



Reclaimed and restored artifacts give each room
at Auberge Saint-Antoine a window into the past

HOTEL GUESTS LODGE AMID HISTORY

GETAWAYS | BY ANGELA ALLEN

At Auberge Saint-Antoine in Quebec City, backlit boxes display one-time buried objects that tell the stories of this city nearing its 400th birthday.

The 700 meticulously displayed artifacts double as artwork and history at the chic boutique hotel in the Old Port area.

The hotel's renovation shares Quebec City's passion for history — you can't miss it in the many museums and well-preserved buildings.

In the past 18 years, several archeological digs — the latest in 2003 — unearthed shards of china, broken goblets and pieces of handcrafted pipe heads dating back to the late 17th century.

Many of the 5,000 bits and pieces were donated to the city. The rest became stunning elements in the hotel's decor.

Daniel Castonguay, a Quebec-based set and exhibit designer, created the museum-quality displays to bring life to mundane objects such as ancient cutlery and a chipped porcelain teacup.

The hotel has arranged the objects by period. The sixth and top floor holds the youngest artifacts. Descending to the lobby, the history grows older floor by floor, as though digging down through the layers of time.

Auberge Saint-Antoine

8 Rue Sainte-Antoine,
Quebec City, Quebec G1K 4C9

1-888-692-2211;
www.saint-antoine.com

Rooms from \$139-\$600

The hotel's restaurant, Panache, is housed in an adjoining 19th-century maritime building. Both are included in the prestigious Relais & Chateau guide.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF
AUBERGE SAINT-ANTOINE,
QUEBEC CITY.



Each room is distinguished by a single restored artifact. A sixth-floor suite, La Chambre de Diplomats, is furnished with high-tech Bose audio equipment, multiple shower heads in the bath and a stunning view of Quebec City's most photographed building, the towering Chateau Frontenac.

But the room's singularity emerges from a tiny cracked goblet, circa 1880-1925, that serves as a night light.

On the sleek bedside table, a stylish red card explains the goblet's historical context: "By 1881 the port was in decline, but there were still a number of consular agents who occasionally organized elegant receptions. The United States, France and Spain had consuls in Quebec. Portugal, the Netherlands, Argentina, Denmark, Chile, Peru and Montevideo were also represented."

Much of this artistic nod to Quebec City's history came about when Auberge Saint-Antoine's owners, the Price family,

expanded its 31-room inn, established in 1992, with a 64-room addition.

Instead of razing the site to build on it, they painstakingly excavated and recorded its hidden secrets.

The Price family originally hailed from Wales, settled in Quebec in 1810 and made their fortune in ship masts, paper, lumber and, most recently, tourism and historical preservation.

Still, Camille Lapointe, a Quebec City archeologist who wrote the hotel's exhibition texts, says, "It's very rare that a private owner regards archeology as an element in development and as a signature."

But preserving history runs in the family. Tony Price, the late grand-pere of the hotel, founded the Musee du Fort in 1964, a much-visited educational diorama that explains Quebec's City's rich military history.

His wife, Martha "Muffy" Price, oversaw the hotel's interior design with her daugh-

The owners of Auberge Saint-Antoine showcase artifacts unearthed from the hotel site. // PHOTO COURTESY OF AUBERGE SAINT-ANTOINE, QUEBEC CITY.

ter, Lucy Price, and family friend Monique Amyot.

Most days Martha Price cruises the hotel on the lookout for unfinished details and future projects with her nutmeg-colored toy poodle, Bruno LeBrun.

Wherever you look in this hotel — the concierge's desk is built from 300-year-old reclaimed oak unearthed during a dig — New World tourism merged with Old Quebec's history.

"The family is very much into detail," says David Mendel, a Quebec City architectural historian whose Les Visites Culturelles Baillairge leads guided tours. "The city is filled with layers of history, like the hotel. It's not a museum; it's about preservation and adaptation. It's living history." ☺