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FOR PEOPLE WHO LOVE TO *read*, LOVE TO *eat* AND LOVE TO *travel*

LODGINGS

AUBERGE SAINT-ANTOINE

CANADA

Auberge Saint-Antoine

QUÉBEC CITY

by ANNE DESBRISAY

PHOTOS THIS SPREAD
CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT
Auberge Saint-
Antoine; Cannons
in Québec; Chef
Julien Ouellet.



I'm at Café-Bar Artéfact in Auberge Saint-Antoine seated comfortably beside a cannonball. It's of French manufacture, shot some 260 years ago from a small French cannon aimed, I would imagine, at the British. Still embedded in the hunk of wood in which it was found, it relaxes next to a section of stonework that was the base of a fortification called the Batterie Dauphine. The cannon is there as well, its guts plugged up to prevent the English conquerors from making use of it. All of these old treasures are behind glass next to my table.

The cocktail I've been handed, however, is thoroughly 21st century. So is the tray of snacks from the raw bar, and the comforts of rich velvet and white marble and soft, modern lighting.

I've come to Artéfact for respite from the drizzle and from the guided historical tour of Vieux Québec I had arranged through the hotel. That lesson began at the terrific little Musée du Fort, and continued along the charming cobblestone lanes of the fortified city. Then past the imposing Château Frontenac, up to the Citadelle and a tromp across the soggy fields of the Plains of Abraham. Eventually, a rewarding clamber down the steep steps from Upper Town to Lower Town, past the galleries, the cafés, the antique shops and museum, toward the mighty St Lawrence River and this beautiful hotel, built on one of Canada's richest archeological sites. »





PHOTOS THIS SPREAD
FROM LEFT Chez
Muffy; View
from Citadelle.

My reward for all the learning and climbing in the autumn drizzle was a flute of Crémant de Bourgogne, in honour of my French cannon company. But if I thought I would escape the history lesson, I had picked the wrong bar.

Owned by the pioneering Price family of Québec, Auberge Saint-Antoine may be a splendid Relais et Châteaux property, with all the modern conveniences and attendant luxuries, but it is also a museum. Everywhere, behind peeking windows, embedded in walls and in the floor, along corridors, in the foyer, in the parking lot, and outside every room and suite, are displays both playful and thoughtful, of the artefacts and archaeological

objects unearthed during construction and expansion. The book on my lap, borrowed from my room, is a fantastic companion to the exhibits and displays — treasures dating back to the 1600s: coins, stemware, silverware and china, clothing and shoe leathers, iron utensils, clay pipes, and yes, vestiges of the old port and machinery of war. Called *Un passé plus-que-parfait* ('Past Perfect') by archeologist and art historian Camille Lapointe, it tells the story of this UNESCO World Heritage Site, evoking the shore, the wharves, the port and the families who called it home.

Chez Muffy

The best sorts of museums also feed us, and this one does that and very well. In

addition to the snacky fare offered at Artéfact, there is the principal restaurant, now called Chez Muffy. Formerly 'Panache,' the dining room of the Auberge Saint-Antoine was rechristened in 2017 in honour of Martha (Muffy) Bate Price, the Price family matriarch. Found in the only 19th century maritime warehouse still standing in Québec City, the stone walls, low-hanging beams, and deep windows overlooking the St Lawrence River evoke the romance of its many past lives. But the past feel of the restaurant — the formal, fine dining of Panache — has been ditched in favour of something much more casual and approachable. Chez Muffy is meant to suit the needs of a generation less enamoured with the trappings of fine

*...I've come to
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from the drizzle...*

dining. In the words of the hotel's newly installed executive chef, Julien Ouellet, "We wanted to see more of me in this restaurant." Ouellet is thirty-something, and his menu's focus on farmhouse cuisine, on sharing plates and charcuterie boards invites a younger crowd's exploration. It presents more options and fewer rules. Ouellet does offer a nightly tasting menu, if that's of interest, but

otherwise, the short, à la carte menu draws inspiration from places nearby. He continues the tradition of a hotel kitchen that's always worked with local producers — Quebec cheesemakers, cider houses, lamb farmers, maple producers, apple growers, eel fishers — and with the stunning harvest from Alexandre Faille, who works Auberge Saint-Antoine's extensive farm on Île d'Orléans. Faille was

responsible for providing the bittersweet baby pink radishes on a plate of the finest lamb I have ever tasted. Ouellet and his team nailed their preparation and plating. In Chez Muffy, a hotel that honours so deeply the past, now embraces the future of fine dining: using a breadth of ingredients that showcase the region, in ways that are playful, technically flawless, and absolutely delicious. **T**

Book
it

AUBERGE SAINT-ANTOINE offers archaeological tours of the hotel. You'll find them shorter (and dryer) than those offered by the Tourist office. And they can be

followed with a drink and a meal.
www.saint-antoine.com

Chez Muffy
www.chezmuffy.com

ANNE DESBRISAY is an award-winning Canadian food writer, restaurant critic, editor and culinary judge.