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At Manoir Hovey, classic style, modern-day comforts

BY ROCHELLE LASH, SPECIAL TO THE GAZETTE MAY 27, 2011 11:07 AM

STORY PHOTOS (1)



Manoir Hovey has unveiled several new main-lodge rooms and suites that are soothing spaces, decorated in a palette of cream and muted earth tones.

Photograph by: Manoir Hovey, Manoir Hovey

Life at Manoir Hovey is as gracious as it was when the distinguished mansion was built in 1898, but this landmark of Quebec tourism is rocking with stylish new features that are decidedly 21st century.

A heady mélange of factors has kept Manoir Hovey at the top of the hospitality game. A southern belle modelled on George Washington's stately home in Virginia, Hovey has an enchanting, secluded location with extensive grounds along the shore of Lake Massawippi. The inn's inviting veranda is shaded by birches and pines and its classic white pillars are draped in a century of vines.

With lush English gardens and fine French-Quebec cuisine, Manoir Hovey offers five-star living with the added rare qualities of privacy and tranquillity. It is a Relais & Châteaux that is a prized getaway for discerning guests from Montreal and throughout North America and Europe.

But, cut to the news of 2011.

A small fire this past winter and the ensuing water damage precipitated a million-

dollar renovation. The library lounge has been brightened with vivid sofa fabrics, although the venerable stone fireplace and book collection are intact. In the dining room, partitions were removed so there are views of the splendid lake from every table.

The marquee attraction of the recent revamp is the unveiling of several dazzling new main-lodge rooms and suites. Sporting a fresh, contemporary style, they are soothing spaces decorated in a palette of cream and muted earth tones, with whimsical splashes of colourful accessories. You'll find contrasts. Sleek glass desks and abstract paintings are balanced by motifs of nature like ginkgo leaves and tree branches. Perhaps the biggest wow is the overhaul of the bathrooms, now white marble sanctuaries equipped with the double air-jet tubs, heated floors and glassed-in rain showers.

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And Hovey has plugged in. Now you can press various buttons for 42-inch flat-screen televisions, espresso machines, iPod docking stations, wireless Internet and gas fireplaces.

Among the choice accommodations is the Cartier Suite, No. 30, the ultimate in romance and privacy. Surrounded by greenery, it is a stand-alone chalet that is lakeside and accessible by boat. If you ordered your meals delivered, you could visit Hovey and no one would ever know. The Montcalm Suite, No. 32, blends contemporary fittings and large windows with the simplicity of a whitewashed wooden cottage. The Massawippi Suite, No. 15, is a merger of two rooms. Now it is the main building's largest suite, with a sweeping private balcony worthy of a scene in *Romeo and Juliet*.

If you yearn for the old, familiar Manoir Hovey, don't despair. The inn has preserved several traditional guest rooms with wood-burning fireplaces, four-poster beds, floral decor and Colonial-style or Quebec pine furniture. And you still can take tea in the stately lounge or a sip a nightcap in the rustic, pine-panelled Tap Room.

"The ambience and the soul have not changed," said Stephen Stafford, who has owned Hovey with his wife, Kathryn, for more than 30 years. "When I travel, I seek out authenticity, history and charm, and so do our guests."

Gastronomy always has been a big part of the experience. Even breakfast is artful, starting with a buffet of homemade delicacies like mango-orange smoothies, granola baked with maple syrup and roasted almonds, tart rhubarb compote and buttery croissants. That's only the warm-up to hot dishes, all perfectly cooked to order, like eggs Benedict, pancakes, omelettes and French toast.

During the day, with the shimmering lake as a backdrop, the bountiful beds of roses, narcissus, lavender and lilies create an idyllic setting. Outdoor luncheon tables are set with silver and draped in white linen, a pristine canvas for a lobster sandwich, roasted salmon or a deluxe burger. And, after a leisurely afternoon of boating, tennis or swimming, you can refresh with champagne cocktails and gin fizzes that sparkle as the sunlight fades.

For dinner, chefs have created dishes that feature contemporary presentations and new fusions using mostly Quebec ingredients, including vegetables from the inn's own organic garden. House specialties include updated versions of duck, quail, beef and fish. Watch for the appetizer of clams in sorrel sauce, fabulous cheeses and a wild 'n' crazy dessert of tiny doughnuts in flavours of lemon, cherry and even foie gras.

On a busy night, the dining room, Le Hatley, is an opera of organization. Maître d's glide and hover. Servers flow, to and fro. Sommeliers swish and pour. Even the wines by the glass are a treat, with selections from Lac Brome to Beaune, France, not to mention the weighty, leather-bound list of choices from nearly 20 countries.

"I don't think of Hovey as sophisticated. Our goal is excellence and warmth," says Stephen Stafford.

Hmmm. Perhaps Stafford hasn't seen the three kinds of salt on the dining table, the hilltop Vista suite with its own private swimming pool or the \$1,750 bottle of wine, a Cheval Blanc from Bordeaux.

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IF YOU GO

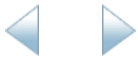
North Hatley is a one-hour and 20-minute drive from Montreal via Highway 10 and Route 55 south.

Manoir Hovey: 800-661-2421, 819-842-2421, www.manoirhovey.com, 575 Chemin Hovey, North Hatley.

Prices include full breakfast and gastronomic dinner, gratuities, evening turndown and use of heated swimming pool, beaches, small watercraft, clay tennis court with rackets, fitness room, bicycles and wireless Internet. Add 10 per cent for Saturdays. In high season (June 17- Oct. 10): rooms cost \$205-315 p.p. double occ., all-inclusive, and suites cost \$355- \$485 p.p. double occ. Mid-season (until June 16, and Oct. 11-June 15, 2012) that's \$165-250 and \$295-380. Discounts of 10 per cent on visits of five nights. Dragonwatch, a four-bedroom lakefront cottage, has its own kitchen, so is rented without meals.

Packages are available with cycling, picnic baskets, honeymoon amenities, massages and spa visits. Extras include golf, horseback riding or guide for fishing of trout, bass and pike.

For non-guests: Breakfast, \$25. Lunch, \$30. Dinner, \$68, or \$88 for the seven-course Discovery Menu, plus \$65 for wine pairings.



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