



Estérel Resort's pastoral setting hasn't changed, but "we have evolved with the times," says co-owner Shawn Zarbatany. PHOTOS: ESTÉREL RESORT

HOTEL INTEL

ESTÉREL REFINES THE GREAT INDOORS



ROCHELLE LASH

Estérel Resort was a sensation when it opened in 1958 with contemporary architecture and a glossy lifestyle built around golf, skiing and boating in Quebec's great outdoors.

The magnificent, pastoral setting hasn't changed, but now Estérel is an all-suite condo hotel that focuses more on indoor sports: a hip cocktail scene at the new Chais58; gourmet cuisine by executive chef Jean-François Bélair, who has worked at two Relais & Châteaux properties and restaurants with Michelin stars; and the Bistro à Champlain wine cellar, with 20,000 bottles and a new tasting room for up to 50 people.

"We have evolved with the times," said co-owner Shawn Zarbatany, whose family founded Estérel. "The neighbourhood has grown vibrantly and our clientele is increasingly sophisticated about food and wine."

If you can handle more indulgence, marinate in Lido Thermal, a Nordic-style spa with hot and cold baths (at no extra charge);

and follow with a massage or facial at the in-house Amerispa.

The great outdoors still beckon as well. Estérel is surrounded by the lower Laurentian Mountains and sits on the shore of Lac Dupuis. The resort's Activity Passport includes snowshoeing, cross-country skiing and skating, and paddleboarding, cycling and kayaking in summer.

Estérel's 200 attractive, contemporary units all have kitchens, gas fireplaces and glass-fronted balconies, many facing the lake.

Wine and spirits: Estérel's wine culture has celebrity status. The Bistro à Champlain cellar holds rare vintages such as Pétrus 1953 and Domaine de la Romanée-Conti 1990, and legendary labels including Château Margaux, Château Lafite Rothschild and Château Haut-Brion.

You don't have to feel intimidated: there are reds and whites for all budgets, and you can refine your palate at monthly wine-and-food events that bring together vintners, sommeliers, hotel guests and non-guests. The year's first such event will be held Jan. 17, featuring a gastronomic dinner with whiskey from Ireland (Redbreast, 21 years), Japan (Suntory Hibiki) and Scotland (Bunnahabhain, 25 years). The cellar is open daily from 4:30 p.m. to midnight for free visits, and for tastings of

wine and spirits such as vintage scotch or cognac, which start at \$19. **Cuisine:** Estérel's three restaurants have different styles and menus. Epicureans head to Bistro à Champlain, the resort's ode to haute cuisine. Favourites here include starters of pork belly, foie gras and smoked sturgeon with caviar, followed by main courses of milk-fed veal, seafood stew, venison or monkfish. ROK is less formal, but still very high-end in terms of ingredients. Here you can order à la carte or grill your own meat and seafood on a hot stone. The choices include Wagyu beef, rack of lamb, aged steak, elk,



Estérel Resort has 200 suites, many with a lake view.

scallops, tuna or a surf-and-turf combo of filet mignon and giant shrimp.

Estérel's bistro-bar Chais58 has a young adult clientele that's keen on casual fare, with cocktails and pairings of wine or beer. The menu features crispy shrimp, charcuterie, cheeses, beef tartare, bison carpaccio, Arctic char, Angus roast beef or burgers, smoked trout and mushroom tagliatelle.

Bélair has also created a vegetarian menu that is available in the evening at all three dining spots.

It includes dishes such as mushrooms in shiitake cream, Parmesan gnocchi, and artichokes with pickled vegetables.

IF YOU GO

Estérel Resort: 888-ESTER-EL (888-378-3735), 450-228-2571; esterel.com; 39 Fridolin-Simard Rd., Estérel. **Price:** Watch for online discounts. Regular rates: garden-view suites, Mon.-Fri., from \$189 for two; lake view from \$219; suites with patio hot tub from \$299. Rates are higher on Saturdays and lower on Sundays. Discount for a third night. Rates include Lido Thermal spa, wine cellar visit, Wi-Fi. In summer, heated swimming pool, private lakefront beach/small craft.

Activity Passport: \$40 per person, per visit, with rentals for cross-country skiing/snowshoeing/skating. Estérel Golf Club is adjacent.

Packages (\$149 to \$265 per person, double occupancy) feature spa treatments, breakfast in bed, cocktails, Activity Passport. With lodging, gourmet packages start at \$298 for two for vegetarian menus; \$339 for two at ROK; \$318 for two at Chais58; and \$388 for two at Bistro à Champlain.

Wine cellar: Open to the public 4:30 p.m. to midnight daily. Visits are free; tastings of wine/spirits start at \$19.

Cuisine: Reservations recommended. Bistro à Champlain: breakfast and dinner, Mon.-Sun.; six-course menu, \$100; wine pairings, \$70. ROK: dinner, Mon.-Sun. Chais58: daily from 11 a.m. to dinner. Vegetarian menu available.

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