

CHECKING IN

Railway tycoon’s restored mansion makes fine inn



ROCHELLE LASH

Innkeepers Valérie Arseneau and Martin Bouchard have reinvented history in an Eastern Townships community that has reinvented itself.

They bought an impressive estate in Waterloo, and after a two-year restoration, they opened Manoir Maplewood. The town is less touristic compared with its neighbours Bromont, Knowlton and Magog, but it is a desirable destination for cycling, golf and beach life.

The elaborate mansion and its grounds were built in 1864 by then-senator Asa Belknap Foster, whose name graces many roads between Waterloo and Foster. He was such a successful railway contractor that he was known as Canada’s Railway King and the first mayor of Waterloo, so he constructed Foster Manor, a landmark home befitting his status. But Foster’s fortune didn’t last long and the manse was sold to nuns who operated Couvent Maplewood for more than a century, between 1882 and 1989.

“The house charmed us totally,” Arseneau said. “It has a weighty history and a great presence in Waterloo.”

After a short drive up, up, up through Waterloo’s posh hill-top neighbourhood of historic houses, I sailed through Maplewood’s imposing stone fence and wrought-iron gates. I was in thrall of the grand, ornate vision of stately grey brick.

An architect’s delight, the house is adorned with turrets and gables poking out of a mansard roof and a broad latticework veranda. It is the centrepiece of extensive grounds of maples, elms, pine and spruce trees, with the added attraction of a heated outdoor pool and hot tub, built by the nuns and cloistered by trees.

The interiors also are a statement. Rather than antique hunting, Arseneau shopped online and decorated Maplewood in stunning faux-antique style. Although everything is fresh from a decoration e-shop, the rooms are as stately as they were in the senator’s days, and probably even more beautiful.



An architect’s delight, this grand mansion built in 1864 in the Eastern Townships has undergone a two-year restoration and is now an inn, Manoir Maplewood. PHOTOS: JEAN-PHILIPPE TROTTIER/MANOIR MAPLEWOOD

In the salon, Arseneau chose cream marble busts, the palest Oriental silk carpets, tufted linen sofas and bronze floor lamps that look like Greek columns. Everything is done in an appealing, soft monochrome of linen and wheat. Bouchard marshalled his carpentry skills, restoring 150-year-old woodwork and painting the ceiling mouldings gold.

The guest rooms have been modernized. Now, in addition to vintage wide-planked floors and sturdy built-in armoires, each has its own shiny bathroom with a glass shower, new Serta mattresses, TV, mini-refrigerator, espresso machine and air-conditioning. Luxurious touches include 650-thread-count sheets, iPod docks and l’Occitane toiletries (en route from France). Four rooms have gas fireplaces.

My favourites are No. 4, Le Sénateur Foster, which has a bay window and a door onto the veranda, and No. 2, La Mme. Elizabeth, which has a charming, intimate salon and a pretty, claw-foot tub.

Arseneau and Bouchard used to run a large summer restaurant in the remote Îles-de-la-Madeleine in the Gulf of St Lawrence. At Maplewood, she is the chef, cooking breakfast daily and dinner on weekends, but only for hotel guests, for now.

Her French-style repertoire — there are two or three



The salon at Manoir Maplewood is decorated with marble busts, pale Oriental silk carpets and bronze floor lamps that look like Greek columns.

choices on any evening — features such appetizers as ham and goat cheese with a tomato-citrus confit, grilled shrimp with mango puree, beef carpaccio with chimichurri, and liver mousse with Grand Marnier. Main courses might be duck confit, filet mignon, roast cod, Cornish hen, scallops risotto and leg of lamb. The creative desserts include a deconstructed cream cheese cake with lemon and fresh fruit, a chocolate “sausage” and thyme-infused crème brûlée.

A wine cellar is part of the original house and tasting events are in planning.

Manoir Maplewood is part of

Waterloo’s history. The town was founded by Loyalists during the 1790s and boomed after the arrival of the railway in the 1860s. The house is a highlight of Heritage Tour, which includes St. Luke’s Anglican Church (1869-70) and the Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce (1914).

The beach on Lac Waterloo, about one kilometre from Maplewood, is the big summertime attraction. It’s a fun-filled 100-metre stretch of sand, plus volleyball courts, water games for children, kayaks for rent and a pier for fishing bass and pike.

■ Rendez-vous Touskisiram, July 25-26 (Waterloo Paddle Out,

IF YOU GO

Waterloo is a one-hour, 20-minute drive from Montreal via Highway 10 east to Exit 90.

Manoir Maplewood: 450-920-1500, manoirmaplewood.com; 26 Rue Clark, Waterloo.

Price: \$150- \$270 (Mon.-Wed.) or \$165-\$285 (Thurs.-Sun.), including Wi-Fi, breakfast, heated outdoor pool, whirlpool, sauna; packages available with meals, massages. Dinner served (to inn guests only) Thursday-Saturday until early June, and then might expand. Pet-friendly, \$30 a day includes treats and doggie bed.

Waterloo tourism: 450-539-4650, 888-472-6292, ville.waterloo.qc.ca. Eastern Townships tourism and events: 800-355-5755, easterntownships.org.

rendezvoustouskisiram.com) is a weekend of competition, both friendly and serious, in rabaskas, rowing craft, canoes, kayaks, paddle-boards and the art of portage, plus kids’ activities. The Rowing Club of Waterloo will hold the season’s first regatta May 30 at the Lachine Canal (avironwaterloo.org).

■ The town is at the junction of three major cycling trails with easygoing rides: The Estriade to Bromont is 12.5 kilometres; the Montagnarde to Magog is 35 km, or you can road-cycle the 16 km to Knowlton along Route 243. For more action, try the Campagnard from Waterloo to Acton Vale or Drummondville.

■ Knowlton, formally called Lac-Brome, will be hopping: The farmer’s market runs Saturdays, June 6-Oct. 10, on Maple St.; the 36th Tour du Lac Brome Merrell (a foot race), June 12-14; Knowlton House & Garden Tour, July 8, supporting Théâtre Lac-Brome; the 27th Tour des Arts, July 11-19, will visit 37 ateliers in Sutton, Abercorn, Mansonville, Bolton and Knowlton.

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