

# Checking In: Whimsical country inn is like no other

## Auberge du Mange-Grenouille, an eclectic creation from two Québecois actors

BY ROCHELLE LASH, SPECIAL TO THE GAZETTE JULY 18, 2013



The Auberge du Mange-Grenouille near Rimouski has 22 guest rooms, most with extravagant and eclectic decor.

**Photograph by:** Simon Jutra / Auberge du Mange-Grenouille

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Frills, fantasy and fabulous food.

Auberge du Mange-Grenouille is the most wild and crazy inn that I have ever encountered. Or probably that anyone else has ever encountered, for that matter. It's theatrical and operatic, eclectic and eccentric, a baroque orgy of decorations and collections.

It is the unique and whimsical creation of Carole Faucher and Jean Rossignol, two Québecois actors who clearly have an irresistible urge to decorate and who have profoundly melodramatic souls. They are business partners and best friends. She takes care of administration, he does the interiors, and chef Richard Duchesneau handles the cuisine, which is terrific.

I have bedded down in a dizzying variety of lodging including tree houses, hobbit-style huts, deluxe resorts, boutique hotels, mountain mansions and seaside cottages. I fondly remember the rustic ski lodge with the shower down the hall and the farmhouse where I milked a cow for my morning coffee.

But there has been no rehearsal for Auberge du Mange-Grenouille.

Mange-Grenouille is a 22-room country inn in Le Bic, a village on the southern tip of Rimouski in the Bas-Saint-Laurent (Lower St-Lawrence) region, about a half-hour this side of Gaspé.

From the street, Mange-Grenouille is a large, rambling, red brick building that stands out from the modest vintage clapboard houses along a quiet village street. A former general store built in the mid-1800s, it is bedecked with white galleries and rooftop lattice work, a model of Victoriana with a country flavour. Out back, the inn has extensive gardens, gurgling waterfalls, classic statuary and a gazebo overlooking a pond. So far, the look is historic and traditional.

But when you walk inside, you are assailed with a visual cacophony of collectibles from around the world. Auberge du Mange-Grenouille is festooned, floor to ceiling, with bowers of artificial flora, paintings in gilded frames, winged cupids, tasselled drapes, sequined pillows from India and bird cages from Java, complete with live birds. One salon has eight crystal chandeliers. If you sip a cocktail on a satin settee, you are in the company of life-size mannequins of Napoleon, King George III and Marie Antoinette — or was it Carmen Miranda? One more drink and I was sure I was going to bump into Caligula or maybe one of the Medicis.

Faucher and Rossignol are not only artistic and expressive. As innkeepers, they are highly capable and successful. One wall is papered with their press clippings, mostly reports from food writers who have dined, wine and swooned. The Gazette's fine-dining critic, Lesley Chesterman, called her experience here "an absolute treat."

The accolades keep on coming. The region of Bas-Saint-Laurent has recognized Mange-Grenouille for its gardens and dedication to heritage. Quebec Tourism has awarded it gold-medal status for its unique lodging. The Collège des Ambassadeurs du vin au Québec has given it a Carte d'or for its impressive wine cellar. And the Association des restaurateurs du Québec has honoured Duchesneau for his cooking, which highlights Quebec ingredients.

Mange-Grenouille runs an artful dining scene, with contemporary presentations and the freshest ingredients, hand-picked by the chef.

At lunch, favourites are fish soup, seared trout or beef carpaccio with cheeses and dressed-down desserts like meringue, almond cake and sorbet. For later in the day, there is a terrace-and-tapas menu of such taste treats as lobster bouillon, liver mousse, smoked mackerel or scallops and crab with asparagus. Now is the time for choice selections from the wine cellar and signature cocktails like the Quebec kir, blended with the essence of cloudberry from the north of the province.

Save room for more. Dinner is tantalizing, starring such dishes as roast boar, mushroom tart, salmon, venison carpaccio, sweetbreads, Gaspé char or Angus beef, and for dessert, strawberry and rhubarb with crème fraîche, spiced shortbread with lemon cream and a chocolate soufflé with orange confit.

Taking it up a notch, Duchesneau also does a multi-course tasting menu at night that features wine pairings and some of his specialties: chilled crab and cauliflower soup, scallops with rhubarb, foie gras, lobster with a sexy butter sauce and a chocolate soufflé tart.

It is, plain and simple, excellent French cuisine.

The accommodations are where things get dramatic. All the rooms are different, so here is a peek at one of the more extravagant creations. No. 17 is in a newer section of the inn, a patio-level hideaway facing misty mountains, colourful gardens and a stream. It is decorated with a wall-to-wall mural of sea and sky, terra cotta tiled floor, sweeping drapes with tassels and huge pots of artificial flowers. The centrepiece is the bed, as it should be, which has a wrought-iron frame with fleurs-de-lys on the posters and a canopy of regal gold and purple fabric draping down from a giant crown. It's hard to imagine relaxing with all this stimuli, but it's worth a try. The experience is unique.

If that might be all too much, you can request one of the rooms in the main inn, which are less elaborate, but still filled with antiques and pretty accessories, although a few have shared bathrooms. No. 7 is a serene, private space with a hand-carved bed.

If you are inspired by Mange-Grenouille's decor style, you can buy treasures hand-picked by Rossignol at the inn's gift shop, La Chapelle, which operates in a tiny authentic chapel next to the inn.

#### IF YOU GO

Le Bic is a five-hour drive from Montreal via Highway 20 east and Route 132.

Auberge du Mange-Grenouille: 418-736-5656, [aubergedumangegrenouille.qc.ca](http://aubergedumangegrenouille.qc.ca); 148 rue Sainte-Cécile, Rimouski /Le Bic. Open May 1-Oct 20.

Price: \$89-\$199 for two, incl. breakfast, outdoor hot tub. Some rooms have shared bathrooms. In high season, June 24-Sept. 2, priority is given to room reservations with a dinner package. Lunch daily: \$12-\$18 p.p.; tapas 4-7 p.m.; dinner nightly; \$35-\$50 p.p., or seven-course tasting menu, \$70 p.p., plus \$55 for a wine flight.

Bas-Saint-Laurent regional tourism: 800-563-5268, [bassaintlaurent.ca](http://bassaintlaurent.ca).

[Rochelle@rochellelash.com](mailto:Rochelle@rochellelash.com) Twitter: [rochellelash](https://twitter.com/rochellelash)

The writer was a guest of the hotel. The hotel did not approve or review this article.