

# In with the old, in with the new at Quebec City gem

BY ROCHELLE LASH, SPECIAL TO THE GAZETTE    OCTOBER 20, 2013



Le Saint-Pierre's breakfast room offers a menu that includes fresh fruit, croissants and café au lait, plus a choice of crêpes, french toast, Eggs Benedict and omelettes with goat cheese and lardons.

A sweeping \$500,000 renovation of Le St-Pierre, a darling boutique hotel in the Old Port of Quebec City, has preserved the best of the fine old structure and bestowed a fresh new look.

It wasn't easy.

The building is nearly 200 years old, built when rue St-Pierre was the Wall Street of Lower Canada and Le St-Pierre was the headquarters of what is believed to be the settlement's first insurance company, Quebec Fire Insurance Cie., founded in 1820.

The renovators, designers and architects had a few extra challenges because the building is classified as historic by the heritage group Commission d'urbanisme et de conservation de Québec. They had to modernize operating systems, such as air conditioning, heating, elevators and water recycling, always working within strict guidelines to respect the original architecture.

The reconstruction spans the centuries. The team fabricated all-new window oak frames and casements, but they maintained the look of 19th-century carpentry and hardware. Then, going very 21st century, they installed dozens of 40-inch flat-screen televisions, hanging them on thick stone and brick walls while miraculously hiding the wiring for cable and electricity.

"It would have been an everyday affair if the walls were plaster, but the stone made it a big drilling challenge," said Michel Couture, Le St-Pierre's general manager. "And they had to ensure that the architectural details such as ceiling mouldings and wainscoting looked the same as the first time around."

Le St-Pierre has had a total update. The lobby lounge now sports handsome leather furniture and stained-glass fixtures crafted by Daniel Dalpé, which give off a period look. The corridors on the guest-room floors have come alive with frescoes of Quebec City scenes painted by Claude Martin and Marc Brochier. Black-and-white photographs add a dash of retro style.

The 31 guest rooms and 10 suites are bright and airy, with white lacquered furniture and mellow taupe fabrics softening the bare, rugged stone and brick walls. The décor is all refreshingly new: sisal rugs, duvets, pillows, mattresses and sheets.

Le St-Pierre bills itself as an “auberge distinctive,” but it treats its guests to a lot of hotel-style amenities. It has four levels of accommodations, all attractive and comfortable, with whirlpool tubs, good lighting, bathrobes and pod coffee machines. At the top end are the split-level loft suites, which have sunken soaking tubs, kitchens, dining areas and living rooms with sofa beds. And some rooms on the fourth floor have views of the St. Lawrence River.

Breakfast is a fulsome affair, with fresh fruit, croissants and café au lait, plus a choice of crêpes, french toast, eggs Benedict and omelettes with goat cheese and lardons.

In Quebec City, I always try to mix culture with outdoor life, and feasting on excellent French-Quebec cuisine is a given. Le St-Pierre makes it all happen. Simply see the Clef d’Or concierge, who lines up food tours, sightseeing excursions, cultural visits and restaurant reservations. (The hotel serves only breakfast.)

The hotel’s Couette & Culture Package includes visits to three museums: Musée de l’Amérique francophone, Musée de la Place Royale and Musée de la civilisation, where the current show, Pierre Gauvreau, J’espérais vous voir ici, features works by one of the Automatistes, the 1940s socio-political group. A new permanent exhibition titled This Is Our Story opens Nov. 27 and will explore First Nations culture.

On an international beat, the Musée national des beaux-arts du Québec is the only Canadian stop for the touring exhibit The William S. Paley Collection: A Taste for Modernism, which stars the works of such impressionist and post-impressionist masters as Picasso, Gauguin and Matisse. Paley founded the CBS television network and helped develop the Museum of Modern Art in New York City.

The splendid Musée national des beaux-arts is one of my favourite stops in Quebec City, with the largest collection of Quebec art, in addition to important travelling shows. The museum’s setting also is compelling. An impressive three-pavilion institution — with a fourth in progress — it’s on a rise at the edge of the Plains of Abraham. I never miss taking a turn here, with its awe-inspiring rolling hills, views of the St. Lawrence River and La Citadelle, part of the city’s landmark fortifications.

The big surprise at the Musée national des beaux-arts is its excellent restaurant. After a morning of perusing great art, you can sit down to an elegant lunch of gourmet dishes, such as coquilles St-Jacques with saffron, veal sausage with foie gras, caramelized apple crêpes, Charlevoix veal chops or vegetarian cassoulet. Finish with an exhilarating walk along the Plains of Abraham. It’s all so very

Quebec.

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

Twitter: [rochellelash](#)

Quebec City is a 2½-hour drive from downtown Montreal via Highway 40 or Highway 20 east.

**Le St-Pierre:** 888-268-1017, [auberge.qc.ca](http://auberge.qc.ca); 79 rue St-Pierre. Small pets, \$40 per visit.

**Price:** All rates include full breakfast, coffee corner, access to business and fitness centres and Wi-Fi. Fall and Winter Magic Packages include one night, breakfast and valet parking, starting at \$190 (until Nov. 14) and \$159 (Nov. 15-March 31) for two. Not valid Dec. 26-Jan. 1. On the regular room rate, from \$180, a third night is free, Nov. 15-March 31. Couette & Culture Package, until April 30, adds admission to three museums. Celebration Package has flowers, Champagne and a late checkout. Extras: massage, babysitting and transportation to Dock 22 cruise terminal.

**Musée de la civilisation:** 866-710-8031, [mcq.org](http://mcq.org); 85 rue Dalhousie. The Pierre Gauvreau exhibit opened this week and runs to Sept. 28, 2014.

**Musée national des beaux-arts du Québec:** 866-220-2150, [mnba.qc.ca](http://mnba.qc.ca); Parc des Champs-de-Bataille. The William S. Paley Collection: A Taste for Modernism runs to Feb. 16, 2014. Closed Monday.

**Quebec City regional tourism:** 877-783-1608, [quebecregion.com](http://quebecregion.com)

© Copyright (c) The Montreal Gazette

---

[Previous](#)

[Next](#)



The boutique hotel Le Saint-Pierre in Quebec City has an intricate façade of stone and brick, built circa 1820.

