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L'AUBERGE LE BARIL ROULANT IS A WINNER ON FOUR FRONTS

There really is something for everyone at this hub of hospitality in Val-David



ROCHELLE LASH

The husband-and-wife team of Sonia Grewal and Patrick Watson have made a smash success with a quartet of enterprises that are the hub of hospitality in Val-David.

The couple owns Le Baril Roulant, which encompasses La Microbrasserie, where Watson produces craft beer with love; Le Pub, which presents live entertainment and theme nights that attract patrons from throughout the Laurentians; l'Auberge, a cosy inn and hostel; and the bistro, which turns local ingredients into an exotic world beat of flavours.

The Auberge and Pub are folksy and rustic, operating in Val-David's vintage cottages, but they also are hotbeds of progressive hospitality ideas.

"We always wanted a place where we can welcome people, and now we have several in a great town," Grewal said. "Val-David is almost a utopia — close to perfect for home life, for culture, for nature and for having fun."

The neighbourhood: Quite true. Val-David's main street is lined with craft shops and casual cafés, creating an artsy enclave in the Laurentians. I drifted through boutiques selling clay pottery, handmade jewelry, yoga wear and tie-dyed dresses, and for a moment I thought I had time-travelled back to the 1960s.

Above all, Val-David is supremely outdoorsy. The Linear Parc of the P'tit Train du Nord, the Laurentians' iconic leisure trail, runs through town. And the woodsy Parc Régional de Val-David/Val-Morin has two warm-up chalets, rock climbing, and trails for hiking, cross-country-skiing, mountain biking, snowshoeing and telemarking.

The inn: Auberge le Baril Roulant is a hybrid of a traditional inn and a youth hostel. Operating in a Swiss-type chalet, it has six private rooms with double, single or queen beds, plus one junior suite with a private entrance, a whirlpool bathtub, bathrobes and a kitchenette.

The room decor is homespun, but updated with flat-screen TVs, private bathrooms and extras such as air-conditioners, hair dryers and organic coffee.

The newest lodging is the dormitory, stacked with bunk beds built by craftsman Guy St-Ger-

main from Val-David of hemlock and finished with a stain of coffee and chaga (liquid brewed from a mushroom) and a polish of organic hemp and linseed oils.

"We used all-natural materials to encourage a good night's sleep," Grewal said.

The dorm is mixed for men and women, with 10 single bunks and two doubles, for a maximum of 14 people in one room. But it has air-conditioning, large windows and quite a lot of space. Dorm guests share two showers and two WCs.

Grewal and Watson think of everyone. In the reception area, there are a small beer library, a kids' toy box and brochures promoting galleries, craft workshops and diverse activities such as ziplining at Tyroparc in Ste-Agathe or holistic face and body treatments at La Chaumière Fleur Soleil in Val-David.

The bistro: Grewal and Watson have high standards for food and drink, and a young, keen staff serving hearty pub fare with a healthy accent.

The ingredients are often organic, and this kitchen doesn't do deep-fried food. Russet potatoes are cut and baked to resemble french fries. Even the nachos are elevated to works of art — organic corn chips baked with cheddar and served with homemade condiments: beet chutney, salsa and sour cream with cilantro oil.

The Quebec-inspired dishes include poutine with duck or

boar sausage, burgers of bison or venison, salads of micro-greens and starters such as cheese fondant with apricot chutney. Some of the culinary creations have global roots, such as Indian curry, Belgian-style mussels, the Maghrebin salad and the vegetarian Shiva burger. And how cute is this? There is a dessert called Beeramis.

The Pub: With theme nights and more than 10 types of craft beer brewed at La Microbrasserie, Pub Baril Roulant is a main attraction of Val-David. The weekend lineup of entertainment includes the Halloween Steam Punk Party on Oct. 27; MAZ neotrad-folk band on Nov. 3; the ska-reggae Stomp All Stars on Nov. 11; and Ichka, a klezmer band on Dec. 1. And a rotating roster on Sunday afternoon features jazz and world beat, with Rachel Bonneau and Thomas Carbou on Oct. 29.

On the first Thursday of every month, the Pub holds Jeux-Di, an intense evening devoted to board games. The beer flows and there might be 10 tables competing at such games as Dixit, Colons de Catane, Carcassone, Epidemy or Room 25. There are occasional poets' nights, a seasonal clothing exchange, documentary screenings, open mic comedy and the rockin' musical improv contests in which teams of musicians compete.

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IF YOU GO

Auberge le Baril Roulant: 819-322-2280, barilroulant.com; 1430 rue de l'Académie, Val-David. Auberge, approximately \$119-\$139 for two, including a continental breakfast buffet, Wi-Fi; add \$10 during summer and holidays. Additional guest 13 and over, \$25; children 12 and under stay for free. Loyalty card offers a seventh night for free (not consecutive). Packages with canoe/kayak on the Rivière du Nord, Tyro-Parc zip-lining and Village du Père Noël. Two passes for Parc Régional are available, first-come, first-served.

Dormitory: \$26 for a single bed, \$42 for a double bed, including locker. Breakfast, \$10.44.

Parc Régional de Val-David/Val-Morin: 819-322-6999, parcregional.com. Val David Tourism: 819-324-5678, 888-322-7030, Ext. 4235, valdavid.com

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