



The three guest rooms at the European Artists B&B are decorated with colourful duvets, country antiques and hand-crafted furniture. PHOTOS: EUROPEAN ARTISTS B&B

# FRENCH FLAIR INFUSES CHARMING VERMONT B&B

European Artists guest house draws on the region's vibrant cultural scene



ROCHELLE LASH

Laure Torkler brings international savoir faire and a French twist to her distinctive B&B near Burlington, Vt.

A former diplomatic press attaché and United Airlines flight attendant, Torkler was born in France, has lived in Europe, New Zealand and Asia, and speaks five languages — French, English, German, Italian and Spanish.

That's a lot of worldliness for Underhill, a very Vermont village founded in 1763, with a population of about 3,000.

The European Artists B&B is at the nexus of the mountain action of Smugglers' Notch, Stowe and Bolton Valley. It can serve as a quiet retreat or as an activity hub for hiking, biking, horseback riding, golf and winter sports. Burlington is a hot spot for shopping, and Fairfax has culinary credentials at the Brobakery and the Brot Bakehouse School and Kitchen.

The neighbouring towns around Underhill also add a vibrant cultural scene, and Torkler has fashioned a getaway package called the Artist's Journey. It's a five-night stay with opportunities to capture Vermont on canvas, including the pretty landscape of forests and fields of wildflowers around the B&B, as well as covered

bridges, Lake Champlain or working farms with old barns and livestock grazing. (Guests are asked to bring their own art supplies.)

**The B&B:** Torkler fell in love with a picturesque property at the western foot of Mount Mansfield. She tore down an old, unsalvageable house and built an architecturally progressive, eco-friendly gem. It's a boxy, modern installation with an exterior of colour blocks, totally different from woody Vermont lodges or clapboard farmhouses.

The three guest rooms — the Pablo Picasso, the Vassily Kandinsky and the Egon Schiele — are decorated with colourful duvets, country antiques and hand-crafted furniture.

The backdrop is a pure palette — pristine white walls and sleek polished concrete floors.

The contrast between the vintage, homey interiors and the bold, contemporary structure is striking.

**The food:** The dining room is so fresh and appealing, with a quirky collection of art on white walls, plus an iron stove, fine wooden floors and cottage-inspired furniture. It's a cheerful setting for Torkler's mostly organic, homemade food, prepared with seasonal herbs and flowers from the garden and infused with local and European flavours.

A passionate cook and hostess, she offers three breakfast choices daily, plus veggie or fruit juice, home-baked breads and pastries from flour that she grinds herself, and hot chocolate that she makes from imported cacao.

## IF YOU GO

**Directions:** Underhill is a one-hour and 45-minute drive from Montreal, via exit 19 off Vermont Interstate 89 south, through Fairfax and Cambridge; or via exit 17 through Essex. It is 30 minutes north-east of Burlington, Vt., and within 30 minutes of Bolton Valley and Smugglers' Notch ski areas. After approximately May 1, the summer route is a 40-minute drive to Stowe, Vt., through Jeffersonville and Smugglers' Notch (you have to verify the opening before heading through the Notch, a mountain pass).

**The European Artists B&B:** 802-858-9175, theeuropeanartists.com; 33 Tupper Rd., Underhill, Vt. Gluten-free and vegan/vegetarian dishes available. **Price:** US\$150-\$170-\$195, including Wi-Fi, gourmet breakfast. Canadians get a five-per-cent discount. Dinner, US\$50, 24-hour advance reservation required. La Vie en Rose is a two-night package with meals.

**Art information/events:** 802-828-3291, Montpelier, Vt.; vermontarts2017.com and vermontartscouncil.org.

The Edith Piaf is a trio of French crêpes with Vermont maple syrup, homemade strawberry compote and whipped cream. The Vincent van Gogh is a plate of eggs with turkey bacon and sautéed potatoes. And the vegan option — always on the menu — is muesli with fresh and dried fruits, nuts and almond, hazelnut or coconut milk.

If you want to dine in, Torkler will prepare dinner with 24-hour



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notice. It's BYOB — bring your own beverage — but you'll start with an apéritif on the house, often served on the patio with a view of the sunset.

She opts for market-fresh choices for a multi-course meal prepared with a French accent. A sample menu might be duck mousse with fig chutney, filet mignon with Roquefort sauce, followed by cheeses and crème caramel.

**The arts:** Vermont has one of the highest percentages of artists, writers, photographers and musicians in the U.S., and the communities around Underhill are popping with shows.

The Bryan Memorial Gallery in Jeffersonville is featuring the work of Thomas Curtin and also exhibits the impressionistic landscapes of Alden Bryan, Mary Bryan, Don Stone, Bob Duffy, Emile Gruppe and many others. The Bryan's Cabin Fever Series presents workshops, including Douglas David's land-

scape oil painting workshop, June 19-21.

The Visions of Vermont Gallery operates in three historic buildings in Jeffersonville and exhibits the works of Eric Tobin, Karen Winslow and Jack Winslow of Cambridge, Vt., as well as T. M. Nicholas, Michael Graves, John Caggiano, Don Mosher and John Reilly, among others.

Jeffersonville is home to new public art, the North & South Silos, which are murals on the side of vintage silos. The works depict the four seasons as well as Vermont farming, past, present and future.

Heading north, the Cold Hollow Sculpture Park in Enosburg Falls features 50 impressive sculptures by David Stromeyer commanding an expanse of farm meadows and hay fields (free, Thurs.-Sun. from 12 p.m., June 24 to mid-Oct., 512-333-2119, coldhollowsculpturepark.com). Rochelle@rochellelash.com Twitter.com/rochellelash

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