

# 36 Hours Montreal



PHOTOGRAPHS BY J. ADAM HUGGINS FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

FROM LEFT Art installation at the Montastiraki showroom; Kenny Hui, president of My Cup of Tea, prepares a pot of green tea; Rue Ste. Catherine in the neighborhood called the Gay Village.

**By SETH SHERWOOD**  
CANADA'S second-largest city may be the second-largest French-speaking metropolis on the planet (after Paris), but the attention lavished on its Frenchness — Bistros! Baguettes! People saying “Bonjour!” — tends to nudge aside the many other ethnic communities within Montreal's remarkably diverse urban sprawl. Italians, Portuguese and Lebanese have a very visible presence, and the city hosts annual festivals dedicated to everything from Asian-American films to Caribbean food. Throw in a pulsing alternative community and creative scene (this is a place that engendered talents as diverse as Saul Bellow, Arcade Fire and the irrepressible William Shatner), and a whole new Montreal opens up. Whether your passion is Syrian cuisine, contemporary art or vintage shopping, Montreal is serving it up with aplomb. C'est vrai.

Rachel is a sort of Little Lisbon, thanks to innumerable hole-in-the-wall Portuguese grills whose windows are filled with roasted chickens. At Portus Calle (4281, boulevard St.-Laurent; 514-849-2070; portuscalle.ca) the chef Helena Loureiro ups the style factor — exposed brick, candlelight — while placing beef, seafood and Portuguese wine at center stage. The sardine fillets have crispy skin and pack in all the sun- and sea-soaked tastes of the Iberian Peninsula. But the star is the steak. Topped with a delicately fried egg, the disc of filet mignon sits atop a haystack of matchstick fries larded with chorizo chunks and slathered with piri-piri sauce. A three-course meal for two costs about 100 Canadian dollars, about the same in U.S. dollars.

**10 p.m.**

**③ Bars Without Borders**

You can practically learn a new language at Les Bobards (4328, boulevard St.-Laurent; 514-987-1174; lesbobards.qc.ca). Just grab a St. Ambrose Cream Ale (3.75 dollars) and join the diverse dancing throngs. Most nights you'll find a band with foreign passports, whether Balkan, Latin American, African or Caribbean. If Tokyo appeals, push the unmarked door at 4175, boulevard St.-Laurent. Speakeasyish and stylish, Big in Japan challenges claustrophobes with its lack of windows, and lights up Nipponophiles with its Suntory Yamazaki single-malt whiskey (10 dollars) and cold Nigori sake (9).

**Saturday**

**11 a.m.**

**④ Oriental Remedies**

Your brain is degenerating and your body is in ruin? Quoc Te (1024, boulevard St.-Laurent; 514-875-8156), a purveyor of Chinese herbs and remedies, can supply you with “Healthy Brain Pills” (3.99 dollars), tincture of hibiscus (for irritated skin) and “Penta Semen Posterity” capsules (for “weakness and flaccidity”; 4.99 dollars). It's a fascinating stop in Montreal's small but lively Chinatown. More cure-alls await at My Cup of Tea (1057A, boulevard St.-Laurent, 514-861-8800; mcot.ca), including “Shopholic” (6.99 dollars), a tea that purports to relieve fatigue.

**12:30 p.m.**

**⑤ The Steam Team**

You won't find General Tso's chicken at this new, second outpost of much-loved Qing Hua (1019, boulevard St.-Laurent; 514-903-9887). The 40-odd varieties of dumplings, served in huge portions of 15, feature bizarre marriages of land and sea, including diced pork with sea urchin (13.99 dollars). If you prefer your turf and surf unalloyed, try the pork with green onions (9.99 dollars). Alternatively, shrimp with zucchini and egg dumplings (10.99 dollars) offers



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one of the most subtle mixes of ocean and agriculture.

**2 p.m.**

**⑥ Art Asylum**

With its white hallways, fluorescent lights and metal-barred doorways, the upper floors of the Belgo Building (372, rue Ste.-Catherine Ouest) suggest a mental hospital. And the dozens of galleries featuring conceptual art sometimes do little to dispel the effect. A good first stop is Visual Voice Art Gallery (514-878-3663; visualvoicegallery.com). The proprietor, Bettina Forget, writes “The Belgo Report” (thebelgoreport.com), your best source for scuttlebutt about the latest shows. Other spaces include Pierre-François Ouellette Art Contemporain (Suite 216; 514-395-6032; pfoac.com) and the joint effort of Galerie Christian Lambert (Suites 501 and 502; 514-638-3994; galeriechristianlambert.com) and Galerie Roger Bellemare (Suites 501 and 502; 514-871-0319; rogerbellemare.com), which has exhibited works by John Cage, Joseph Beuys and other heavyweights.

**4 p.m.**

**⑦ Northern Luminaries**

Warning: Shopping at Three Monkeys (Les Cours Mont Royal; 1455, Peel Street, Suite 207; 514-284-1333;

threemonkeys.ca), one of a handful of indie boutiques hidden in downtown malls, can lead strangers to grate their fingernails against your trousers. Such are the possible consequences of sporting raspberry scratch 'n' sniff jeans (150 dollars) by Naked & Famous Denim, a cult local label. The boutique also stocks the cutesy fashions of Betina Lou, as well as its own line of playful T-shirts (38 dollars) picturing such Montreal institutions as famous buildings and plates of poutine. You can complement your perfumy pants at Little Burgundy (Eaton Center, 705, rue Ste.-Catherine Ouest; 514-844-3226; littleburgundyshoes.com), which sells Canadian-made accessories like long feathered earrings by Everything (20 dollars) and mirrored aviator-style sunglasses by Hibou (12 dollars).

**7 p.m.**

**⑧ A Mideast Feast**

The political situation in Syria may be demoralizing, but the country's finest cultural export — food — is thriving at Restaurant Alep (199, rue Jean Talon Est; 514-270-6396). You won't find any carved camels or other faux Mideast décor in the minimalist dining room, just top-notch mezze — small plates of appetizers. Standouts include a tangy moutabal (a purée of eggplant, tahini and lemon juice) and spicy muhammara (a walnut and red pepper paste). For

main courses, the kefta kebab features ground lamb with a smoky-crisp exterior and garlicky interior. Dinner for two, without drinks, runs about 80 dollars.

**10 p.m.**

**⑨ Sky's the Limit**

You can't accuse the neighborhood called the Gay Village of false advertising. The most out, loud and proud corner of Canada, this strip of Rue Ste.-Catherine is where much of Montreal's gay and lesbian community, and abundant straight people, congregate in bars and clubs of every rainbow stripe. Sky (1474, rue Ste.-Catherine Est; 514-529-6969; complexesky.com) offers floors of fun, from the straight-friendly bar on the ground floor. The vast red-lit space is a fine spot to swig a Stella Artois (4.75 dollars), play video poker and catch a drag show before heading upstairs to dance to hip-hop (level 2) or Top 40 (level 3).

**Sunday**

**10 a.m.**

**⑩ Run to Iran**

By late Sunday morning, the line at Byblos Le Petit Café (1499, avenue Laurier Est; 514-523-9396; bybloslepetitcafe.ca) is full of young couples, grad-student types and others eager to dig into the bright, book-lined Persian restaurant's esteemed brunch. Arrive early and you'll have dibs on the Oriental Omelet, a fragrant mix of cardamom, rose petals, milk and nuts. Alternatively, the plate of lightly salted feta cheese with pita bread and mint, coriander and anise is a creamy-crunchy-herbal blast. Brunch for two costs around 30 dollars.

**Noon**

**⑪ Tweed, Brass and Smoke**

One man's trash is another man's livelihood in Mile End, a bohemian neighborhood whose vintage-store-per-capita ratio must be among the highest in North America. Want to get gussied up like a stylish grandparent? Well-preserved tweed professor jackets (56 dollars) and floral dresses (32 dollars) at Citizen Vintage (5330, boulevard St.-Laurent; 514-439-2774; citizenvintage.com) will do the trick. Need to furnish your home like an early-20th-century machine shop or farmhouse? Style Labo (5765, boulevard St.-Laurent; 514-658-9910; stylelabo-deco.com) sells old metal lockers (850 dollars), long-ago country fair medals (112 dollars) and other lovingly restored relics. More eclectic still, Monastiraki (5478, boulevard St.-Laurent; 514-278-4879; monastiraki.blogspot.com) sells everything from the ethnic (an Egyptian water pipe; 220 dollars) to the alternative (posters of women with machine heads by the local artist Rupert Bottenberg; 40 dollars). Think of it as Montreal in microcosm. ■

**Friday**

**5 p.m.**

**① Look in the Window**

Inaugurated in February, the avant-garde glass building known as Le 2-22 (2, rue Ste.-Catherine Est; le2-22.com) puts Montreal's vast cultural scene at your fingertips — literally. The atrium-like lobby houses La Vitrine (514-285-4545; lavitrine.com), a high-tech information center with touch-screen computers that provide listings of exhibitions, performances and other events around the city, including the coming African music celebration, Festival International Nuits d'Afrique (July 10 to 22). Upstairs, a bookshop called Formats (514-842-5579; formatsbookstore.org) sells art tomes and local magazines, while Vox gallery (514-390-0382; voxphoto.com) hosts art exhibitions.

**8 p.m.**

**② Little Lisbon**

The neighborhood around the intersection of Boulevard St.-Laurent and Rue

**If You Go**

Opened last year, **Zero 1** (1, boulevard René Lévesque Est; 514-871-9696; zero1-mtl.com) contains 120 sleek, modern rooms and is within easy proximity to Chinatown. Doubles from 139 Canadian dollars.

Rockers and night owls might prefer one of the four vintage-furnished rooms at **Pensione Popolo** (4871, boulevard St.-Laurent; 514-284-0122; casadelpopolo.com), a sister project of two nearby live-music bars, Casa del Popolo and La Sala Rossa. Doubles start at 60 dollars and include a pair of free concert passes.

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