

Checking In: New look for hotel overlooking Richelieu River

Country-style inn adds a dollop of urban chic

BY ROCHELLE LASH, SPECIAL TO THE GAZETTE SEPTEMBER 6, 2013



The sophisticated and serene room décor is created by white beds, camel-coloured carpeting and grey accents.

Photograph by: HÔtel Rive Gauche

After a total renovation and the introduction of a new dining concept, HÔtel Rive Gauche straddles both city and country styles.

Rive Gauche is a four-star hotel overlooking the Richelieu River in a protected setting that has withstood the suburban boom nearby. A 30-minute drive from downtown Montreal, it has dual roles. One mandate is an attractive, modernized conference venue for businesspeople throughout Quebec, and the other is a weekend and dining getaway in a picturesque region that is full of tourist attractions, including cruises along the Richelieu and apple-picking and harvest festivals.

The hotel recently boosted its vacation appeal with an overhaul of its 22 rooms and suites. Previously a country-style inn named Auberge Rive-Gauche, the hotel has changed its moniker and added some urban chic with a new look by Jean-Pierre Viau Design of Montreal.

“We made it more fresh and light and more like a contemporary city hotel,” Viau said. “We used brown, grey and white, which are stylish and comfortable on the senses.”

Rive Gauche now sports sophisticated and serene room décor created by white beds, camel-coloured carpeting and grey accents. The bathrooms are spanking new, all white and glass and equipped with top-of-the-line fixtures. You can happily cocoon here, taking advantage of room service, high-quality cotton bathrobes, pod-coffee machines, flat-screen televisions and sound systems. The executive suites are truly swish, with dolphin grey leather sofas and special soaking tubs.

All the rooms have a slanted, side view of the Richelieu and Mont St-Hilaire. At this time of year, the mountain is particularly beautiful with its glorious forests gradually turning to fiery colours. The suites have larger, two-corner windows and full river views, plus the mountain.

The hotel’s restaurant, Le Coureur des Bois, also has been overhauled.

“It’s a mix of rustic and urban,” Viau said. “The lines are straight, square and simple, but the materials — reclaimed wood, recycled metal and vintage glass fixtures — add country warmth.”

The chairs are bark brown and moss green and the tables are bare wood, with little pots of herbs and stoneware plates, all adding a woodsy look to the framework of a sleek modern bistro. But Le Coureur des Bois is not just another pretty space. The food is great too.

Executive chef Jean-François Méthot’s culinary background is impressive. He was captain of Quebec’s cuisine team at the Lillehammer Olympic Games in Norway and winner in 2002 of the Renaud Cyr prize for his focus on Quebec products in his recipes. He also was executive chef at Auberge Les Trois Tilleuls and at Club St-Denis in Montreal.

With sous-chefs Sébastien Gagnon (day) and Véronique Charron (evening), Méthot blends contemporary presentations with “cuisine terroir” and has come up with thoroughly pleasing menus for lunch, dinner and Sunday brunch, which is cooked to order.

The Plateau express du Coureur des Bois is a one-hour lunch indulgence that is named for Quebec’s “runners of the woods,” the fur traders and explorers of New France of centuries ago. The meal is meant to be relatively quick, but still gourmet, and the presentation is delightful. The three courses all are served on the same wooden platter, a little like an airplane meal that arrives on a tray, but so much better.

“The idea is to have the ‘chef’s trio’ of the day,” Méthot said. “Guests can come and have a tasty three-course meal with no fuss. In and out in an hour, if you like.”

The menu changes daily, but with autumn’s harvest you can expect such dishes as velouté of squash, venison, endive and spinach salad and classics like fish with lemon butter and hangar steak. Méthot focuses on local produce, so his poultry, duck, rabbit and beef come from farms in Montérégie and the Eastern Townships.

Le Coureur des Bois's dessert always comes in a stemmed coupe — a “verrine,” the chef explained — which might be a mousse or a sorbet, crème brûlée, pannacotta or a runny, rich cheesecake.

You can plan lunch and dinner at Rive Gauche and also use the hotel as a jumping-off point for the rich choice of autumn activities. If you still are in a food mood, the 10th annual Le Rendezvous des Papilles in St-Hyacinthe (translates as rendezvous of the tastebuds) will bring together 100 Quebec producers in an indoor-outdoor festival Sept. 20, 21 and 22. There will be music, a mechoui, children's animation and tastings of wine, cider, fruit, cheese and even Gaspé seafood.

We're right in season for apple-picking, which in this region near Mont St-Hilaire and Rougemont is a rite of passage. At Les Vergers Petit & Fils, you can pick your own Lobo, McIntosh and Paula Red, and later in September and October, there will be Empire, Spartan, Red Delicious, Honey Crisp and Cortland.

You can make a day of it with horse-drawn-carriage rides and a visit to the petting farm for the kids. Lunch at the orchard's crêperie features apéritifs of homemade apple cider, plus a feast of roast ham and yummy crêpes filled with cheese, caramelized apples, strawberries or chocolate.

IF YOU GO:

Beloil is a 30-minute drive from Montreal via Highway 20 east to Exit 112.

Hôtel Rive Gauche: 888-608-6565, 450-467-4477, www.hotelrivegauche.ca; 1810 Boul. Richelieu, Beloil.

Price: rooms, approximately \$130-\$145 for two people; suites, \$200-\$245, including wireless Internet. CAA discounts apply; package available with meals.

Le Coureur des Bois: Evening table d'hôte, \$39; express lunch, \$19; five-course brunch, \$36 for adults or \$18 for ages 5-11. Room service available.

Hôtellerie Champêtre: Hôtel Rive Gauche is a member of Hôtellerie Champêtre, a group of more than 30 establishments throughout Quebec. For gift cards and specials: 514- 861-4024, www.hotelleriechampetre.com.

Montréal tourism info and events: 866-469-0069, www.tourisme-monteregie.qc.ca.

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