



The Auberge Willow, now impressively revamped, is prized for its location on the shore of Lake St Louis in Hudson. PHOTOS: FIVE POUND MEDIA

Hudson’s Willow Inn has been lovingly transformed

New owners renovate venerable landmark with respect for ‘classic look and history’



ROCHELLE LASH

You have heard this before: Auberge Willow in Hudson has enthusiastic new owners who have carried out an impressive makeover. This time, it’s for real. And it’s terrific. **The news:** The exterior sports an all-new, fresh look of white stucco, black lacquered trim and a sturdy steel roof. Almost all the interiors have been gutted down to the wall studs, and the kitchens have been modernized to the max. The guest rooms have been transformed with cottage chic decor, and they’re pretty as a picture, subtly reflecting the inn’s nearly 200-year-old soul. (The current Willow is almost a replica of the original house built in 1847.) The Willow Pub is thriving

under executive chef Shaun Hughes, who is introducing more sophisticated cuisine with regional, organic ingredients and food made from scratch — condiments, baked goods, soup stock and more. The pub looks familiar, but everything — polished tavern chairs, hunter-green leather banquettes and handsome oiled-oak floors — is new. The inn’s time-honoured attraction — the gorgeous lakefront terrace — is being rejuvenated. And a reinvented party space (formerly the dining room) is dressed to the nines for at least 10 weddings this summer, a Father’s Day barbecue on June 17, and events such as tastings of gin or Scotch. **Backstory:** Husband and wife David Ades and Patricia Wenzel met nearly 40 years ago and dated at the venerable Hudson landmark. So when it came on the market, they scooped it up and bravely embarked on their first hospital-ity venture. The Willow is a bigger operation than it looks, with nearly 60 employees, including the



The Willow’s 10 renovated guest rooms offer a soothing ambience with country chic decor. couple’s daughter Vanessa in marketing and their son Henry, a cook. “We want our food and lodging to be worthy of this remarkable setting,” said Ades, an industrialist. “The lakefront lawn, plus drinks and dinner on the terrace and the glorious water views are unique around Montreal.” “We have transformed everything, but with deep respect for the inn’s classic look and history,

which is so much a part of the Hudson community,” said Wenzel, who also is a volunteer at the Jewish General Hospital and a guide at the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts. **Guest rooms:** With these darling, well-appointed guest rooms, you can now think of The Willow as a deluxe getaway. Interior designer Sophie Fidler curated a fresh cottage look with toile de jouy wallpaper and a few well-chosen antiques. The result is a timeless, soothing country cocoon with pastel accents and walls painted in one of Benjamin Moore’s nearly 70 creamy whites (which one is a secret). You’ll feel spoiled with dreamy cotton sateen sheets, puffy duvets and bathrobes and slippers tucked into armoires. I love the design detail of sliding barn doors to the bathrooms, which sparkle with new tiles, baths, rain showers and granite vanities. It’s 2018 at The Willow, so each room has Bluetooth-enabled radios, bedside lighting, USB ports, flat-screen TVs, soundproofing and thermostats. **Food:** Chef Hughes seems made-to-order for the reimagined Willow. He is from Hudson originally and has worked at top

IF YOU GO

Auberge Willow: 450-458-7006, aubergewillowinn.com; 208 Main Rd., Hudson. **Price:** 10 guest rooms, including continental breakfast, Wi-Fi, lakefront lawn: June-Aug., \$175-\$240; Sept.-Oct., \$140-\$200; Nov.-April, \$120-\$175. **The Willow Pub:** Lunch-dinner, Wed.-Sat., 11:30 a.m.-10 p.m.; brunch Sat.-Sun.

restaurants in Toronto and Vancouver, so his standards are high. At Montreal’s Joe Beef, he picked up on trends, and Bishop & Bagge gave him insight into British pub fare. His cuisine is artful and authentic. Keeping the English accent, The Willow serves hearty steak ‘n’ kidney pie and velvety fish chowder. You can still get a burger, but now it’s made from top-quality beef ground in-house and served on a homemade potato-bread bun. Tantalizing new offerings include ribs glazed with peach and ginger, beef tartare, rib-eye steak, roast cod and duck breast salad. Hughes forages for his own chanterelles, lovage and spruce tips, and also favours local suppliers, such as Ferme Sanglier Rôdeur in Pointe-Fortune for pork, Le Moulin des Cèdres in Les Cèdres for organic grains and Les Jardins Carya in Senneville for organic vegetables. Pastry chef Melinda Gorman (ex of 40 Westt and Le Serpent) spins out such delights as a sea buckthorn tart and maple cheesecake. Hughes’s talent shines in the morning, too. Overnight guests have continental breakfast included. It’s not a buffet, but a handful of creative choices, such as a daily cake, wild-rice granola or an excellent yogurt panna cotta with fruit compote. An à la carte menu (\$6-\$12), also for brunch on Saturday and Sunday, offers farm-fresh eggs, brioche French toast with quince; Welsh rarebit with creamed spinach and mushrooms; or a hearty breakfast sandwich. **Drinks:** Keeping the British theme, you can try the Pimm’s Cup, the Bee’s Knees and Maude’s Bramble, which fuse sweet and tart flavours. **And here’s a new one:** The Willow blends warm drinks for chilly evenings by the fireplace: Vin Chaud spiced with Cointreau, rum and citrus; or a Hot Toddy, with, honey and lemon.

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