

# Country Roads: Le Finlandais not quite a country getaway

## Redone vintage motel just 15 minutes away from Montreal

BY ROCHELLE LASH, SPECIAL TO THE GAZETTE APRIL 2, 2013



One of the new suites at the Spa-Hôtel Le Finlandais in Rosemère which is a clever re-do of a vintage motel.

**Photograph by:** Guillaume Fouliot

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**Note to readers:** *Le Finlandais was heavily damaged by a fire on Tuesday. The spa is separate from a hotel across the street that also carries the Le Finlandais name. The hotel hasn't been damaged.*

MONTREAL - The Spa-Hôtel Le Finlandais is not quite a country getaway. A 15-minute drive from downtown or a half-hour from the West Island, it's more of a suburban escape with a pastoral ambience. It's on tiny Ile Bélair in Rosemère, with an entrance on Labelle Blvd. and peaceful views of woods and the Rivière des Milles Îles on three sides.

It's so close to Montreal that I wondered, why spend the night? I weighed my options: indulge in a romantic rendezvous, set up a business brain-storming session, wait for a special occasion or simply escape from everyday duties.

I settled on a one-night tryst, called Jean-Pierre and we zoomed up the Laurentian Autoroute to Rosemère, toting overnight bags and the all-important swimsuits and flip-flops.

Le Finlandais had been two separate businesses — the spa and Hotel Le Rivage — until a few

months ago, but they merged in both spirit and in name. They are, however, still across the street from each other, so the management operates a van shuttle to ferry people back and forth across busy Labelle Blvd.

The hotel is a clever re-do of a vintage motel. Owner Pierre Verville had been involved in real estate, so he knows his way around construction materials. And designers Jean-Pierre Viau and Julie Turgeon are infusing Hôtel Le Finlandais with a totally fresh, contemporary look.

Three striking suites are the newest products, and the Suite Le Finlandais is the pièce de résistance. It's a private corner space with all the trimmings: a fireplace, a 55-inch television and a stretch of windows that overlook the Rivière des Mille Îles and the summertime swimming pool. On the leading edge of a new hotel trend, the suite sports an I-Home audio system, so if you bring your own music via iPod, you can set a personal mood. Everything has been thought out to fulfill modern indulgences: aromatic soap made of green tea and ginger, a soaking tub with a television and a separate shower for two with a sexy glow of red lights.

Le Finlandais' Nordic spa across the street has a totally different look. It's a series of outdoor hot and cold baths surrounded by rustic barnwood buildings. The interiors are totally up to date, though. The locker rooms are decked out in stylish red mosaic tiles and the relaxation chambers are warmed by fireplaces. I arrived at 3 p.m. on a Thursday afternoon, and the place was booming with people. Everyone was tiptoeing along heated stone paths around the cold and hot pools or blissing out in the saunas and steam rooms, so it didn't feel really feel crowded. There is a policy of silence, so it's not noisy either, and the waterfalls make a soothing constant gurgle and splash. Still, Carole Verville, the spa director and sister of the owner, suggests that morning spa sojourns are ideal. I think evenings are quite magical, too, because coloured lights radiate from underwater, giving the entire outdoor area a pastel glow.

The spa offers more than 20 beauty and body treatments — all listed on iPads — including the signature Royal Facial, plus body wraps that tone the skin and relieve stressed muscles, and reflexology, which uses foot massage to ease aches from head to toe. What makes Le Finlandais a hot property is its moderate prices, as low as \$25 for use of the Nordic baths at certain times, when some spas can go to \$50.

If you make an overnight visit of it, Le Finlandais works with two next-door neighbours who offer different dining experiences. And the advantages of being in the 'burbs instead of fully in the countryside are that there are competitive prices and after-dark action. With a package, table d'hôte dinners at Mojo or LÂ! cost \$110 for two, including a bottle of wine, tax and tip.

LÂ! Grill-Lounge is run by Jean-François Plante, co-star of the midday Quebec television show C'est-Extra! and owner of l'Aromate in Le Saint-Martin Hotel in downtown Montreal. The Rosemère space is pure and modern, with white lounge sofas, minimalist decor and, in summer, beautiful riverfront terraces. Plante does French-inspired bistro cuisine such as bavette, rack of lamb, chorizo sausages, duck confit salad and linguine with shrimp. For dessert, the best-selling extravaganza is sugar pie —

astoundingly served with nuts, caramel, ice cream and whipped cream.

Mojo, a lively bar-bistro, offers deals like wine, martinis and draft beer for \$5 at their Monday-Friday 5-à-7 cocktail parties, two-for-one tapas on Wednesdays, free dining for women on Thursdays and live music on Thursdays to Saturdays.

The raw bar features tuna tataki and beef tartare, and the huge can't-miss menu lists steaks, seafood, rack of lamb, shrimp, fish 'n' chips, chicken satay, smoked duck and pizza topped with goat cheese and prosciutto.

Le Finlandais is immediately north of St-Rose in Laval via Pont Marius Dufresne over the Rivière des Mille Îles. In warmer weather, the Parc de la Rivière des Mille Îles is an idyllic spot for a laid-back cruise through a series of islands that form a wildlife sanctuary. Park entry is free and there are rabaskas, kayaks and pedal boats for hire or guided tours on pontoons. The trails and riverfront promenade are open in April, but rentals and island activities start on May 6 for spring.

### **IF YOU GO:**

Rosemère is a 15-minute drive from downtown Montreal via Highway 15 north to Exit 14 north.

Spa & Hôtel Le Finlandais: 888-971-0005, 450-971-0005, [www.spalefinlandais.com](http://www.spalefinlandais.com); 124 & 125 Boul. Labelle, Rosemère.

Hotel: \$100-\$330 for two, incl. continental breakfast and valet parking. Outdoor swimming pool in summer.

Spa Le Finlandais: 450-971-0005; access to Nordic baths, Mon.-Thurs., \$35 from 11 a.m.-6 p.m., or \$25 before 11 a.m. and after 6 p.m. On weekends & holidays, it's \$35 all day until 11 p.m.; open daily 8:30 a.m. to 11 p.m. For hotel guests, it's \$25 at all times, plus a 10-per-cent discount on spa treatments. A 60-minute Swedish massage costs \$99, incl. access to Nordic baths. Minimum age for spa is 16 years.

Spa Bistro: sandwiches & salads, 8:30 a.m.-11 p.m.

Regional info: Office de Tourisme des Basses-Laurentides (Lower Laurentians), 866-491-4449, [www.basseslaurentides.com](http://www.basseslaurentides.com); Tourisme Laval, 877-465-2825, [www.tourismelaval.com](http://www.tourismelaval.com); Tourisme Laurentides, 800-561-NORD (6673), [www.laurentides.com](http://www.laurentides.com). Parc de la Rivère des Mille Îles: 450-622-1020, [www.parc-mille-iles.qc.ca](http://www.parc-mille-iles.qc.ca).

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