



Marie-Thérèse Bonnichon, a former nurse in Montreal, gets help from son William tending goats. Their operation raises about 1,000 animals for the table each year. *PATRICK ST-ARNAUD*

LIVING FARM-TO-FORK AT B&B

Ferme Au Pied Levé in Eastern Townships embraces four distinct country ventures



ROCHELLE LASH

Eva Gabor tended Green Acres. Paris Hilton spoofed rural norms in *The Simple Life*. And Martha Stewart still grows her own everything for Martha Stewart Living Omnimedia. But that’s all showbiz. Marie-Thérèse Bonnichon is the real thing. A farmer, that is. She and husband Denis Carrier run Ferme Au Pied Levé, about a 15-minute drive south of Magog in the Eastern Townships. It embraces four country ventures:

- Most fundamentally, it is a working farm where vegetables and about 1,000 animals are raised for food each season;
- It is also a striking, modern B&B that offers a gourmet breakfast;
- It is a sumptuous Table Champêtre, a Quebec Tourism designation for a dining room specializing in local cuisine;
- And it operates a butcher shop that stocks the farm’s produce, as well as Bonnichon’s prepared delicacies.

Here is a snapshot of life at Ferme Au Pied Levé. **B&B:** Life is so peaceful here, on a hill overlooking the rolling countryside around Lake Lovering. No city noise or orange cones. Only sky and trees and meadows, with the occasional moo or bleat from the barnyard. The contemporary farmhouse/ B&B is less than two years old. It was designed by a family friend, architect Patrick Morand, who decided simplicity was best. The exterior is weathered hemlock and the interiors are modern and minimalist, with pristine white walls, heated concrete floors, industrial accessories and white Eames chairs. The B&B has five guest rooms and a dormitory for up to six children. A lovely salon features a fireplace and windows, so the pastoral views of the countryside take the place of artworks. **Farm:** Farming seems lighthearted when city folks visit and commune with goats and geese, but Bonnichon and Carrier are serious. Their Highland cattle are grass-fed, and all the animals are given hormone-free, organic feed. “This is not a hobby or a petting zoo,” Bonnichon said. “You simply never know what is

going to happen.” **Here is one day’s worth of drama:** Béatrice, a 250-kilogram sow, gave birth at 6 a.m. to a litter of 16 piglets. The mother was exhausted, but the babies were doing well and wriggling around. A bad-tempered alpha goose chased me through the barnyard, honking like mad. Scared silly, I ran, iPad and stylus flying into the mud. In the poultry barn, fluffy one-day-old turkeys had a water-feeder mishap in their incubator. All 60 little ones got soaked and wound up coated in sawdust. Bonnichon bathed each fragile baby by hand. A massive Highland cow, complete with shaggy mane and horns, snuck out of the paddock and ambled free. The couple’s 15-year-old son, William, managed to coax her back with a bucket of feed. **Food:** The cuisine at Ferme Au Pied Levé gives new meaning to farm-to-table. The dining table is a mere 30 paces from the barns where the animals are raised. Breakfast is a multi-course affair that might include an egg soufflé, quiche or pancakes, as well as homemade financier (almond cake) or canelé (rum-custard pastry), toast with rhubarb or

IF YOU GO

Ferme Au Pied Levé: 819-843-6143, www.aupiedleve.ca; 1107 Fitch Bay Rd., Magog; 75-minute drive from Montreal via Highway 10 east to Magog and Route 141 south. **Price:** room with breakfast, \$145 for two; adding six-course Table Champêtre dinner for two, \$230 per night. Dormitory available for up to six children. Table Champêtre dinner (without lodging), \$55 p.p., minimum 10 people. The entire B&B can lodge up to 16 people. **Eastern Townships tourism:** 800-355-5755, eastertownships.org.

strawberry jam and cheese. The six-course Table Champêtre dinner starts with an amuse-bouche of rillettes or meatballs of

goat or beef, followed by appetizers such as feuilleté of wild turkey confit, and main courses such as veal ribs, guinea fowl, beef or leg of goat. The feast ends with local cheeses and tarte Tatin or apple-maple ice cream. **Butcher shop:** The farm’s gourmet boutique/butcher is open to visitors, but it sells to only one commercial client: Manoir Hovey, a Relais & Châteaux property in nearby North Hatley. Manoir Hovey is known for gastronomy based on the finest ingredients, so the endorsement is a huge compliment to Ferme Au Pied Levé. And Manoir Hovey offers a two-night Farm-to-Feast package with overnights and meals at both establishments. **Hosts:** Nurturing comes naturally to Bonnichon and Carrier. She is a former nurse at the Royal Victoria and Jewish General hospitals, and he is a designer of exhibits at museums, including the McCord and Pointe-à-Callière. They have five children in a blended family. (All except William have grown up and left home.) The couple frequently welcome up to 16 guests at the B&B, or up to 20 for a Table Champêtre dinner. And then there are the three dogs, five cats and the farm animals.

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