increase slightly from June 1 to Sept. 14, and again from Sept. 15 to Oct. 15.

New England Culinary Institute: 877-223-6324, www.neci.edu. La Brioché Bakery and Café, 89 Main St., Montpelier, open Mon-Fri. 7 a.m. to 5 p.m., Sat. 7 a.m. to 3 p.m. NECI on Main, 118 Main St., Montpelier, open Tues.-Sat. 11:30 a.m. to 9 p.m. (lunch \$10-\$20, dinner \$28-\$45); Sunday brunch 10 a.m. to 2 p.m., \$20.

Green Mountain Film Festival, March 22 to 31, 802-262-3423.

Tourism information: 800-VERMONT, www.montpelier-vt.org, www.visitvt.com, www.vermontvacation.com.

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