



The Ripplecove Lakefront Hotel & Spa in the Eastern Townships has the soul of a classic country inn. PHOTOS: RIPPLECOVE LAKEFRONT HOTEL & SPA

IF YOU GO

Ripplecove Lakefront Hotel & Spa: 800-668-4296, ripplecove.com; 700 rue Ripplecove, Ayer's Cliff. Rates include Wi-Fi, local calls, two outdoor hot tubs, coffee corner, in-room pod-coffee. **In summer:** Heated outdoor pool, lakefront beach, kayaks, paddleboards, tennis, bicycles, trails. Five categories start at: \$199, \$239, \$279, \$339 and \$399. **Mother's Day package:** \$279 p.p. Rates increase June 1. Two private chalets available. Packages with breakfast, gourmet dinner (three-course or seven-course), skiing at Mont Orford. CAA discount applies. **Eastern Townships tourism:** 800-355-5755, easterntownships.org

HOTEL INTEL

FRESH, MODERN LOOK, SAME FIVE-STAR CHARM

Ripplecove's new owner has eye for beauty, obvious respect for landmark hotel and spa



ROCHELLE LASH

The classic Ripplecove Lakefront Hotel & Spa in the Eastern Townships has a new owner, and it appears to be a match made in heaven.

Richard Laliberté is a developer and landscape entrepreneur who has an eye for beauty and respect for this precious landmark outside the sleepy village of Ayer's Cliff.

Laliberté is modernizing discreetly to best serve his guests, but he's discerning enough to maintain the establishment's charm, history and serenity.

In a culinary coup, he has lured back executive chef Steeve Rondeau, who seduces his loyal patrons with luscious Quebec delicacies such as foie gras and venison.

One of Quebec's few five-star country properties, Ripplecove is a darling boutique resort tucked into a splendid, woody setting

on the shore of Lake Massawippi.

Pretty and prestigious, Ripplecove is a favourite for gastronomy, romantic rendezvous, company retreats and destination weddings with amazing photo ops.

Here are a few special experiences:

Drinks on the lakefront terrace: Each pair of deck chairs has its own fire pit and red plaid blanket for bundling up. To really get warm, the bar serves 25 single malt Scotches, including a rare \$125-an-ounce Macallan.

A massage at Arborecence Spa: Try something exotic like a mango enzyme exfoliating gel or a facial with organic creams by Éminence of Hungary, made with ginseng and almonds. Ask about the current promotion of two 30-minute treatments for \$80.

Dining at Le Riverain: Lunch favourites include the lobster club sandwich and duck tartare, with a Chablis from an extensive cellar that has earned the Award of Excellence from Wine Spectator magazine. Even breakfast is a triumph, featuring scrambled eggs dusted with black truffle and lobster benedict.



Many rooms and suites at the boutique resort have been overhauled. Some feature whirlpool tubs and glass balconies overlooking Lake Massawippi.

Mother's Day, May 9-12: Your best present to Mom, ever. The package includes breakfast, dinner, a spa treatment and a gift, plus lodging in a deluxe lakefront room with a fireplace.

The news: Laliberté has created an entirely new and expanded Ripplecove Bar, still with traditional, clubby trappings of polished oak woodwork, tartan wallpaper and handsome furniture. But now, flat-screen TVs draw a crowd for sports, and an impressive new glass étagère displays premium spirits.

In lodging, many of the 30 rooms have been redone, includ-

ing the luxurious suites. They all have pod coffee machines and Canadian-made toiletries by Organiq Spa, and some have whirlpool tubs and glass balconies facing the lake.

Even the least expensive "comfort rooms" have been overhauled for about \$25,000 each, and now have new beds, cheerful décor, shiny modern bathrooms and flat-screen TVs.

I have not seen the updated pool, but it sports a new deck and sunbeds.

The scene: Ripplecove has lots of activities — tennis, hiking, lake paddling, fishing, swimming,

pontoon cruises and cycling. But, it really has the soul of a classic country inn, prized for tranquility, grace and intimacy.

The collection of antiques and vintage botanicals and photography is exceptional. Its grounds are magnificent, surrounded by snow-laden maples and pines in winter, and flourishing English gardens in summer.

There are several fireplaces and sitting rooms with Chippendale desks and velvet sofas, where you can read, think or simply gaze at the forest and the lake. A grandfather clock chimes every 30 minutes, and if it were not for that, you might be lulled into a timeless state and totally miss cocktail hour or your spa appointment.

Cuisine: Ripplecove takes dining seriously and its restaurant — Le Riverain — has been awarded Four Diamonds by CAA-AAA.

Candles flicker on white damask tablecloths and patrons have a choice of lake view or fireplace table. Among chef Rondeau's suppliers are regional producers, including Ferme au Pied Levé, Boucherie René & Richard and Ferme Garfat.

Rondeau harmonizes French techniques with contemporary presentations. One of his special dishes is Quebec venison, during certain seasons, and some of his spring treats are salmon gravlax and striped bass with fennel, coriander and wheelks. Rondeau's signature veal sweetbreads are done with grapefruit butter, lobster and celery rave purée.

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