



Retired Olympic and Paralympic coach Tom Silletta and his wife, Line Caissy, have opened the first bed and breakfast in Quebec recognized as “fully accessible” for travellers with limited mobility. *VITA BELLA B&B*

PICTURESQUE SETTING OFFERS ACCESSIBILITY

Vita Bella bed and breakfast is first of its kind for physically challenged



ROCHELLE LASH

Tom Silletta, a retired Olympic and Paralympic coach, has scored another first. Silletta and his wife, Line Caissy, have opened Vita Bella, the first B&B in Quebec to be recognized as “fully accessible” for travellers with limited mobility. The certification is done by K  roul, an organization that documents the most accessible destinations in Quebec for wheelchair-bound tourists and those with other physical challenges such as visual or hearing impairments. (K  roul is short for “Qu  bec roule” — Quebec moves on wheels.)

Many large hotels and institutions have installed adapted features, but Silletta and Caissy have created the intimate experience of an obstacle-free B&B in a woodsy, lakefront setting. “We want all travellers to enjoy the best of the Laurentians without restrictions,” Silletta said. “We have built Vita Bella to meet the criteria of K  roul, so everyone can move around self-sufficiently.” Silletta and Caissy built Vita Bella from scratch on the side of a mountain overlooking Lac Vingt Sous and the Laurentian Mountains. It took four years to complete the winding road up to the B&B and two more years for the house itself. The interiors have hardwood floors without carpets, extra-wide doorways and lots of space between the furniture, with few accessories that might add clutter.

The B&B is strong on nature, with large windows, a commanding stone fireplace in the living room, warm country decor in earth tones and furniture handcrafted by Silletta from maple trees harvested on the property. The three guest rooms (named for the Olympic years Montreal ’76, Calgary ’88 and Vancouver ’10) have generous space surrounding the beds, and the super-sized bathrooms are equipped with vanities of appropriate height, as well as roll-in showers or a tub with a transfer bench and security bars. The open closets, thermostats and electric plugs are easily reached, and the B&B also has a phone that lights up, for guests who are hearing impaired. Outdoors, there are wide ramps with wheel-friendly, firm surfaces leading to Vita Bella’s picturesque relaxation spots, so all guests can enjoy summertime in the countryside — sipping coffee or a glass of wine at the gazebo, the fire pit or the picnic table, or soaking up the sun beside the rock garden. Vita Bella is near the lakeshore and the B&B supplies a handful of small craft — two canoes, a pedal boat and a kayak. In winter, there will be snowshoes and cross-country skis on loan, for use on Vita Bella’s own trails. Caissy is the breakfast cook, dishing up classics like waffles, pancakes and eggs, with healthy sides like yogurt and fruit. Her specialty is wafer-thin crepes topped with fresh berries, icing sugar and local maple syrup. And, on request, she’ll prepare a simple takeout lunch for guests

going on a daylong outing. Silletta is no stranger to conquering physical challenges, overcoming hurdles and boosting motivation. With a master’s in the biomechanics of sports from McGill University, he has been an educator, researcher, sports psychologist and coach in cross-country skiing, running and pentathlon for McGill, the YMCA, competitive school teams and the military. Among his career highlights are his coaching position with the Canadian Olympic cross-country ski team at the Calgary Winter Games in 1988, and of the para-Nordic team at the Vancouver Paralympics in 2010, where his skiers won five medals, including three golds, ranking third in the world after Germany and Russia. St-Adolphe-d’Howard, a laid-back cottage community located a 15-minute drive west of St-Sauveur, is popular year-round for activities on Lac Vingt Sous and in the rolling hills of the Laurentians.

“We want all travellers to enjoy the best of the Laurentians without restrictions, even if they have some limitations.”

IF YOU GO

St-Adolphe-d’Howard is a one-hour and 15-minute drive from Montreal via Highway 15 north to exit 60 (St-Sauveur) and routes 364 west and 329 north. **Vita Bella B&B:** 819-327-5037, 450-271-9224, vitabella.ca; 280 Chemin de Bellefeuille, St-Adolphe-d’Howard. **Price:** \$120 for two, including breakfast, Wi-Fi, on-site trails, lake access with canoes, a pedal-boat and a kayak. **St-Adolphe-d’Howard info:** 855-327-2044, 819-327-2626; Centre de plein-air; 866-236-5743 (866-ADOL-PHE), 819-327-3519, stadolphedhoward.qc.ca or st-adolphe.com. **K  roul & the Accessible Road:** 514-252-3104, keroul.qc.ca or theaccessibleroad.com (larouteaccessible.com); annual membership costs \$25 and includes the magazine Baladeur.

To add to the recreation options, Silletta recently finished carving a one-kilometre trail adapted for wheel-riding. With a smooth forest floor and extra-wide space, the path circles around the welcome chalet of St-Adolphe’s Centre de plein-air. The centre also offers boat rentals, fishing, mountain biking, camping and hiking trails that link with those of Ste-Agathe, Morin Heights and Val Morin. La Petite Charrette is one of the restaurants around town that has adapted facilities. Casual, with a beach-friendly style, it’s known for its luscious burgers and perky salads, Thurs.-Sun., as well as table d’h  tes and live music on Fri.-Sat. (819-714-0077, petitecharrette.com, from 11 a.m.). And the rockin’ ground-floor terrace of the rustic bar l’Ange Vagabond is accessible and serves cocktails, micro-brews and bar snacks (Thurs.-Sun., from 3 p.m.). Indoors, there is live music, usually Saturday nights, with a cover charge of \$15-\$25 (819-714-0213, facebook.com/langevagabond). About 900,000 people, or 10 to 15 per cent of Quebec’s population, are coping with some kind of physical challenge, not including temporary injuries. K  roul’s research is compiled into a guide called the Accessible Route. Similar to the Wine Route of the Eastern Townships or the Gourmet Route around Quebec City, the Accessible Route provides details about more than 250 of the most accessible of the province’s tourist sites, activities, restaurants and lodging establishments. Rochelle@rochellelash.com twitter.com/rochellelash

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