

B&B doubles as a stage for Quebec talent

Quaint house across street from patriots' museum



ROCHELLE LASH
COUNTRY ROADS

Elections and political parties come and go, but the spirit of Quebec stays strong in the village of Saint-Denis-sur-Richelieu.

The community was a hotbed of activity during the Patriotes War of 1837-38 against the British, a grassroots movement that fought for more power for Lower Canada and its own democratic government, separate from that of Upper Canada. And this historic village on the banks of the Richelieu River is still a centre of Quebec pride.

La Maison nationale des Patriotes, a small museum on Saint-Denis's main street, tells the story of the people's rebellion through artifacts and newspapers of the day. The distinctive factor here is that La Maison does not house military arms and uniforms. It displays the primitive weapons of regular folk — the pitchforks, fence-posts and hammers of farmers and blacksmiths — because these were the fighters who waged the Patriotes' rebellion under the leadership of politician Louis-Joseph Papineau.

The spirit continues. Across the street is À La Petite scène, a quaint B&B in an 1865 red brick house that doubles as platform for Quebec singers. It's owned by Manon Vincent and her husband, François Richard, who love music so much they transform their little inn into an intimate performance space — la petite scène is the stage — every three weeks or so, on Sunday afternoons starting in September.

The shows are informal as concerts go — 40 tavern chairs squeezed into a salon — but all the seats are good because everyone in the audience is within five metres of the stage.

The sounds are the songs of a Quebec boîte à chanson: lively, robust and ideal for singalongs. The lineup



A view of the Richelieu River from À La Petite scène, a B&B in the historic village of Saint-Denis-sur-Richelieu.

begins in September after the high season of summer, but there is always music À La Petite scène, with guests and friends jamming on the piano, accordion, flute, guitar and African drums, which are part of the furniture. Richard is a metallurgical engineer with Pratt & Whitney Canada's aircraft division, but he is an avid pianist, too, as well as president of La Maison nationale des Patriotes.

As a B&B, La Petite scène has three guest rooms, all simple and cosy. They're named after Quebec entertainment stars and decorated to reflect their personalities. Atop a narrow staircase, the Diane Dufresne room is decked out in feathers and lace and a purple bedcover. Next door, the Jean-Pierre Ferland is wrapped in reds to represent his passion. The couple is putting the finishing touches on the Gilles Vigneault, a mini-suite with a kitchenette that will accommodate up to four people.

The look throughout is vintage and homespun, with wide-planked floors and detailed wall trim, but each room has a private bathroom, shiny and modernized.

Vincent is in charge of breakfast and Richard often



The guest rooms at À La Petite scène are cosy and homespun. They are named after Quebec singers Diane Dufresne, Jean-Pierre Ferland and Gilles Vigneault.

serenades at the piano. The meal starts with a view of the Richelieu, either from the kitchen table or from the veranda. Vincent's repertoire features main courses such as french toast with caramelized apples or eggs Florentine with cheese sauce, as well as baked goods, quiche, homemade jams and locally produced honey. Don't miss

the yogurt with her special homemade pear compote.

The summer will be full of Quebec-centric events, starting with the Parcours des Arts du Richelieu, an opportunity to visit the workshops and studios of artists and artisans creating paintings, jewelry, leather and pottery. The event spans two weekends, Saturday until June 24 and June

28-29, and involves 28 artists in six villages around Saint-Denis-sur-Richelieu. There are maps and details at www.parcours-des-arts.com. At each stop, you'll be able to enter a contest to win \$500 worth of art or brunch for two at Manoir Rouville-Campbell in Mont-St-Hilaire.

On Monday, the eve of Quebec's Fête nationale, Saint-

IF YOU GO

Saint-Denis-sur-Richelieu is a 45-minute drive from downtown Montreal via Highway 20 east (toward Quebec City) to Exit 113. Take chemin des Patriotes north (Route 133). Alternatively, a ferry crosses the Richelieu River from St-Antoine on Route 223.

À La Petite scène B&B: 450-787-1109, www.alapetitescene.ca; 613 Patriotes Rd., Saint-Denis-sur-Richelieu.

Price: Rooms, \$95 for one person, \$110 for two; in the Gilles Vigneault, it's \$145 for two, and \$25 each additional guest, including breakfast; shows cost \$15-\$25 and will run September to December. Packages available with massage, and Le show, dodo et coco (show, bed and breakfast).

La Maison nationale des Patriotes: 450-787-3623, www.mndp.qc.ca; 610 Patriotes Rd., Saint-Denis-sur-Richelieu; until Sept. 30 open Tuesday to Sunday; from Oct. 1-Dec. 23, Wednesday to Sunday; adults, \$8, with discounts for seniors and juniors.

Tourisme Montérégie: 866-469-0069, 450-466-4666.

Denis will put on a thrilling fireworks show and a performance by the rock band l'Enfer, which will reinterpret Quebec hits from the 1970s and on.

La Fête du Vieux Marché de Saint-Denis-sur-Richelieu, to take place days and evenings, Aug. 7-10, will recreate the life and times of the 1830s, with ladies in long lace-trimmed dresses and flowered hats and men in knickers and redingotes.

The town square will come alive with free concerts, food kiosks, craft displays and dancing; there will be beer at a recreation of the old Dis of the ice ciders of Le Clos Saint-Denis. New features this year for youngsters will be a petting farm and a playground (www.vieuxmarche-saintdenis.com).

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