

Country Roads: Resort ‘du terroir’ makes the most of the Beauce

BY ROCHELLE LASH, SPECIAL TO THE GAZETTE MARCH 22, 2013



The new chalets at La Cache à Maxime are modern two-storey hideaways in the woods.

Photograph by: La Cache à Maxime

Jean Grégoire used to be the CEO of Solisco, one of North America's largest industrial printing companies. Now, he is an inn-keeper, lock, stock and wine barrel.

Grégoire owns La Cache à Maxime, a resort “du terroir” that combines vacation chalets, a spa with a difference, a vineyard, a restaurant and an all-Quebec gourmet shop. It's in the unlikely location of Scott, a teeny community of about 2,100 people, a 25-minute drive east of Lévis in the region called La Beauce. It seems Grégoire has both a sense of tradition and a sense of humour. Even with all of this hedonistic living, it turns out that the resort was named after Reverend Maxime Fillion, the first priest born in the fledging community circa 1900.

La Cache has been evolving gradually since Grégoire indulged his passion for epicurean pursuits and planted his first grapevines 12 years ago. He then expanded and opened Les Délices de Maxime, a creative restaurant that is entirely dedicated to using the finest ingredients produced in La Beauce and throughout Quebec. The restaurant is in the boonies, and yet it's packed for lunch and dinner with people from the region, from Quebec City and skiers heading to Le Massif du Sud for downhill

thrills on the cat-ski or heli-ski programs. (Skiers and riders, please take note. That is not the same ski station as Le Massif in Charlevoix).

The signature appetizer at Les Délices de Maxime is a tasting platter of terrines, cheese fondues, smoked salmon and charcuterie, all from La Cache's own kitchens or their neighbours'. For dinner, you can tuck into main courses like pork with apples, confit of duck, and roast bison, lamb or boar ribs.

Grégoire's original intention was to share his vision and to raise the profile of the area where he had conducted business for a long time. So recently, he expanded La Cache by adding 33 attractive, contemporary chalets in wooded copse called Le Boisé du Vigneron. With two bedrooms and two bathrooms each, they're perfect for families or two couples who want to get away for spa life, gastronomy or sports. Modern, bright and fully equipped with barbecues, satellite television and kitchens, the chalets are private, two-storey homes-away-from-home.

The truly distinctive aspect of La Cache is its Noah Spa. It didn't go the Nordic route, like so many new spas in Quebec. Instead, Grégoire built an all-indoor facility called Spa Eaunergique, a network of 14 water basins, with many styles of massage jets and temperatures that vary from a chilly 10 C. to a cookin' 100 C. Noah Spa is a full-service beauty and body treatment centre with massages, body wraps, smoothing paraffin soaks for hands and feet, back care and aesthetics.

Still, just as at the beginning, Grégoire's pride and joy is his vineyard. He researched by travelling in France and California and is cultivating three types of grapes that manage to grow and even flourish in our challenging climate: maréchal Foch, sainte-croix and vandal-cliche.

I'm not a connoisseur, but I think that La Cache's red wine, Le Jarret Noir, a blend of all three grapes, is a winner and as desirable as many from overseas. It's low on tannins, smooth, yet full-flavoured, and sells for \$19.95. The winery also produces whites, rosés and late-harvest dessert wines.

Grégoire wants visitors to enjoy his vacation development, but he also wants them to take home part of the experience. The gift shop Les Trésors de Maxime is huge, carrying a whopping selection of jams and tapenades, maple products, vinaigrettes, oils, honey, cheeses and even hand-crafted items. I invested in strawberry jam from La Cache's kitchens and a pair of alpaca socks from Alpagas des Appalaches. The ultimate take-home treat was a chunk of wapiti terrine – simply the best, low in fat and high in flavour, with a jar of caramelized onions as a condiment.

In summer, La Cache is surrounded by picturesque gardens with fountains, waterfalls and statuettes and a forest with walking trails. The resort runs tours of the vineyard with tastings and lunch. The countryside around Scott has great cycling routes for easy riders, although you do share the road. The Véloroute de la Chaudière Appalaches — that's the name of this tourist region — is a mostly flat bike lane of Route 73 that follows a river past farmland and through the towns of Sainte-Marie and Saint-Joseph-de-Beauce.

IF YOU GO:

Scott is a three-hour drive from Montreal via South Shore Highway 20 to Route 73 south.

La Cache à Maxime 855-387-5060, 418-387-5060, www.lacacheamaxime.com; 265 rue Drouin, Scott.

Price: Chalets of Le Boisé du Vigneron, \$220 per night on Sun.-Thurs., for up to six people or \$420 on Fri.-Sat.. Prices will be higher in summer.

Boutique Les Trésors de Maxime and the restaurant Les Délices de Maxime are open daily. Lunch, \$15-25 (Mon-Sat.); dinner (Tues-Sat.) \$35-48. Sunday brunch; \$24.95 for adults, \$12.95 for children 5-12; it's free for children four and under.

Noah Spa: 418- 387-8888, www.noah-spa.com; Spa Eaunergique water system, \$50-60 for a full-day. Sample treatments: a hydrating facial with organic ingredients, \$75. A 60- minute-massage, \$90.

Regional info: 888 831-4411, www.chaudiereappalaches.com.

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