

MONTREAL'S FOOD SCENE

By Diana Lambdin Meyer

ALISON SLATTERY

On a beautiful August evening, foodies climb the stairs to the Culinary Lab inside the Society of Technology building in Montreal's Quartier des Spectacles. If they're fortunate, they find an empty table on the restaurant's outdoor terrace, one of the most popular spots in the city to enjoy summer's gifts.

Surrounded by trees, bushes and flowers, the terrace transports you to a lush oasis, setting the stage for an extraordinary culinary experience that celebrates Mother Nature's bounties. It's a meal that would have been hard to find in Montreal a few years ago.

Chef Renaud refers to La Ferme de Quatre-Temps (The Farm of Four Seasons), an agricultural project that seeks to develop a more ecological and nourishing food system in Quebec. One way is working with independently-owned restaurants in Montreal. The city is blessed with over 7,000 restaurants, serving vastly diverse cuisines.

Before La Ferme de Quatre-Temps, Montreal's chefs had a reputation as hard-to-approach among regional

food growers. Farmers outside of the metropolitan area rarely sold directly to restaurants. Chefs relied on hot-house produce and ingredients shipped from long distances. The result was decent cuisine but lacking a distinguishing local flavor that sophisticated gourmands had come to expect.

"We've developed a better understanding of each other's challenges," Renaud says of the relationship he has

with growers. "We have a dialogue now that results in a collaborative process which benefits everyone."

Chef Renaud is almost giddy as he talks about the richness of the heirloom tomatoes, the eggplants and peppers he now works with. Fresh flowers are a common ingredient. He and other chefs now order whole animals rather than specific cuts from suppliers.

"My whole approach to cooking has changed," he says. "Rather than following a recipe, I listen to what [an ingredient] tells me. I let it lead the way, based on its unique flavor that often differs from week to week." ○

To read more about Montreal's food scene, including the influence of female chefs and recommended places to dine, go to NewYorkByRail.com/Montreal-Food-Scene.

DO IT BY TRAIN! Take Amtrak to Montreal (MTR). Montreal is a walkable city, use the Bixi bike-share program or take the Metro (subway). Lyft and Uber available throughout the city.



DLMeyer