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Stop for chocolate, foie gras and maple syrup pie

If you go

LES PERVENCHES 150 chemin Boulais, Farnham; 450-293-8311; www.lespervenches.com. Open off-season by appointment only. Biodynamic and Écocert Canada-certified organic chardonnays, reds and rosés.

VAL CAUDALIES, VIGNOBLE ET CIDRERIE 4921 Principale, Dunham; 450-295-2333; www.valcaudalies.com. Open year-round; cross-country skiing, snowshoeing, tours and tastings.

LE VIGNOBLE DE L'ORPAILLEUR 1086 Bruce, Route 202, Dunham; 450-295-2763; www.orpailleur.ca. The second-oldest winery along the Route des Vins, with a museum of winemaking in Quebec.

CLOS SARAGNAT 100 chemin Richford, Frelighsburg; 450-298-1444; www.saragnat.com. This biodynamic winery is open weekends until the end of December.

DOMAINE LES BROME 285 chemin Brome, Lac-Brome; 450-242-2665; www.domainelesbrome.com. Open weekends and by appointment.

MORE INFORMATION
www.laroutedesvins.ca;
www.easterntownships.org;
www.bonjourquebec.com.

» S.S.

» In a storage shed doubling as a tasting room and store, Marler, 37, siphons into our glasses wine after unfinished wine from stainless steel drums. This is the first stop on the Route des Vins, which is a bit like the chardonnay: young, not well-known, but unexpectedly satisfying.

In all, Quebec has 84 wineries out of 400 in Canada, making it the third-largest wine region in the country after Ontario and British Columbia. Seventeen registered wineries are in the Eastern Townships – farm communities starting an hour east of Montreal. The region extends for 13,000 square kilometres, from the lakes and mountains of the Mégantic in the northeast, to Brome-Missisquoi at the U.S. border, a collection of the earliest incorporated townships, which today are about 90 per cent French-speaking.

Twin silos at a crossroads and a blue sign (about the size of an opened paperback novel) depicting grapes are the only signposts to Les Pervenches. Typical. For all the Townships' whispered reputation as the next wine and culinary tourism must-see, this isn't a place accustomed to drawing attention to itself.

"Everybody still thinks the only thing Quebec does well is ice cider, just like people still think Canadians only make ice-wine," says Cory Ciona, som-



Les Pervenches's wines, made by Véronique Hupin and Mike Marler, sell out – so taste them at the source.

melier and co-founder of the all-Canadian wine agents Les Fils de Bacchus, who with his business partner, Guy Bourbonnière, is writing a tasting guide to Canadian wines, due next year.

Leaving Les Pervenches, you follow successive gravel roads wending past burnt-straw-colour fields; past Anglican, Methodist and Catholic one-room churches, covered bridges and old sawmills; past Victorian red-brick and whitewashed clapboard villages, whose place names – for the most part – hint at their Anglo character: Dunham, Farnham,

Frelighsburg, Foster, Knowlton, Lac-Brome.

Dunham – the first township, established in 1796 – and Frelighsburg are for the epicure. Knowlton is known for its antique dealers, and is rumoured to be, but isn't solely, the inspiration for Arthur Ellis Award-winning mystery writer Louise Penny's *Three Pines* (the fictional setting of her books *Still Life*, *Dead Cold*, *The Cruellest Month* and *The Brutal Telling*).

Within Brome-Missisquoi, you can cover the best two or three wineries along the route and be back in Montreal by nightfall. Or venture eastward,

staying at bed and breakfasts and lakeside inns in neighbouring townships, to keep sampling not only wine and ice cider (depending on the season), but artisanal cheese, chocolate, honey, duck and foie gras, and maple syrup pie – a variant of the French-Canadian classic.

There's barely a car to cross paths with on the road to Frelighsburg, where we pause for a late lunch at a pizzeria-cum-convenience store. Paired with a decent "all-dressed," we order Val Caudalies Vidal Demi-Sec (2008): another vintage that's hard to find, even at the best

restaurants in the city. It's made 10 minutes away.

We decide to visit. The 100-acre property, purchased in 2004 by three partners – friends since high school near Montreal – was once exclusively an apple orchard. The partners expanded, planting 20,000 grape vines and opening Val Caudalies year-round for tastings, picnics, weddings and outdoor activities along its three kilometres of forested trails.

Co-owner Guillaume Leroux, 30, pours us his Vidal Late Harvest (2008), a semi-sweet white made with a well-established Quebec variety, and tells us that the Route des Vins a decade ago drew 50,000 people a year; today, it's 400,000 – with about 18,000 visitors to Val Caudalies alone.

This winter, visitors will be able to hike, snowshoe or cross-country ski for a few hours, then taste wines and observe how the late-harvest vintage is made, all free of charge.

In a first for the young wine route, the last two weekends in January, 10 local vineyards including Val Caudalies, and two restaurants, will conduct tastings of late-harvest wines and icewines paired with five- and seven-course menus.

"The outdoors, small-town friendliness, good food, good wine," Leroux says, "here there's so much *plaisir de la vie*."

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