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Val David getaway a marvel of rustic luxury

Guest rooms boast heated floors, Montagnard fabrics**ROCHELLE LASH, Freelance**

Published: 3 hours ago The name Domaine des Merveilles suggests a countryside development that is full of delights. This new vacation getaway has all that, but it also is a play on words, using the name of the family that built it - the Merveilles.

Philippe Merveille, his wife, Christelle Pendino Merveille, and their two children come from the French Alps, where they had a love of mountains and the outdoors. After six years of planning and building, they opened their lakeside getaway outside Val David in September.

Domaine des Merveilles consists of a superior B&B and four large vacation houses for rent or purchase, all built around a private lake tucked into the woods.

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Philippe Merveille, an irrepressible builder, constructed the five substantial eco-conscious buildings in a Scandinavian style out of white pine.

The three guest rooms are luxurious by B&B standards, awarded four "suns" out of five by Quebec Tourism.

The couple hopes to get a top rating by next summer when Merveilles' extensive landscaping is finished.

Pendino Merveille imported country-style Montagnard fabrics from France for curtains and bedspreads and put bathrobes, slippers and toiletries in each room. Merveille installed heated floors and glassed-in showers and equipped one junior suite with a wood-burning fireplace, a double jet tub and an LCD television. Merveille's handiwork with wood can be seen everywhere: the built-in closets have heart-shaped designs and the ceiling moulding is inspired by the intricate alpine style of France's Haut Savoie region.

The B&B's heated indoor swimming pool is a definite plus. It's not full-sized, but it does have a perpetual jet, so lap-swimmers can go against the current for as long as they want to. The outdoor hot tub is a great place to unwind.

Domaine des Merveilles' private Lake Huron comes alive in winter with skating and snowshoeing. In summer, the B&B provides a trampoline, pedal boats and other small boats. A complete outdoor playground will be ready next summer.

Guests who fall in love with the location and style of Domaine des Merveilles have an option to rent or buy one of the log chalets.

"Non, non. They're definitely not simple chalets," said Pendino Merveille. "We finished the interiors to a level of luxury not seen in Val David, and they are big. We installed stainless kitchens, red-pine floors, plasma televisions, fireplaces and private hot tubs."

Merveille and Pendino Merveille put their construction talents into these two- to six-bedroom vacation houses.

So far, one is available for rent. It's spacious, sturdy, bright and thoroughly appealing. Arrive after dark and you'll walk into a living room warmed by a wood-

burning fireplace. The ground floor is a wide-open space with a well-equipped kitchen, a large family-style dining table and cushy sofas facing the television. The bathrooms have double sinks and double soaking tubs. When you wake up in the morning, the windows open on the woods and the lake. Merveille built huge decks with family-size hot tubs and barbecues.

Val David is known for its outdoor activities. A new education display along the trails of Le Parc Rgional Dufresne gives a close-up look at wildlife, botany, geology and history. Area animals include Virginia deer, moose and black bears.

"To actually see animals, you have to be there at the right time," said Gilles Parent, director of Parc Dufresne's Val David sector. "Generally, animals don't like to be seen. Plus, we have two wildlife conservation zones, large parts of the park that are closed to hikers from May to October, so there is a slightly better chance of seeing animals in winter, especially deer."

The new, child-friendly display panels also describe the local birds of prey like red-tailed buzzards, sparrow hawks, peregrine falcons and owls. "Because of the park's natural granite cliffs, it's a wonderful place for these birds to nest. They feel protected when they live at least 35 metres high," Parent said.

The panels pay tribute to Val-David's sporting history. Rock-climbing started here in the 1930s when John Brett, a Swiss-born engineer, discovered the natural stone walls around Mont Csaire. Cross-country skiing dates to the early 1930s when brothers Tom and Gault Gillespie, two competitive skiers from Ste. Agathe, helped Laurentian pioneer "Jackrabbit" Johannsen carve trails.

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If You Go

Val David is a one hour drive from Montreal. Take Highway 15 north to Exit 76. Domaine des Merveilles is four kilometres from the centre of town. Take the main street (rue de l'glise), which becomes chemin Doncaster and then chemin Doncaster 2.

Domaine des Merveilles: www.domainedesmerveilles.com, 819-322-7613, 3914 chemin Doncaster 2 in Val David.

Price: \$150 for two, including continental breakfast, indoor pool, hot tub and lake access. Junior suite: \$200 for two; children 5 and younger stay for free; an extra child (6-14) is \$25.

Log vacation houses: (minimum two nights): \$650 for two adults and up to three children, for two nights, in a two- to three-bedroom chalet. Weekly rates are available. To purchase: two-storey, two- to three-bedroom house costs \$350,000 (unfinished interiors) to \$560,000 (fully finished). A three-storey, four- to six-bedroom house costs \$385,000 (unfinished) to \$660,000 (fully finished).

Val David Tourist Bureau: 2525 de l'glise, 888-322-7030 Local 235, www.valdavid.com.

Le Parc Rgional Dufresne: www.parcregionaldufresne.com, 819-322-6999. The ski trail fee is \$8 on weekdays or \$11 on weekends; snowshoeing trail fee, \$5 or \$8. Rentals and lessons available. Chalet d'accueil Anne-Pich, 1165 chemin Condor, Val David, opens Dec. 13.