

# Country Roads: Healthy cuisine at the heart of this Victorian inn

## Mostly organic, vegetarian meals served as well as box lunches for cyclists along La Route verte

BY ROCHELLE LASH, SPECIAL TO THE GAZETTE APRIL 14, 2013 3:13 PM



Guest rooms at Le 100 St-Laurent, an inn in Mauricie, combine vintage and modern looks.

**Photograph by:** Nicolas Durand-Thibodeau

---

“I’ve never been to a McDonald’s,” said innkeeper Sonia Duhaime. “And I don’t eat poutine.”

Duhaime grew up in a world rife with fried food, burgers and white bread, and when she found out her digestive system was upset by those foods, she turned to healthier, mostly vegetarian cuisine.

Eventually, she brought up her son on organic cuisine, with lots of vegetables, high-quality grains, tofu and only a soupçon of poultry, fish and beef. Today, he’s a strapping 32-year-old who has a physical job in forestry that keeps him working outdoors both summer and winter.

Now, Duhaime is sharing her food philosophy with her guests at Le 100 St-Laurent, the inn that she operates with her partner, Réjean M. Rioux. She also runs Chez Flora, a food boutique where she spreads the message to the townsfolk of Louiseville, which was named for Queen Victoria’s daughter.

Le 100 St-Laurent is an ornate Victorian-style manor with turrets, gables and a spacious garden, all

created nearly 100 years ago by a prominent family. It's at the centre of Louiseville's main street, holding its own beside the grand, historic l'Église St-Antoine-de-Padoue, which has lavish interiors of Italian marble and a domed ceiling adorned with hand-painted frescoes.

Le 100 St-Laurent has preserved its heritage with lots of polished walnut door frames, lace curtains, stained glass windows, built-in china cabinets and pastel walls of antique rose and eggshell blue. Rated four "suns" out of five by Quebec Tourism, it has four spacious guest rooms and a third-floor attic suite that can accommodate six people.

There are antique pieces here and there, but mostly Duhaime and Rioux decorated with reproductions of a variety of looks, everything from Queen Anne-inspired chairs to art deco-ish tables. Still, the rooms are comfortable, bright and equipped with cosy comforters, bathrobes and televisions. Two have inviting private porches facing the church or the main street and are shaded by towering trees.

On a business note, Louiseville happens to be a hub of manufacturing. Duhaime and Rioux bought furniture from Canadel and Meubles JLM, two local companies. And the original owner of the grand house at 100 St-Laurent Ave. was Joseph-Edouard Béland, founder of Chemise Empire Shirt in the 1890s.

Today, the company on Louiseville's main street is run by the fourth generation of Bélands, who successfully make shirts for uniforms and dress wear, quite an accomplishment in a T-shirt world. Coincidentally, my maternal grandfather, Joseph Balacan, father of Gloria Lash, also lived in Louiseville and owned a shirt factory, way back when. But I digress.

What makes Le 100 St-Laurent special is its food. Duhaime serves breakfast to guests of the inn and lunch and dinner to outsiders.

She believes in healthy cuisine more than strict vegetarianism and occasionally runs Sunday brunch tasting sessions to introduce people to what she hopes will be a new and improved way of eating.

Her cuisine is low in salt, sugar and fat and mostly organic. She avoids deep-fried foods and serves beef, poultry and fish sparingly. She is ready for any guest request — gluten-free, lactose-free or vegan.

We had lunch together and while chatting about her food mission, we feasted on some of her specialties: a velouté of red peppers sprinkled with hemp seeds rich in omega-3, a mijoté of chicken with apricots and basmati rice, and a low-calorie, gluten-free chocolate cake sweetened with agave juice.

She also does trout filets, a cassoulet of beans with tofu sausages, beef bourguignon, chicken stuffed with zucchini and wok-sautéed vegetables with shrimp.

Le 100 St-Laurent also serves wine and beer, proving that even food purists can let their hair down. The choice includes organic wine from Vignoble Saint-Gabriel in nearby St-Gabriel-de-Brandon and

beer from such Quebec micro-breweries as La Barberie and Le Bilboquet.

If you would like to pursue Duhaime's noble food habits, you're in luck.

She spends 12 hours a day in the kitchen to stock Chez Flora, a fulsome grocery and health food store brimming with her own berry pies, soups, vegetarian lasagna, fruit compotes and petits fours made with sweet potatoes or buckwheat flour.

She favours such regional products as coffee from Brûlerie St-Maurice, herbs and plant extracts from Clef des Champs in Val-David and aromatherapy oils from Prana Sens.

I wondered how Rioux was coping. I wondered if he ever cheated and went out to the local tavern for a big, juicy steak? "Once a summer, I buy a big steak for the barbecue and we share it," he admitted.

Louiseville is an important hub for cyclists, especially for riders travelling La Route verte (along Route 138) between Montreal and Quebec City.

Le 100 St-Laurent provides secure bike storage and box lunches. In addition, Duhaime and Rioux are part of an inn-to-inn cycling experience called Vélo à la carte.

If you choose to explore the country roads of Mauricie, the couple will provide shuttle service for your car or luggage to other B & Bs.

The terrain is flat around Louiseville, hilly in the farming region around Charette and St-Paulin and mountainous around Saint-Mathieu-du-Parc, which is near the entrance of La Mauricie National Park.

## IF YOU GO

Louiseville is a one-hour, 10-minute drive from Montreal via Highway 40 east to Exit 166.

Le 100 St-Laurent: 819-721-3414, 819-383-7646, [www.le100st-laurent.com](http://www.le100st-laurent.com); 100 Ave. Saint-Laurent, Louiseville.

Price: \$95-\$135 for two, including breakfast (some rooms share a bathroom); third-floor Suite Soho, \$250. Small pets welcome. Three-course lunches, \$18-\$20; dinners, \$23-\$30.

Chez Flora Épicerie Santé: 819-721-3414, 819-383-7646; 23 rue Rémi-Paul, Louiseville. Open daily. No website.

Tourism, Mauricie region: 800-567-7603, [www.tourismemauricie.org](http://www.tourismemauricie.org).

[rochelle@rochellelash.com](mailto:rochelle@rochellelash.com)

Twitter: rochellelash

© Copyright (c) The Montreal Gazette



Guest rooms at Le 100 St-Laurent, an inn in Mauricie, combine vintage and modern looks.

**Photograph by:** Nicolas Durand-Thibodeau

