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September 2006: Special Eastern Townships Edition

22,030 copies – v.1.4

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All Roads Lead to Brome

Brome Fair Welcomes Montrealers for its 150th Anniversary

BY STUART WOODS

For most of the year, the village of Brome is a quiet hamlet set in farmland. Unlike the neighbouring communities of Knowlton, Sutton and Bromont, Brome has little to offer traditional tourists – no ski hills, boutiques or restaurants.

For four days a year, however, this tiny community of 300 welcomes well over 40,000 visitors from across the province. With dozens of competitive categories,

.....
continued on page three



In Mansonville – 30 minutes east of Brome Village, but still in Brome County – you can see one of Quebec's increasingly rare round barns.

Photo: Imprints II by Ray and Diana Baillie

Townships Wine Quebec's Best Kept Secret

BY CAROLA PRICE

As a Canadian sommelier, I am fiercely proud of our continued effort to be recognized as a serious wine-producing country. As a Quebecer, I hope that one day our province, too, can be recognized for growing grapes and producing wine. Many people don't know it, but we actually do produce wines in Quebec. Some are even

.....
continued on page six

Maternally Yours Townships Honey, Chocolate and Animals

BY ANNIKA MELANSON

I remember spending my summers and weekends in the Eastern Townships as a child. My parents loved being "out of the city" and my sister and I spent our



.....
continued on page eight

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HAPPENINGS

Vivva Montreal's guide to what's on around the island.

■ **Shakespeare redux.** Spearheaded by theatre impresario Tony Palermo, the fourth annual **New Classical Theatre Festival** features six shows at four downtown venues. Two plays take liberties with Shakespeare classics: *Gayanashagowa* is a re-telling of *Romeo & Juliet* set against a backdrop of inter-cine Mohawk rivalry and *Hamlet (solo)* re-works the eponymous play into a one-man show. The fest also features the Montreal premiere of Moises Kaufman's *Gross Indecency: The Three Trials of Oscar Wilde*, based on actual court transcripts from the trial that saw the great Irish wit incarcerated, as well as original works by Montreal playwrights. For more information go to www.newclassicaltheatrefestival.com. For tickets to shows at Monument-National, call 514.871.2224. For all other tickets call 514.540.0774 or reserve online at tickets@gravybath.com. **August 15 to September 9.**

■ **Good news for film buffs.** A balm to Montreal film fans suffering the closure of Cinéma du Parc this summer, the **Montreal World Film Festival** is celebrating its 30th year. Coming during the run-up to the star-studded Toronto International Film Festival, the Montreal event has always had a hard time attracting marquee names. This year's roster of films is no different, with 215 features from 76 countries and nary a familiar face. But for film lovers the event can be both liberating and exhilarating since virtually none of the films are adulterated by pre-festival buzz. Free films will be screened under the stars



at Place des Arts for the fourteen nights of the festival. Official program can be picked up at festival box offices. Individual tickets are \$10. For more information go to www.ffmpegontreal.org. **August 24 to September 4.**

■ **From Montreal with Love.** Fundraiser for charitable group helping victims of Hurricane Katrina. An evening of music with Colectivo, The Cockroaches and People's Gospel Choir, among others. Tickets are \$20. At The Saints, 30 St. Catherine Street West. **August 29.**

■ **Music sur l'herbe.** Montreal's MEG Montreal is teaming up with upstart **Osheaga Festival Musique et Arts** to offer the year's most eclectic music festival. The twin-staged, two-day event happening this Labour Day weekend at Jean Drapeau Park features world-class talent (Lady Sovereign, Amon Tobin, Sonic Youth) beside home-grown artists like Wolf Parade, Bell Orchestre and Kid Koala. Jean Drapeau Park. Tickets are \$60 each or \$95 for a two-day pass. Call 1.800.361.4595 or go to www.osheaga.com. **September 2 & 3.**

■ If you want to avoid the crowds at Jean Drapeau Park, check out **MEG Montreal's** listings for club events. A sure bet is Sunday night's show at the Metropolis featuring dance-punk pioneers ESG. MEG Montreal. At Metropolis, Sala Rosa and Zoobizarre. Go to www.megmontreal.com. **September 1 to 4.**

SPORTS ROUNDUP

■ **Montreal Impact** are at the top of their division with five games remaining in the regular soccer

season. Catch their final game against the Toronto Lynx on **September 8** at the Claude Robillard Stadium. The Impact also host the Virginia Beach Mariners on **August 27**. Tickets are \$10-\$20 and \$5 for youths under 18. Call 514.328.3668 or 514.790.1245 on game-day or go to www.montrealimpact.com. Claude Robillard Stadium, 1000 Emile Journault Avenue.

■ The **Alouettes** have yet to lose a home game and hope to continue their streak when they host the Calgary Stampeders and the BC Lions on **August 24** and **September 1**. Tickets start at \$21 and can be reserved by calling 514.790.1245 or at admissions.com. For more info go to www.montrealalouettes.com.

■ **Fall registration.** Registration for fall and winter activities organized by the city of Westmount takes place on **August 21, 22 and 23** between 6 pm and 8 pm. Hockey and skating sign-up occurs August 21, with all other events scheduled on August 22 & 23. Go to <http://westmount.org> for a complete list of activities. Victoria Hall, 4626 Sherbrooke Street West.

■ **Ayer's Cliff Fair, August 24 to 27** Ayer's Cliff, www.expoayerscliff.com info@expoayerscliff.com 819.876.7317

■ **Knowlton Duck Festival, September 23 to 24** and **September 30 to October 1 2006**, Knowlton, QC www.cclacbrome.com janie@cclacbrome.com 450.242.2870

■ **Townshippers Day.** Free admission. At the Richmond Fairgrounds. For more information and directions go to www.tday.ca. **September 16.**

■ Have an event you know about or want to publicize for *October*? Send your idea to vivvamontreal@pricepatterson.com. If it fits in, we'll publish it.

Vivva

MONTREAL

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Vivva Montreal is a publication designed to help its readers find things to do in Montreal and the surrounding area.

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BROME FAIR... *continued from page one*

which include everything from handicrafts to horse-jumping, an \$80,000 pot of prize money, a teeming midway and live nighttime entertainment, Brome Fair is one of the largest events of its kind in Quebec.

The tactical nightmare of organizing the event rests on the shoulders of the Brome County Agricultural Society, a sixteen-member volunteer society. Its four-member executive works around the clock to ensure the event goes off without a hitch.

“We work full-time 361 days a year and hope for good weather for four,” says Ernie Banks, this year’s president.

Oldest Fair in Canada

He’s being facetious, of course: it would take a lot more than foul weather to hamper the fair. This year marks the 150th anniversary of the event, making Brome Fair the oldest agricultural fair in the country.

Brome Fair was established as a way of bringing together farmers from the surrounding area who otherwise wouldn’t meet during the rest of the year. Originally a cattle show held twice annually in Knowlton, the event has changed little since moving to its current location on 18 acres of farmland in the village of Brome in 1890.

The fair remains true to its roots as an agricultural event. Visiting Montrealers can expect to come face-to-face with the realities of farm life.

Focus on the Farm

“Agriculture gets first priority,” says former Agricultural Society president Diana Frizzle. “People are further removed from the farm these days. Now milk comes in

plastic bags, and I bet most people don’t even know how cheese is made.”

This year the educational role of the fair will be particularly important as organizers try to link the fair’s present to its past. Participants in the artisanal competition will be dressed in period costume and a heritage display will showcase pioneers’ farm equipment.

To this day Brome Fair remains a vital forum for local farmers. The fair hosts the largest showcase of heavy-duty farm equipment in the region, and although most competitive categories are entered into in the spirit of fun, the livestock events are important in establishing local prestige. Last year a deal struck at the fair led to the sale of a cow for \$25,000.

More than Agriculture

Brome Fair has slowly evolved over the years to become, first and foremost, a social event, an occasion when far-flung family members and friends return to the Townships.

Diana Frizzle herself is a good example of the fair’s evolving social significance. Diana met her husband Larry at Brome Fair 33 years ago and hasn’t missed one since. Each year, she says, her husband buys her anniversary present from one of the farm equipment vendors.

Ask a Townshipper about Brome Fair and he’ll trot out any number of well-worn yarns of country life. Gordon Ladd, a renowned local artist, is an excellent source of local lore. Now semi-retired, Ladd was a fixture at Brome Fair for 25 years, when, along with wife Phyllis, he managed a booth selling his paintings, which portray regional subjects.

Ladd remembers attending the fair as a young boy in the 1930s, a time, he says, when an ice-cream cone cost a nickel and was a once-in-a-year treat. One year, at a time before tractors were commonplace, a trailer sunk to its axles in mud. No manner of coercion, including a team of six Percheron horses, would cause it to budge. It wasn’t until an elephant was recruited from the rural circus that was then part of the entertainment programme that the trailer was unstuck.

Sowing Seeds and Winning Prizes

One man who’s as integral to the fair as horse manure and cotton candy is Winston Rhickard. Although neither a farmer nor a member of the Agricultural Society, “It’s in his blood to be in the fair,” according to Ernie Banks.

For seventeen of the last twenty-seven years, Rhickard (pronounced ‘Rackard’) has brought home the Charlie Horner Trophy for most firsts in the vegetable section of the fair’s competitive categories. Before that, Mr. Rhickard’s father, Kenneth, dominated the field, making

Winston part of a veritable dynasty of greenthumbs.

When I visited Rhickard at his modest spread overlooking the Brome fairgrounds, I was impressed by his obvious commitment to his garden.

Rhickard begins preparations in the winter, comparing seed catalogues and placing orders for the spring. He sows his first crop, red and white onions, around April 1 and his last, green beans, in mid-July. The harvest occurs during the three days leading up to the event.

Rhickard divides his garden into two fenced-in patches. In the larger of the two, he grows as many as ten varieties of squash. In a separate enclosure sprouts an array of fruit and veggies, as many as a dozen different kinds, including leeks, beets, cantalope, watermelon and jalapeno peppers.

“My wife comes out to take the odd squash or zucchini,” says Rhickard, “but she doesn’t take too many.”

A peculiarity of the competition is that veggies aren’t always judged on quality or appearance, but on total mass as well. This spurs the cultivation of preposterous, oversized pumpkins, squash and

gourds – unfailing crowd-pleasers at the fair. Rhickard has personally raised a pumpkin to 300 pounds. I was shown a 17-pound Hungarian zucchini, a grotesque and unnatural protuberance still attached to the stalk, that Rhickard hopes will place first. Vegetables of this size aren’t good for eating; they aren’t good for anything but the show or the slop bucket.

All told, Rhickard might take home as much as \$300 in prize winnings – hardly enough to cover the material costs of his garden, not to mention the hours spent tilling. Each year, though, he finds himself planting again in the spring.

And what advice does he have for would-be gardeners? It’s quite simple, really:

“Look after (your garden). Keep it watered and weeded.”

Rhickard has a long-standing arrangement with the organizers of Brome Fair. Each year, he gives over a small portion of land to park cars and receives in turn a pile of horse manure from the barns for fertilizer. And as Ernie Banks points out, “That grows big pumpkins.”

Stuart Woods is the assistant editor of Vivva Montreal.

5½ Things that Vivva Montreal recommends you do in September

- 1 Check out **Garde Manger**, a new bar/resto in Old Montreal that opened on June 1. The vibe is hip, low-key and rock ‘n’ roll. Their house specialty cocktail is a giant Caesar (3 oz. of vodka) with all the trimmings and a giant crab leg sticking out. 408 St. François Xavier, 514.678.5044.
 - 2 Check out **Tim Dobby** (20th century world guitar: music from Russia, Japan and Brazil) as part of “Music in Cabot Square Park”. **August 29, 12 noon to 1 pm.** Cabot Square Park (corner of St. Catherine St. West and Atwater Avenue), 514.935.7344.
 - 3 Check out the McCord Museum’s “**Growing up in Montreal**” before it ends on **January 7, 2007**. It is an exhibition that explores the daily lives of young urban-dwellers in the last century. 690 Sherbrooke Street West, www.mccord-museum.qc.ca, 514.398.7100.
 - 4 Check out the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts’ “**Il Modo Italiano: Italian Design and Avant-garde in the 20th Century**” before it ends on **August 27**. It explores how Italy became the prominent leader in international industrial design. 1379/80 Sherbrooke Street West, www.mmma.qc.ca, 514.285.2000.
 - 5 Go for a bike ride on the **Lachine Canal**. That hot humid weather is coming to an end – but there are still many snow- and cold-free days to enjoy!
- 1/2 Buy some warm clothes. Fall is coming! (Docked a ½ unit for lack of originality and the less-than-welcome reminder.)

*Have 5½ Things to recommend for October?
Send your idea to vivvamontreal@pricepatterson.com*

BROME FAIR

September 1 to September 4

For information, go to www.bromefair.com or call **450.242.2565**.

How to get there:

Take Autoroute 10 to Exit 90. Follow Route 243 south to Route 215. Brome Fairgrounds located in the village of Brome.

When to go

Sundays are busiest because of The Big Parade at 1 pm. Fairgrounds open to the public at 8 am.

How much:

Tickets are \$10 for adults and \$7 for children under 12 and seniors. A four day pass is \$25. Admissions include entry to the grounds, midway rides and entertainment. Parking is \$4.

A Whiff of Grape *A Wine Tour Gone Right (and Wrong)*

BY CATHERINE MCKENZIE

It all started, as so many of these things do, as a suggestion after several glasses of good wine at a friend's house. Our friends Phil and Annie had just moved back to Montreal from New York. During the course of the evening, they told us about a wine tour they had been on while living in the Big Apple. It was all very posh: they had rented a limo to take them to several vineyards and eaten in a four star restaurant to cap off the night. The fun they were describing turned into a general call to repeat the same thing here.

A Slip of the Tongue

I mentioned that there was something called the *Route des vins* near our country place in the Townships. I had seen the signs for years and never given them much thought until now. This suggestion was met with general enthusiasm. Everyone whipped out their Blackberrys and Palm Pilots (no, yuppies are not dead, they are just in hiding) and we settled on a date in October. We would drink wine, see the leaves and stay at our place afterwards. And of course, we would do all of this in a limo. Awesome!

The next morning when I woke up (okay, it was afternoon), I had that taste on the brain. You know the taste. That feeling that you agreed to do something under the influence, but you can't remember exactly what. The answer came to me when I was checking something else on my organizer. Wine tour, right, October. And I was pretty sure that I had agreed to organize it, not to mention host. Oh boy.

The Tour Company

Since my husband, David, wasn't there that night, my first order of business was to advise him of what I had agreed to.

When he seemed amenable, I sent around a general email to make sure that everyone was still on board. After receiving eight to ten positive answers, a critical mass necessary for maximum fun, I began my investigation. Okay, all I really did was type "townships wine tour" into Google and an early hit was for Wood & Westland, a touring company located in Knowlton.

After a few phone calls with one of the owners, a few things became clear: (1) there wasn't going to be a limo, and (2) there wasn't going to be a four star restaurant. But ... because of (1) and (2), the whole thing was going to be reasonably priced. This would get us into three vineyards, a gourmet lunch, a minibus, a driver and a tour guide. Excellent.

The plan was this: David and I would head to the country on Friday night to get the house ready for the influx of guests. The others (our friends Annie, Phil, Tanya, Eric, Christie, Ryan, Michael and Candice) would arrive at our place by 10:30 am on Saturday where the minibus would pick us up. We were expected at the first vineyard at 11:30. Knowing my friends, I had built in a half-hour buffer.

The Group Arrives (Sort of)

Now all plans have a fatal flaw. The fatal flaw in our plan was expecting this many people to arrive at our place by 10:30 on a Saturday morning. Oh yeah, and expecting that we would have a nice day to see the fall foliage.

We woke up on Saturday to a steady rain, and cloud cover that seemed to hover about twenty feet off the ground. The first vehicle to arrive was the minibus with its driver. And the tour guide. And the tour guide was dressed like a cast member from *Little House on the Prairie*. When I had arranged for a guide, no one

mentioned anything about role playing. I was so shocked that all I could say when she climbed out of the minibus was "You're in costume!"

Everyone actually made it on time. Except Phil and Annie, and they were not answering their cell phones.

The Bus Ride

At 11:15 we gave up waiting for them. David, who doesn't like wine, agreed to wait behind for them until 12:00 and to meet us at the second vineyard. So we all climbed into the minibus and headed off for L'Orpailleur, located in Dunham (450.295.2763, www.orpailleur.ca). We were all yapping away loudly when our guide began speaking. We quieted down like school children and listened to her filling us in on the local history, and the reason there were so many vineyards in the area. I believe it has something to do with a microclimate, but if you want to know more, you'll have to take the tour.

Just like school kids, whenever the guide stopped speaking, we would all start talking to each other again, but the guide persevered throughout the day. Kudos to her for trying to earn her fee. Somewhere along the way, Eric asked her how red and white wine were made, just making conversation. While her historical facts might have been accurate (I never checked), her wine knowledge was a little lacking. She said that all wine (red and white) was made from red grapes. We all looked at each other in disbelief, but were too polite to correct her.

The Vineyards

We arrived at L'Orpailleur around 11:40, piled out into the rain and got a tour from our guide. This vineyard is the largest in the Townships, with a yearly production of approximately 100,000 bottles. Part of the tour included a video, which I remember as being hilariously awful (I'll let you discover why for yourself). And after the video came the whole reason for our visit: the wine tasting. Ah, there's nothing like a little wine before noon! Or a lot of wine. The tour included tastes of several varieties, white and red, all quite pleasant depending on your tastes.

After about an hour, we piled back into the minibus and made our way to the second vineyard, Domaine du Ridge (450.248.3987), located in Saint Armand, where we were to have our lunch before touring the facility. There was an excellent lunch, which we ate under an awning looking out over a bucolic river scene.


David had given up on our missing friends and joined us, but we were pleased to learn that they had called the tour company for directions and would be joining us shortly. And join us shortly they did, to much cheering. We finished our lunch, and toured this much smaller vineyard. I personally thought that most of the product was undrinkable, much too sweet and thick, but several of our friends purchased bottles of port. The property was lovely.

Our last stop was Domaine des Côtes d'Ardoise (450.295.2020, www.cotesdardoise.com), located in Dunham, not far from L'Orpailleur. We were supposed to go on a tour of the fields at this vineyard, but it was so wet, and we had now been drinking for a few hours, that we opted for tasting more wine than was originally foreseen. We must have tasted ten different varieties. Their bestselling white and red were excellent; my favourites of the day. And reasonably priced too: I purchased two bottles. We tasted the wine out on a covered patio that would, I imagine, have a lovely view of the vineyard if there had been any view to see that day. This vineyard serves meals as well, and we all agreed that it would be a perfect place to eat.

Post-Vino Post-Mortem

With the sun setting behind the clouds, we all piled back into the minibus (followed by the unplanned caravan of David in one car, and Phil and Annie in another) back to our house. We clutched our purchases as we let the tour guide tell us a little more about the history of the Townships.

In the post-mortem that evening, we decided that when we did it again the next year (because of course we are going to do it again!) we would: (1) go to Domaine des Côtes d'Ardoise only, (2) if possible, have dinner there afterwards, and (3) make sure the guide wasn't in costume. Hopefully, we will have a nice sunny day so we can see some of the fall foliage. And we will make sure we give Phil and Annie a one-hour cushion!

The *Route des vins* is certainly worth taking in: the vineyards are well situated and pretty, even on a rainy day, and there is some truly good product to be had. If you are driving yourself, don't take in more than one vineyard because you will not be in any shape to drive yourself anywhere. Despite the miscommunication about the guide, Wood & Westland was professional and punctual and I would use their services again. 

Deborah Herman

M.A., ATPQ., BCETS, CCFS

*Psychotherapist
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BOOK REVIEW

Chick Lit and Sophomores

BY CATHERINE MCKENZIE

Prep
by Curtis Sittenfeld



The Man of My Dreams
by Curtis Sittenfeld



Something Borrowed
by Emily Griffin



Something Blue
by Emily Griffin



This is not the first day of school, but what I did on my summer vacation was read, and these are the books that I read.

I started by reading *Prep*, Curtis Sittenfeld's (who, despite the name, is a woman) first novel that was a sleeper New York Times bestseller last year. *Prep* is about the main character's (Lee) four years at a tony boarding school in New England. Lee is an outsider. She is not blonde. She is not a Yankee. She is not from money. And while Lee might have been outgoing and scholarship-worthy in her hometown, at her new school, Ault (can't you just smell the money?), surrounded by teenagers named Gates and Aspath and Cross, Lee blends into the well-oiled woodwork and becomes an observer.

Teen Memories

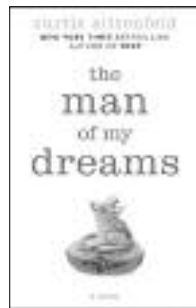
Lee's observations are spot on. Anyone who went to boarding school, or knows people who went to private school anywhere, will recognize the people in this book. This is probably in part because Sittenfeld herself attended a tony eastern boarding school and hailed from the Midwest. It is also probably partly due to the fact that she wrote the book while an artist-in-residence at another boarding school. (There are boarding schools with artists in residence? Who knew?) But the final element is Sittenfeld's keen memory for what it felt like to be a teenager. How teenagers interact, how they live, how they love and how they hurt. Sittenfeld remembers and tells us in a way that makes us remember too.

I found this book addictive; I read the whole 400-plus pages in a few days. The only real weakness with the book is that she occasionally tells the reader about the resolution of a tense moment while in the middle of the tense moment. Why build up the tension in the first place if not to let it resolve naturally?

The Sophomore Curse

It was because I enjoyed reading this book so much that I broke one of my rules and bought her next book, *The Man of My Dreams*, while it was still in hard-cover. *The Man of My Dreams* follows a female character (Hannah) over a series of incidents, involving men of course, that take place over twelve years.

While I do think that Sittenfeld is a true new talent who will be entertaining us for years, this book suffers a little from the "sophomore curse". I personally blame the curse on having the money to become a full-time writer. I think that when that happens, you stop having as many experi-



ences because you stop interacting with people in the way you always have. So you have to mine your life experience up to that point. And you probably used most of that in your first book anyway, so you have less to draw on. Whatever the reason, this book is a looser book than *Prep*. Fewer pages, less structure, a less dense (and compelling) story. Still well written, still a good read, still recommended.

Character Flaws

On another note, it was reading *The Man of My Dreams* that made me see the biggest weakness in Sittenfeld's characterizations. Some critics I have read pin this on the fact that the main characters in both of her books are not that likeable.

I personally think that the problem is that neither of the main characters ever really *does* anything. They are observers, they wait for things to happen to them. And while that is interesting to read through one book, and maybe even two, it is time for Sittenfeld to change her *modus operandi*. I want to see her write about a character who makes things happen, rather than lets them happen to her.

The Sophomore Cure

Emily Griffin has figured out how to avoid the sophomore curse by writing the same story from two different characters' perspectives in her twin books *Something Borrowed* and *Something Blue*. Although *Something Borrowed* was published first, I actually read *Something Blue* first, and this is probably why I think it is the better book.

These books tell the story of two best friends and the bad things that they do to one another. Rachel, the main character of *Something Borrowed*, sleeps with her best friend Darcy's fiancé, Dex. Can Rachel and Darcy maintain their friendship? Were they as good friends as Rachel always thought? Is their friendship even worth it? And because it is chick lit, the other theme in the book is: will Rachel

and Dex end up together?

I should have loved the main character in this book: she is my age, a lawyer, our lives have followed similar tracks (though not the fiancé stealing part!). However, I personally found her perspective on life ("Woe is me, my friend Darcy is the lucky one, I have always had to work for what I have...") to be grating. I wasn't sure if I wanted her to get the man. I wasn't sure if I thought she deserved Darcy as a friend.

Second, Blue and Better

Something Blue picks up where *Something Borrowed* left off, but this time from Darcy's perspective. Darcy the lucky girl, the beautiful girl, the shallow girl. Darcy is pretty and shallow and frivolous, but she knows she is and is unapologetic about it. She is also generous with her friends and truly cares about Rachel. She is not perfect. We learn early that she had her own bad behaviour to apologize for (I won't ruin the surprise). But she is trying to improve herself as a person, she is trying to be true to her friends.

The ending of both of these books is slightly cheesy, Hollywood-perfect, but they are well written and addictive in their own right. I recommend them both.

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M&AAPP

WINE...*continued from page one*

winning awards and most are a must on any terrasse in the sweltering heat of summer.

Vine and Vending Visionaries

There are just over fifty wineries throughout the province of Quebec. The Eastern Townships has the most vineyards, or *domaines*, and even have a wine country trail, the *Route des vins des Cantons de L'Est*. Since the mid-1980s wonderful, dedicated people – I may even say visionaries – have been experiencing the frustration and joy of making wine in this region. The current offerings are a delicious example of what pride and perseverance can deliver.

And the true visionary is, of course, the provincial liquor commission, committing time and money to a marketing program that will encourage residents of the province to buy wine from their own backyard. Unfortunately, the previous sentence describes what is happening in Ontario. Alas, in reality, the SAQ is in the dark when it comes to regional products – or is it that they are so in tune with the consumer who loves French and Italian wines above all else? As I peruse the shelf (that's right, one shelf) of my local SAQ, I

am sadly reminded that the consumer, coddled by the purveyor, is also in the dark about the fantastic wines that are made in this province.

Piece of Advice: Experiment

I've said it before and I'll say it again, practice makes perfect. There is too much wine out there to be repeating what you may have enjoyed previously. So what if Harry likes a Côtes du Rhone with his meatloaf? It may be time to introduce a Maréchal Foch or De Chaunac made by artisan wineries from St. Pétronille to St. Eustache.

Hybrid grapes are grown in Quebec and seem to thrive despite gruesome winter conditions. A hybrid is a cross between a European and North American grape. In the early 1900s, a pesky louse changed the wine world forever by being a killer of certain vines. The Europeans, desperate to keep their habit alive, traveled to North America to graft their vine onto our stronger and louse-resistant root. The result is what we drink today.

Grafting has introduced us to new varieties that are proving to be a great success outside of Europe. Vidal is a hybrid used in several award-winning icewines. Seyval Blanc makes a light and refreshing summer sipper, Maréchal Foch tastes so

vegetal and rich that it cries out for burgers on the BBQ, and New York Muscat is a delightful match with gooey, stinky *lait cru* cheeses.

More Advice: Take a Tour

Here is the number one selling point: all of those beautifully shot movies with people enjoying life amongst the vines and advertisements depicting an idyllic tour of wine country can actually be done within an hour of downtown Montreal. Amazingly, the Eastern Townships are not only for skiing and antiquing. Boasting a rather large area under vine, it is the perfect place to begin a tour dedicated to your palate.

(For one consumer's journal, check out "A Whiff of Grape" on p. 4)

Start the morning off on the right note with a tour of Domaine du Ridge in St. Armand. This winery has few labels, which makes it a perfect place to whet the appetite. Next stop is L'Orpailleur, and what a great place to learn about Quebec viticulture. In business since 1985, this winery knows how to cater to the beginner and the connoisseur. The views are magnificent, the restaurant delicious and the museum a delight, not to mention the wines. Must-haves are the Cuvée Spéciale, l'Orpailleur Blanc and the Brut de Brut. Down the road is Domaine des Côtes d'Ardoises. They have been farming in Dunham since 1980 and make an incredible Alsatian-style Riesling. Try the port-style wine for a real treat. Then get back in the car and drive on for a visit to Vignoble la Bauge in Brigham. You must sample their cheeses and *terrines de sanglier* with the wines. A tour of the animal lairs and it's on to the last stop.

By now, your tastebuds have had a workout and you may not be able to tell the differences in the wines you taste. Retreat to the terrasse of Vignoble le Cep d'Argent in Magog for a nice lunch and a discussion of the matches these types of wine have with food. I should stress that a wine tour is the best time to practise your swirling and spitting technique. Wine in this setting, especially when cars are involved, can lead to over-indulgence. Spit in the buckets provided, buy the wines and be free to enjoy them another time, without having the burden of driving home.

The Best Time of Year is Now

August and September are perfect months to enjoy wine country. The grapes are full on the vines, you can walk around on the tour and learn about Quebec viticulture in person and the end result is a guided wine tasting. All this on less than half a tank of gas appeals to me as well. Enjoy one of the most beautiful regions in our province at the height of summer.

There will be others enjoying the sites with you, but remember there are plenty of antiques and wine for everyone. Onward, wine explorers, and cheers to you and your discoveries!

Dégustation Québec**15/20 De Lavoie Poitevin, Onir SAQ#00741231 \$13.15**

This easy drinking white is probably a blend of Vidal and Seyval and is light with some peach and melon on the palate and some pink grapefruit in the nose. Light bodied, but surprisingly well balanced. Don't look for a blockbuster here, but a refreshing apéro to wind down the day.

16.5/20 Domaine Royarinois, Blanc de Montmorency SAQ#00741215 \$12.25

The grape is Vandal-Cliche and it tastes of freshly picked crab apples and white peaches with some almond and bark aromas. It is also light and refreshing and matches well with Mamirolle cheese and fish with citrus and fresh herbs.

**18/20 Domaine Pinnacle, Cidre de Glace SAQ#00734269 \$24.45**

This apple wine is an amazing match to blue cheeses from St. Benoit or runny Fourme d'Ambert. Don't forget the nuts and grapes with the cheese plate. Also holds up to some lighter fruit mousses and chocolate.

16/20 Vignoble de la Rivière du Chêne, Cuvée William SAQ#00743989 \$13.50

Made from Baco Noir and Maréchal Foch, this wine has a very fruity and slightly bell pepper nose with cassis, green and black pepper, and some baking spice (nutmeg) on the palate. A medium-bodied red that matches well with sheep's milk cheeses and light meats whether they are roasted or grilled. William is an amazing match to grilled asparagus and eggplant with goat cheese and olive oil.



Carola Price is a sommelier, chef and co-author of the bestselling MONTREAL FROM BREAD TO WINE. She is a member of the Canadian Association of Professional Sommeliers and The International Sommelier Guild. She can be reached at carola@ivvmontreal.com.



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SPOTLIGHT ON MONTREAL FICTION:

Sheila Kindellan-Sheehan

Montreal native and three-time *Gazette* bestselling author Sheila Kindellan-Sheehan is launching her third novel, *An Easy Mark*, this September. *An Easy Mark* is the third book in the Caitlin Donovan series. The first two titles, *The Sands Motel* and *Cutting Corners*, were both *Montreal Gazette* bestsellers. Here is a sneak peek at the first chapter:

Caitlin Donovan knew she had caught a break. The sun was warm, dimpling on the colouring leaves. On the second of October, it was 21 degrees Celsius. Montrealers had begun the traditional count-down, knowing that such days would change to cold November winds and, worse, snow. She wheeled her mountain bike out the front door, lifted it down the three steps of her home on Wood Avenue, climbed on, cycled up to Sherbrooke Street and turned right. At the corner, she said a silent prayer for her brother Chris. Weaving in between traffic and hopping onto sidewalks and back onto the road again, her blonde shaggy hair curled with the breeze.

...
She might have been pulled under by the sad events of the past four and a half years, but Sophia Argento, who worked for Caitlin's parents, was much more than a cook. She was a wise old woman who knew of both tragedies in Caitlin's life: the deaths of her husband and brother. One afternoon, she had taken her hand, smiled warmly and said simply, 'For their sake, live bravely and well. Every minute counts.' The words stuck. When she thought of all the life her brother had lost to a callous

drunk driver seventeen months ago, she made up her mind not to waste the life she was lucky enough to have.

...
'Good morning!' Caitlin said, smiling, as she walked quickly to the wooden podium of her Concordia class, picking up a felt pen as she laid her papers on the desk nearby. 'Three weeks from today, at four o'clock, in this classroom, you'll write that all-important first mid-term.'

A collective groan made it to her ears.

...
At the end of the class, the students filed out of the room quietly, brows tight with concern. Because she was packing up, she did not notice Kevin Leary at the

door until she almost bumped into him. 'Kevin, you look awful! Did you sleep last night?'

'No, I had trouble. May I see you for a few minutes, Miss?'

Caitlin felt she knew Kevin Leary, better than most anyway. 'All right, Kevin,' she said, walking back into her classroom, 'but leave the door open, please.'

'You got it.'

She noticed that he'd left the door ajar, not open.

Leary sat in the third seat, where a passer-by would not notice him from the corridor.

'See, Professor Donovan, I need a solid A on this exam, but there is no way I can make that grade. I stayed up all night studying and trying to figure out a plan. My father already feels disgraced that I'm not at McGill. His plan is for me to go to Harvard Law School. He has a connection there or something. The hitch is that I have to produce straight A's to get a shot at it.'

'The only route I know is study, Kevin.'

'I've come up with something better I think. Just hear me out, please. You can really help me here. If you write out the essays for me and say, give them to me by the end of the week, I can memorize them and reproduce both the day of the mid-term. To me, that's the simple way of getting around this problem.'

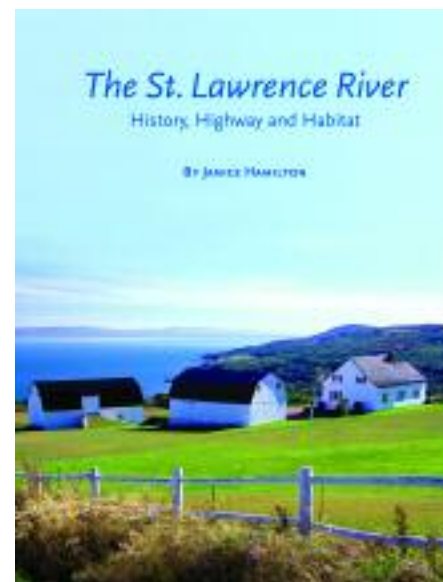
'Why would you ever feel I'd do something like this for you?'

'Think of this as helping a friend. I'd like for you to think of it that way. But if you can't, I guess I'd have to go to the cops with these photos and my story...



'This sweeping portrait of the St. Lawrence ... is overdue. ... The text is crisp, well-organized and tells you everything you need to know about the St. Lawrence...'

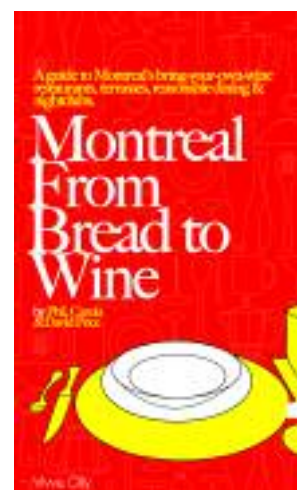
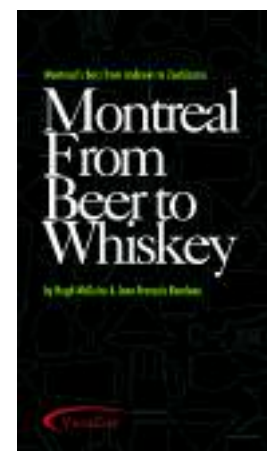
– J. D. Gravenor in the *Montreal Gazette* (June 30, 2006)



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MATERNALLY... *continued from page one*

days exploring, walking in the woods, feeding hay to the neighbouring farmer's cows, horseback riding at the Knowlton Pony Club, and embarking on the occasional excursion to the Granby Zoo or across the border to Vermont. Whether you have a home in the Townships or are simply planning a day-trip for your family, this area has an abundance of activities for all ages!

Sweets and Stingers

A fantastic and educational day trip is the *Ferme Lune de Miel*, a bee interpretation centre, where children and adults can learn all about bees: their lives, society and how honey is made. Visits are available and each tour is preceded by a short, informative lecture and video presentation, after which visitors are invited to observe the inner workings of an actual live beehive. Three times daily, a master bee-keeper answers questions as he opens up one of the bee farm's 400 operational beehives. Although one hive might house as many as 60,000 bees, you don't need to worry about getting stung: it's all witnessed from the safety of a screened-in observation deck. This particular part of the tour is only available weather permitting and only three times daily, so if this is of particular interest to

you, it's a good idea to call ahead to ensure being there at the right time.

The visit wraps up with a visit to North America's largest replica of a beehive – complete with surprisingly realistic bee-puppets – and, of course, a sampling of the delicious honey! There are many different varieties of honey to sample, each a different hue and made from a different type of flower: clover, buckwheat, blueberry flower, wildflower and strawberry flower. This is an ideal day-trip for budding naturalists and inquisitive children (and parents!) of all ages.

The complete visit takes about an hour and a half and is definitely worth the trip. From Montreal, take Exit 150 off Autoroute 10. Figure on about an hour and a half drive from Montreal, as it is located in the town of Stoke, just outside of Sherbrooke. This family-run business is open year-round from 10 am to 5 pm. French guided tours are offered every hour on the hour and English tours are at 11:30 am and 2:30 pm. Admission fees are \$8 for adults, \$6 for children 4 to 16 and admission is free for kids under 3. The recommended age for this activity is 4 and up. www.fermelunedemiel.com, 819.346.2558.

More Sweets

Just thinking about the next activity makes my mouth water ... and no, it is not the wine tasting tour. It's a visit to *Le musée du chocolat*. If you happen to be in

Bromont and are a chocolate lover (who isn't?), this is a fun way to spend half an hour or so and have lunch, since the museum also hosts a restaurant. Chocolate lovers of all ages will enjoy an explanation of how chocolate is made and participate in a free *dégustation* of chocolate. There is a short guided tour and there is no fee, but a voluntary contribution is appreciated. Tours are offered every hour on the hour from 11 am to 4 pm daily in English, French, Spanish and Italian. Opening hours are from 9 am to 6 pm daily, year-round. From Montreal, take Exit 78 off Autoroute 10. *Le musée du chocolat*, 679 Shefford Street (across the church in the "old town" of Bromont), 450.534.3893, www.bromont.com/chocolat.

Animals and Water

Open since 1953, the Granby Zoo has undergone extensive renovations and now hosts more than 1,000 animals. My daughter and I always especially enjoy the monkeys and the gorillas and there is a little petting zoo where children can buy food for the farm animals (25 cents for a handful of grub) and feed and pet them. Another main attraction is seeing the hippos underwater through a huge glass aquarium. The Amazoo water park, also on the premises, includes a giant wave pool, water slides and a wading pool for little ones. Rides are also available and mostly geared towards young children: a carousel, bumper cars and a Ferris wheel. There are six diaper changing facilities on-site: one at the entrance (connected to the public bathrooms) and the rest are scattered throughout the zoo. Pick up a map on your way in. Everything is well-indicated. For breast feeding, the diaper change area is your best bet. Opening hours are from 10 am to 7 pm every day until August 27. From August 28 to September 4, the zoo is open from 10 am to 5 pm daily, but the water park closes for the season on August 27. From September 9 to October 9, the zoo is open on weekends only from 10 am to 5 pm. Admission fees are \$24.99, \$15.99 for children 3 to 12, and free admission for the "under 3 gang". Admission includes access to the Amazoo water park, the jungle gym, rides and parking. Take Exit 68 off Autoroute 10. www.zoodegranby.com, 877.472.6299.

Back in Montreal...

For the city slickers who plan on staying in town, there are always fun things going on in Montreal for kids. The McCord Museum of Canadian History is offering workshops for parents and their babies ages 6 to 18 months. The activity for August and September is "jello painting". Babies will paint aboriginal masks

using Jello ... talk about using a non-toxic, delicious substance, not to mention a great way to stimulate your baby's senses! Once their *pièce de résistance* is finished, babies can take their work home with them. The workshops will be given every half-hour between 1 pm and 3 pm. A *salle d'allaitement* (breastfeeding station) as well as a diaper changing area will be set up to accommodate workshop participants. Independent activities are also available in the permanent exhibition: boxes containing different objects to stimulate the senses, such as furry or textured objects to touch, and plants and herbs to smell. These activities will be available from 10 am to 6 pm the same days as the workshops. Reservations are not necessary; just show up and enjoy! Specify that you are there for the baby workshops, as this particular activity is free. The workshops will be held on August 30, September 27 and every last Wednesday of the month from 1 pm to 3 pm. The McCord Museum also organizes children's birthday parties. McCord Museum of Canadian History, www.mccord-museum.qc.ca, 690 Sherbrooke Street West, 514.398.7100.

For Next Year

As I write, I am looking forward to the eighth annual *Fête des Enfants* (children's festival) to be held on August 19 and 20 at Maisonneuve Park – and my first year attending. There will be shows, multicultural singing and dancing performances, a train ride through Maisonneuve Park in collaboration with Via Rail and a chance to meet Caillou (my daughter, Amel, is a huge fan and can't wait!). The Réptico team will be on site with all sorts of scaly-skinned creatures to give children a chance to "socialize" with lizards, alligators, turtles and more. Amel and I are looking forward to our first time at the *fête* and I will report back for next year!

News Update

Newsflash to all ice cream lovers: a new Ben & Jerry's has opened at 1200 McGill College Avenue, 514.392.1226.

The *Enfants du quartier café familial* is still closed due to a flood in the restaurant upstairs. The owners are planning to reopen mid-September.

With research from Stuart Woods.

Annika Melanson is the author of THE MONTREAL POCKET PARENT and LE BOTTIN DES BAMBINS. She was born and brought up in Montreal. In a past life, she spent most of her time travelling and working as a flight attendant. She now enjoys exploring parent- and child-friendly Montreal with her three-and-a-half year old daughter, Amel.



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RESTAURANT REVIEW

Simple Food through
Chef Scot Woods' Tastebuds

BY JAMES FISCHER

Chef Scot Woods can reduce the requisites of a good meal to a few basic elements: “Does it have enough salt and pepper, is it hot enough and does it generally taste good?” he asks equally of a hamburger and a *terriner de foie gras*.

Scot's frankness might come as a surprise if you consider his credentials. Head chef at Toronto hotspot Habitat Dining Lounge, he cut his chops with name-brand chefs in New York, San Francisco and Toronto. He's now considered a leading young talent by influential *Globe and Mail* critic Joanne Kates, who in a column last December raved, “This guy can cook the pants off most Toronto chefs.”

21st Century Dining

“The suit-and-tie restaurant is slowly dying off,” Scot says. “That's part of a cultural change as well. You might want to go someplace on a whim, without having to dress up. There doesn't have to be a whole bunch of pomp and circumstance just to have a good meal.”

From all-day bacon and eggs at L'Express to foie-gras poutine at Au Pied de Cochon, Montreal's top eateries are serving the once scorned dishes of the *casse croûte*. And according to Scot, it's something that comes naturally to Montrealers.



Patati Patata: Fast Food deluxe

Doing it Wrong in Toronto ...

“There's a lot of people trying to do that now in Toronto, but they don't do it right. They think homey food is cheap and you just throw it on a plate, but that's not what it is. You still have to have the same passion, care and technique to do very simple things right, because there's nothing to hide.”

... and Right in Montreal

This summer I followed Scot's lead to some of his favourite restaurants on the island. My mission was two-fold: to experience Montreal through the tastebuds of a pro, and to uncover simple, authentic, straightforward – and above all, well-seasoned – food.

Au Pied de Cochon

526 Duluth Street East

514.281.1116

www.restaurantaupieddecochon.com

Open for dinner Tuesday-Sunday at 5 pm

At Au Pied de Cochon every dish is epic, from great hunks of smoldering pork (the Au Pied de Cochon ‘cut’ is a little over a pound), to the slow-cooked, literally named, duck-in-a-can (\$36). Foie gras is dispensed like a condiment, and appears in unexpected guises – from the foie-gras hamburger (\$21), a lopsided affair in a floppy brown bun, to foie-gras-stuffed grilled cheese (\$23). There is not a



At Au Pied de Cochon, to eat well means to eat amply.

single green item on the menu, unless you count the bottle of Chartreuse behind the bar.

Dieting diners beware. If a menu in Montreal is controversial, this is it.

It all stems from the steadfast vision of head chef and owner Marc Picard, *bête noir* of the Montreal dining establishment. Picard is the trailblazing, headline-grabbing chef who at the turn of the millennium coupled foie gras with poutine and attached it to a \$20 price-tag. The resulting concoction is an unabashedly earnest rendition of the familiar dish.

Picard's poutine sauce is a textured and well-balanced blend of pork stock, egg yolks, foie gras and a touch of cream. His cheese curds, imported from a local farm, are nested in a pile of top-notch golden frites. Although it can be ordered as a side dish (\$7.50), Au Pied's poutine is best as a main, when it comes garnished with pieces of foie gras.

Part of the pleasure of eating here is in the transgressive act of dropping \$100+ on a roster of guilty pleasures. The strength of Au Pied de Cochon, though, is its frank embrace of deep-seated, uncultured gastronomic impulses. The joy of eating, like other carnal pleasures, is not always in good taste.

Patati Patata

4177 St. Laurent (at Rachel)

514.844.0126

Open for breakfast, lunch and dinner.

Monday to Friday 9 am to 11 pm;

Saturday & Sunday 11 am to 11 pm

If Au Pied de Cochon is a boisterous attention-seeker, then Patati Patata is its demure but no less attractive cousin. Whereas Au Pied de Cochon wants to convert wayward diners to its cause, Patati Patata makes modest claims on our hearts, minds, bellies.

The two restaurants are in many ways a world apart. Everything at Patati Patata, from three-bite burgers to its spare-

change pricing policy, is on a diminished scale: with hamburgers for under \$2 and a \$4 poutine, it is possible to eat a full meal at Patati Patata, with dessert and a small glass of beer, for around \$10.

Most of the menu has been cribbed from La Belle Province, with a few vegetarian-friendly exceptions. The restaurant specializes in miniscule burgers and sandwiches, wafer-thin beef, feta, tofu or fish patties on Portuguese buns, served à la carte or beside a mound of golden fries and an always fresh, always colourful salad.

More than half the floorspace of this tiny restaurant is given over to an open kitchen where a dexterous staff of two takes orders, prepares meals and works the register. With a seating capacity of only ten, surprisingly few diners are turned away for lack of space.

What Patati Patata shares with Au Pied de Cochon is a conviction that good food is a relatively straightforward affair. The revelation here is that refinement can be conjured in humble circumstances, the product of care, attention to detail and hard work.

James Fischer is a Montreal writer.

Chef Scot Woods on his favourite Montreal restaurants:**TOQUÉ!**

“One of the best dining experiences I've had in a long time, although it was a large price tag. Their service program and the way the restaurant is set up is pretty much flawless.”

SCHWARTZ'S

“I love the simplicity of that style of restaurant. I'm always searching out the best corned beef sandwich, and Schwartz's definitely ranks up there. It's far better than anything we have in Toronto.”

MOVIE REVIEW

The Top of the Charts

An Inconvenient Truth



BY CATHERINE MCKENZIE

If you haven't heard, *An Inconvenient Truth* is a documentary of sorts starring the former vice-president of the United States (and almost president in 2000) Al Gore. It is essentially a monologue that tracks a talk that Al Gore has apparently given hundreds of times to thousands of people around the world.

The Future is Yesterday

The monologue is about global warming. Al Gore's message is simple: global warming isn't happening, it's already happened. To convince us of this, Gore takes us through a compelling Power Point presentation (never thought I would write those words!) full of charts and graphs and data demonstrating temperature fluctuations through time and how they correlate with levels of carbon dioxide (five points for guessing they follow a perfect trajectory). And while we have had hot periods, and cold periods, in the past, we have never had carbon dioxide levels as high as there are now. We are in unknown territory; we can only guess how hot it is going to get.

Consequences and Solutions

And if it gets hot, and the ice caps melt, it could set off a chain reaction that could flood a lot of the populated world or – paradoxically – send us spinning into an ice age. Or we could do something, we could all do something small, to reduce our carbon dioxide emissions and stop whatever is going to happen.

Gore's message is mostly directed at an American audience. We can feel smug here in Canada being a small contributor

to the global problem. That being said, we can all follow the suggestions that pop up at the end of the movie. We can all do a little to maybe change the course of history.

Gore-as-Politician Remains the Story

I never really understood the Al-Gore-is-boring and George-Bush-is-charismatic comments that dogged Gore during the 2000 campaign. He might have lacked the pure charisma of Clinton, but I always found him well spoken, intelligent and fairly sincere for a politician. This is the way he comes across in this movie, and he kept my attention through the film.

Now apparently, Al Gore is not running for president again. This is what he says as he tours the talk show circuit promoting this movie. We'll see. But the only weakness in this film is that it occasionally feels like one of those videos they produce about the Democratic or Republican candidate-elect to play at the national convention. Especially egregious in this regard is a shot of Gore in profile at the podium, which was clearly stolen from the opening credits of the *West Wing*.

Hindsight

On the other hand, this movie also made me think about something that may or may not have been intended by the filmmaker. It made me think what the world would be like now if Al Gore had been named the president in 2000 (I use these words intentionally; I think history demonstrates that he did win the election). In particular, how different the Middle East might be. As bombs continue to drop and create rubble, and soldiers and civilians continue to die, and Iraq falls into civil war, I thought of the power of that office and truly understood it for perhaps the first time. One person can make a difference, particularly if that person sits in an oval office in a certain white house.

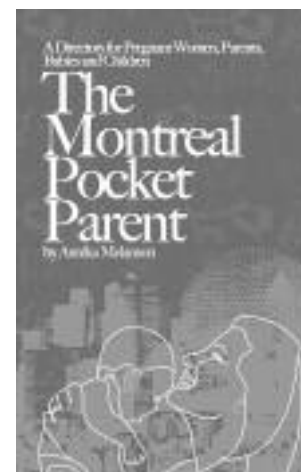
I don't know if what Al Gore thinks is happening really is or what the consequences will be for all of us if we don't do anything. I just know that he convinced me that something is happening, and I enjoyed being convinced. Go and see, and decide for yourself.

Catherine McKenzie
is a lawyer in Montreal.



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PRACTICAL POINTS

Wireless Round-up

Cafés in Westmount and NDG: Price, Quality and Peripherals

BY NEXUS

Second Cup

5550 Monkland Avenue
Free internet access: No
Price of a small coffee: \$1.55
Food served? Yes

The service at this café is impeccable, and the atmosphere isn't your typical Second Cup café: this one has opted for a unique Texan-Latino décor. There is plenty of seating available, with comfortable chairs for prolonged work and cushioned banquettes. It's also a good place to get work done: clients are not rushed to drink their coffee and leave. On the contrary, patrons are often seen relaxing, playing chess, and generally enjoying the experience. The only drawback is the internet access, provided by Hotspot, which customers have to pay to use. You can either connect to your service provider (Bell, Fido, Rogers, Telus, etc.) and include the fee on your monthly bill or pay by credit card (\$6/1-hour session or \$13/24-hour session).

Starbucks

5526 Monkland Avenue
Free internet access? Yes
Price of a small coffee: \$1.70
Food served? Yes

The atmosphere of this Starbucks is more typical of a chain: there is plenty of seating available, but it's a little bland: mostly wooden chairs that are uncomfortable for long stays. However, the café has a pleasant atmosphere in which to work. The music is mellow and you'll find many other patrons reading or working on their laptops. Access to the internet through their provider, Videotron, is very simple: you open your web browser and are asked for a username and password (both of which are provided to you on the same page).

Java U

5511 Monkland Avenue
Free internet access? Yes
Price of a small coffee: \$1.79
Food served? Yes

Java U's atmosphere is more that of a restaurant than of a coffee house: the front of the restaurant and the outdoor terrace are often packed with lunching couples and groups enjoying the diverse food items on the menu and sampling wine and other alcohol. The back of the restaurant has a quieter area replete with leather banquettes, a comfortable area for people working on laptops or reading quietly. This area, however, is right beside the kitchen and the audible clanking of dishes can make it difficult to work. Wireless internet access is simple: your laptop will automatically detect the connection.

Shaika Café

5526 Sherbrooke Street West
Free Internet access? Yes
Price of a small coffee: \$1.50
Food served? Yes

The clients at Shaika are a nice balance between those having relaxed conversations and others working on their laptops. This café doubles as an art gallery, and the beautiful original paintings add a distinct touch to the décor, as do the leather chairs and banquettes. Customers can enjoy a tranquil coffee or meal without feeling under pressure to clear their spots, and many of the patrons remain for long periods of time to use the internet and enjoy the view of the park across the street. Access to the internet is easy: any wireless laptop will connect to it automatically.

With over 10 years of technical experience working for medium-sized and multinational corporations, Nexus helps individuals working from home and small offices. Email your technical questions to him at nexus@nufontier.ca or visit www.nufontier.ca.

WET...

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Approach it in the right frame of mind and it's one of the very best ways to appreciate the wonderful fall colours of the Tremblant region.

Kayaks or canoes are widely available to rent. If you really enjoy yourself, you could invest in your own kayak and a paddle: then all you'll need is a stretch of river.

Tight for space? Inflatable kayaks are now available, which pack into the trunk of even the most compact car.

See reviews at www.kayakonline.com

Sportyaking

Sadly, sportyaking doesn't involve yaks. It's a more extreme version of kayaking for people who actually enjoy getting wet. Only experienced kayakers need apply: paddling for half an hour, before breaking for an all-day picnic, probably won't have prepared you for the shock.

Life vests, recommended for standard kayaks, are mandatory for sportyaking. You'll also be required to wear a hard, full-head helmet. Five seconds into the first section of rapids will make you forget how daft you look.

Sportyaking is a thrill. The boats are self-bailing, so – in theory – they won't fill with water. Be prepared to get up close and personal with rocks, gravel banks, submerged tree roots and other sportyakers. Serious injuries are rare, but you will probably sustain bruises to both body and ego.

I've been more scared before. Sportyaking is not an all-out thrill ride, like a bungee or rollercoaster experience. It's more like interval training in terror. Minutes can pass without incident, then in seconds you can be tossed about like a voter in a separatist referendum.

There probably is some kind of skill involved. Experienced sportyakers would manage better than I did. For sure, though, anybody with guts and a sense of adventure will have an absolute blast. A Laurentians suggestion:

Mont Tremblant Resort

888.738.1777
www.tremblant.ca

Sailing

Like so many watery pastimes, sailing can be different things to different people. You might be a relaxed observer, sipping cocktails on deck while a crew rushes about doing the tricky stuff, or up to your elbows in spray, rope burns and navigation charts.

Montreal being surrounded by water, you're spoiled for choice of locations to sail in. First-timers with a serious interest can take an accredited course. Your course fees include the cost of an exami-

nation (back to school everybody!), after which you will be a certified sailor.

If all that sounds too much like hard work (and expensive), skippered cruises are available. If your ambitions don't extend beyond the next case of beer, that's fine, but landlubbers who want to get their hands dirty, without investing in a course, can fulfil their ambitions, too.

Me? I suffer from seasickness, am prone to sun and windburn, couldn't navigate my way out of a cul-de-sac and get nervous around very deep water. And yes, I loved every minute of it.

Of all watersports, sailing is most prone to being cancelled due to weather, so be prepared for last-minute disappointments. A local suggestion:

Ynot Sailing

514.622.3397
www.ynotsailing.com

Ashley Cotter-Cairns is a freelance writer from England currently residing in Hudson. He has written for a number of publications, including IN CAMERA MAGAZINE, UK MAXIM, THE NET, INTERNATIONAL TRAVELLER, BUSINESS LIFE and EN ROUTE. In collaboration with his wife, Carolina Pla, he has also written and sold a screenplay, THE WITCH AND THE FAMOUS. He can be reached at ashley@church-of-texas-holdem.com



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MISSION MONTREAL

Something Wet for the Weekend, Sir?

In which our correspondent Ashley Cotter-Cairns comes to terms with his aversion to all things watery.

As my wife Carolina never tires of telling me, I am a landlubber. Water's great for taking brief, hot showers in, making plants grow and adding to malt whiskey. Otherwise, you can keep it.

At least, that was the case until *Vivva Montreal* publisher David 'Evil Genius' Price got his hooks into me. The more uncomfortable I am with my subject matter, the more he seems to like it. And so, my protests falling on wet ears, I took the plunge into some watersports, Canadian autumn style.

Scuba Diving

Scuba suits me fine. You can pretend you're not really underwater and are watching a nature show on your flat-screen HDTV. This illusion is complete as soon as the water inside your wetsuit reaches body temperature.

There's a strong sense of the unreal, caused partly by the weird, washed-out colour scheme and partly by the lack of discomfort. You feel warm, weightless and detached from the alien environment you're observing.

There are dangers associated with being metres down in wet stuff. You'll need to take a PADI (Professional Association of Diving Instructors) certificate before any legitimate company will let you dive for real.

The Montreal region, though lacking in sharks and tropical fish, has some excellent lakes to dive in: at St. Zotique, you can explore *bona fide* shipwrecks.

Scuba can be affected by the weather, but is usually available until the beginning of October. After that, you can be civilized and fly to a tropical location instead. A local suggestion:

Total Diving Montreal
514.482.1890
www.totaldiving.com

Kayaking and Canoeing

Paddling a small boat is rather like a marriage: with a decent technique, results are based entirely on the effort you apply.

Much depends on the river you choose. It can be a sedate or exhilarating experience, relatively relaxed or very hard work. Fighting against the current is not recommended, especially if, like me, your usual workout involves pushing a computer mouse around your desktop.

There's some mental agility required if you want to avoid running aground or taking the wrong route. For a sedate mode of transportation, manning a one-



person boat can be surprisingly challenging. I find kayaks more comfortable, though in both cases, comfort is a relative term. You're piloting a small, unsteady craft, bothered by bugs and sunburn, arms and wrists aching from the exertion. For groups of two or three, a canoe is probably a better bet. Misery loves company.

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