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A SENSE OF PLACE

As an extension of its local history, Quebec City's Auberge Saint-Antoine is the nonpareil of true luxurious style

WRITTEN BY *Gina Christman*

QUEBEC IS A CITY OF STARK BUT SEAMLESS contrasts; chic, modern shops and restaurants are tucked into centuries-old fortification walls. Sinuous cobblestone streets and footpaths lead to cutting-edge galleries d'art and architectural wonders. It is home to natural wonders, too, like the St. Lawrence river which figured prominently in the area's history. The river served early settlers as the main route for commerce, primarily the fur trade, and was considered one of the most important ports in North America.

Perched alongside the river is the picturesque Historic District of Old Quebec, or Old Port, which was recognized as a UNESCO World Heritage site in 1985. The fortified colonial city enchants with its old-world character and charm—a storybook setting indeed.

As history goes, two successful French fur traders were among the first to build in the Old Port in 1687 on what is now the site of Auberge Saint-Antoine, an award-winning boutique hotel and member of the prestigious Relais & Châteaux association. The hotel displays more than 700 artefacts from the French and British colonial regimes, all unearthed during several years of archeological excavation on the site.

The family-owned Auberge Saint-Antoine sits





like a crown jewel on Rue Saint-Antoine, the tiny street connecting the St. Lawrence riverfront and the *très chic* shopping street, Rue Saint-Pierre. The hotel consists of only 95 very individualized rooms and suites, created from three historic buildings dating as far back as the late 17th century. Each room's décor is different and impeccably designed—from the British merchant period in the Maison Hunt building to contemporary-cozy in the main wing—with absolutely no creature comfort overlooked. Such indulgences as Frette linens, Bose sound systems (with an assortment of CDs) Nespresso coffee centers, and grand, lavish bathrooms with heated tile floors, no-fog mirrors and washlet bidet toilet seats are standard here. As a wow-inspiring touch, a tiny artefact is framed outside the door of each guestroom, with a “partner” piece (shard from the same plate, handle from a matching teacup, for example) is embedded in that room's night table, with a little card explaining the piece's historical significance.

The hotel's Chez Muffy, named in honor of Auberge Saint-Antoine's owner and matriarch Martha “Muffy” Bate Price, is a rich, warm restaurant housed in a preserved 19th century warehouse complete with stone walls and massive rough-hewn wood beams. Menu items such as Oxtail *Pot au Feu*, Striped Bass with Wild Rice and Leg of Venison showcase local ingredients, many sourced from the hotel's farm on Ile d'Orleans in the St. Lawrence River, and feature chef Julien Ouellet's deft hand with classic French and modern Canadian cuisine.

Chez Muffy's carefully curated wine list—with more than 700 different wines from 14 countries—is a treat to navigate with the help of the restaurant's sommelier team. In order to taste rare and expensive wines without springing for an entire bottle, guests can choose from offerings on the “Disponible au Coravin” list, where the Coravin



top A typical guest *chambre*, complete with uber-luxurious features and amenities like Bose stereo systems, Frette linens, and goose down pillows and duvets. *middle row, left to right* A few of the more than 700 artifacts covering four centuries of Quebec's history that were unearthed during the site's excavation and now are displayed throughout the hotel. *below* A typical *chambre salle de bain* featuring every bell-and-whistle amenity imaginable, including huge soaking tubs and no-fog mirrors.



PASSPORT

TRAVEL

needle measures out precise 3- or 5-ounce pours. The Coravin allows the cork to reseal itself so what's left in the bottle is preserved.

The aptly-named Café-Bar Artefact sits adjacent to the lobby, and is a cheerful spot to enjoy a hand-crafted *Kir a l'Erable*—cava, crème de cassis and a little maple syrup—to a simple *Vin Blanc*. Belly up to the bar or choose to lounge in one of Artefact's comfy seating areas, including two small alcoves, each with cozy chairs and a fireplace, for an even more intimate cocktail time.

For guests' wellness, the hotel offers spa treatments at The Health Club, and a world-class massage therapy program at L'Attitude. LeGYM is the on-site fitness facility, complete with a yoga studio and Finnish saunas, and is available to guests 24 hours a day.

There are many sights and sites in Quebec City not to miss. Just next door to Auberge Saint-Antoine is the Moshe Safdie-designed Museum of Civilization which bridges the past and future with its modern design and fascinating exhibits. Historic centers like the Citadelle or the Plains of Abraham and the magic of the oldest neighborhood in North America, Place Royale/Petit-Champain District are where the region's rich history really comes to life.

But come here for something classically Québécois—the food. It is very recent that chefs here set their focus on local ingredients, and it is an immense source of pride. Step into Louise, a clubby tavern/bistro on one side and a chic wine bar on the other, for traditional beef tartare or rabbit and pork terrine. Ciel! (Sky) downtown is the only revolving restaurant in the city and is the best way to get a 360-degree aerial view of Quebec. The food here is as exceptional as the view.

A block from Auberge Saint-Antoine is Hotel Le Priori where celebrity chef Christian Lemelin presides over Restaurant Toast. His nightly tasting menu with wine pairings is a gastronomical adventure in deliciousness. An absolute must.

Everything is mere steps away from Auberge Saint-Antoine so you can take in the Port City on foot, just like the *Québécois*. saint-antoine.com



top A modern take on the classic French Cassoulet, as conceived by Chez Muffy Executive Chef Julien Ouellet who joined Auberge Saint-Antoine in 2013. *below* LeGYM, open 24 hours a day for guests, features high-level fitness equipment, but also a yoga studio and a steam room. To pass the time quickly, there is a wall of windows for watching shoppers on the fashionable Rue Saint-Pierre.





BRYAN STONE

top left At Chez Muffy, the sommelier measures out a tasting pour using the Coravin, a tool that replaces the poured wine with inert argon gas, then allows the cork to reseal itself. As a result, the remaining wine in the bottle is freshly preserved. *top right* Savory starters at Chez Muffy highlight seasonal ingredients, such as this Carmelized Cippolini Onion Tart. *below* The cozy ambience at Chez Muffy takes its inspiration from the natural stone and wood beams in the Auberge Saint-Antoine's riverfront warehouse that dates back to 1822. The farmhouse-inspired restaurant is open for breakfast (featuring a lavish buffet), lunch and dinner.

