

New owners modernize vintage Richelieu inn

Les Trois Tilleuls gets fresh look, terrasse scene



ROCHELLE LASH
CHECKING IN

Les Trois Tilleuls Hôtel & Spa, on the banks of the Richelieu River, has been a go-to destination for bon vivants for 40 years.

French gastronomy, rare vintage liquor and indulgent spa treatments have defined the high life at this rambling, upscale waterfront inn, so popular for romantic sojourns, sunset weddings and other celebrations. But four decades is a long time to party, and la belle vie has taken its toll. It's high time for a facelift and a fresh direction.

Say no more. Enter the new owners, Michel Barrette, comedian, actor and Radio-Canada host, and his partner, real estate entrepreneur David Sepulchre, who are giving Les Trois Tilleuls a fabulous second debut.

Contemporary new look

It's curtains for the dowdy drapes. Say sayonara to ruffles and doilies. We bid adieu to dated French bedroom sets, wave farewell to faded carpets and say toodle-oo to tables of rustic pine.

Les Trois Tilleuls' new look is clean, crisp and contemporary. The lobby, bar and dining room have been redecorated with cool taupe leather seating, natural wood floors and pure white walls. New glass patio doors let in the light and broaden the mesmerizing river views.

Life has moved outdoors too, while there still is fine weather. Sepulchre and Barrette are betting on an endless summer, with a new large deck shaded by colourful patio umbrellas and overlooking gardens and tinkling fountains. They have even added a chic outdoor living room, with sofas for lounging and gauzy fabric separating each space for privacy.

It wouldn't be an authentic Richelieu River scene without a lot of leisure boats, so Tilleuls has added a 20-slip marina. That's right — you can power up your yacht or



ROBIN DAVINDISCH

Les Trois Tilleuls Hôtel & Spa is undergoing a top-to-bottom renovation — including large new deck and chic outdoor living room — but its gorgeous setting on the Richelieu River will not change.



LES TROIS TILLEULS HÔTEL & SPA GIVENCHY

The makeover was unveiled this month with a renovated bar and dining room and new patio doors opening onto a deck, plus a 20-slip marina.

paddle your canoe and stop in for lunch.

Food and drink

"We still represent the high life," said Barrette, who lives across the street from the inn, was married there and has been a regular client. "but we have introduced affordable options.

"We want people to enjoy the patio with drink and casual food. Locals were afraid to come here before, but we are inviting people to enjoy our gorgeous setting."

To that end, the formerly formal Trois Tilleuls has introduced an accessible \$14-\$20 terrasse menu of fancy fast food — salads, cheeses, smoothies, burgers and fries, calamari, mini-pizzas and sandwiches of crab, prosciutto and roast beef.

Lunch, dinner and Sunday brunch are part of the old Trois Tilleuls. Classic French dinner choices include foie gras, escargots, beef flambé, rack of lamb, blanquette of scallops and shrimp (cream and white wine sauce), and

Old World sweets: soufflés, thin-crust apple tarts and crêpes Suzette.

The five-course Sunday brunch, served at the table, lays on French pastries and fancy dishes such as poached eggs with artichoke mouseline, nutmeg cream and smoked salmon; and a duo of pork and quail with mushroom fricassee, honey and rosemary sauce.

Bon vivants will feel at home. The bar menu lists a tulipe of Veuve Clicquot at an encouraging \$15, and Les

Trois Tilleuls has always been known for rare wines and spirits, such as 30-year-old Bowmore Scotch at \$60 a shot and Courvoisier Erté Cognac at \$95.

Spa life a highlight

Originally a farmhouse built in 1910, Les Trois Tilleuls has grown up gradually. Spa Givenchy is a modern pavilion adjacent to the main hotel, housing an indoor swimming pool, fitness room and sauna.

Spa Givenchy offers a full range of beauty and body treatments: massages, facial care and herbal wraps. I like the full-day package — truly a mini-vacation — that comes with lunch, access to the heated saltwater pool and sauna. The spa day for women includes a Swedish massage, a facial, a body scrub, foot care and a hydrating wrap. For men, the getaway offers some of the same, plus a hydrotherapy bath and an algae wrap.

Spend some time

A handy 30-minute drive from South Shore bridges, Les Trois Tilleuls is close enough for a quick day trip for dining or a spa sojourn, but there are 21 guest rooms and 18 suites that will be overhauled this winter.

The most important fea-

IF YOU GO

Les Trois Tilleuls is a 30-minute drive via Highway 20 east toward Quebec City and Exit 112 to Route 223 north.

Les Trois Tilleuls Hôtel & Spa Givenchy: 514-856-7787, 800-263-2230, lestroistilleuls.com; 290 Richelieu St., St-Marc-sur-Richelieu.

Price: \$155-\$275, for two, year-round; royal suite, \$500; including Wi-Fi, indoor saltwater swimming pool, sauna, fitness room. Extra: marina docking. Packages available with meals, La Route des Vins, golf at La Seigneurie in Mont St-Hilaire. The one-night Givenchy Package includes lodging, breakfast, dinner and two treatments each, \$799-\$919 for two, or \$1,144 for the suite.

Dining: Terrasse menu, lunch and dinner served daily. Sunday brunch \$39.50 p.p.; lunchtime table d'hôte, \$25-\$30, three-course dinner, \$55-70, p.p.

Spa Givenchy: closed Mon.-Tues.; spagivenchy.com; 60-minute massages \$95-\$130; half-day package (without lodging) \$255 p.p.; full day \$415 p.p.

Montérégie regional tourism: 866-469-0069, tourisme-montregie.qc.ca, routedurichelieu.ca.

Les Vergers Petit et fils: 450-467-9926, auxvergers-petit.com.

Vignoble Les Murmures: 450-467-1730, lesmurmures.ca.

ture won't change: each room has a private balcony with an up-close view of the flowing Richelieu. The new decor is still on the drawing board, but it will be modern, with large flat-screen TVs, hardwood floors and updated bathrooms.

The Richelieu region is ripe with delicacies at harvest time. At Les Vergers Petit et fils, a picturesque orchard with views of the farmland around Mont St-Hilaire, you can pick apples or sip artisanal ciders. The charming Vignoble Les Murmures, on the mountain's southern slope, has terraced vineyards and seven varietals to try and buy.

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