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January 2007–v2.1

Arts & Entertainment on the Island and Beyond

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Poker Conquers the Internet

BY ASHLEY COTTER-CAIRNS, AKA FATHER ASHLEY OF THE CHURCH OF TEXAS HOLDEM

A glance at the schedule of the cable sports channels will tell you how popular poker has become in recent years. Internet qualifiers have risen from nowhere to instant fortune and fame in the big Las Vegas tournaments. Millions of players around the world log on to play poker every day from the comfort of their home or office.

But before the advent of internet gambling, if you wanted to play poker, chances are you'd either be facing a long drive to an out-of-province casino, or looking for an underground, home-based game.

Real world poker is not illegal in Montreal – certainly not when played amongst friends who are not charging people to play – but it's not licensed here either, so the Casino de Montréal doesn't offer it.

There are no laws forbidding, or even seeming to forbid, Canadians from playing online poker. Some months ago, an act passed in the US seemed to ban online gambling. In *continued on page 8*



Before the internet, gamblers used playing cards to play poker.

Restaurant Review

New Restaurant Leaves Customers in the Dark but Robin Hood Hits His Mark

BY STUART WOODS

With its curtained exterior and licentious slogan (“It’s better in the dark”), you’d be forgiven for mistaking O.NOIR, a new restaurant on St. Catherine St. at Guy, for a massage parlour.

A notice posted in the front window explains that O.NOIR is the only restaurant in Canada with a “dark” dining room, where diners can’t see the tips of their noses, let alone what they’re eating.

.....
continued on page 7

Maternally Yours

Things for Kids to Play With: Food, Music and Snow

BY ANNIKA MELANSON



The holidays are over. If you are anything like me, you have overspent and over-indulged. The aftermath of it all can be a little anti-climactic, so here are some fun things to do with the kids during the cold (warm?) month of January in Montreal.

Through the grapevine, I got wind of a new child-friendly restaurant with a play area and all sorts of activities and *ateliers* (workshops) on site called **Kavaloo**. Kavaloo opened last summer and is owned by Anne Pelletier and Luc

.....
continued on page 5

CONFESSIONS OF A REAL ESTATE AGENT

I love hunting

My game isn’t feathery fowl but finding a home for your down-filled pillows. As a real-estate agent, my biggest thrill is helping my clients track down the right home for their needs.

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HAPPENINGS

Vivva Montreal's guide to what's on around the island.

COMMUNITY EVENTS

■ **Films That Transform.** The McGill medical faculty's ongoing film series features *Doing Time*, *Doing Vipassana*, which documents the inside of India's largest prison and the changes brought about there with the introduction of Vipassana meditation. Tickets are \$10, \$5 for students and seniors. Moyse Hall, 853 Sherbrooke St. West. **January 16 at 7 pm.**

Music

■ **Matt Mays.** Hirsute Halifax rocker plays Cabaret Juste Pour Rire, 2111 St. Laurent. Tickets are \$15.50, available at Cheap Thrills or at www.admission.com. **January 18.**

■ Baroque music ensemble **Les Boréades** teams up with the Franz Joseph String Quartet to perform a programme of concertos written during the often neglected pre-Classical period. The performance will be recorded and aired at a later date on the CBC. Tickets are \$25, \$20 for seniors and \$12 for students. Notre

Dame de Bon Secours Cathedral, 400 St. Paul St. East. Tickets and information, 514.634.1244 or www.boreades.com. **January 25 at 8 pm.**

■ In collaboration with the Conservatoire de musique de Montréal, the piano-duo **Murray-Ouellet** performs a programme of chamber music featuring Ravel, Rachmaninov and Poulenc. Admission is free. Chapelle historique du Bon-Pasteur, 100 Sherbrooke St. East. For information call 514.872.5338. **January 27 at 8 pm.**

■ **SMCQ** presents a tribute to Steve Reich, the "giant of minimalism." Tickets are \$20. Spectrum. For tickets go to www.ticketpro.com. **January 30 at 8 pm.**

■ **International Guitar Night 2007** unites the world's finest acoustic guitarists to perform their latest works and exchange ideas on stage. Tickets are \$26. Theatre Outremont, 1248 Bernard West. For information and tickets call 514.495.9944 or go to www.ticketpro.ca. **January 30 at 7:30 pm.**

■ **Shane Philips**, self-described "sultan of soul," is in town after a European tour and a spot at last year's International Jazz Festival. Presented by local impresarios Global NTT. Tickets are \$8. Jello Bar, 151 Ontario East. Tickets and information at www.globalntt.com. **January 18 at 10 pm.**

■ **A tribute to the Irish of St. Columban, Quebec**, featuring music, dance and lore. Music by celtic band Tüna. Tickets are \$30, \$25 for children and seniors. The Oscar Peterson Concert Hall, 7141 Sherbrooke St. West. For tickets and information call 514.457.1353 or go to www.stcolumban-irish.com. **January 27 at 8 pm.**

THEATRE

■ Centaur Theatre presents the **10th Annual Wildside Theatre Festival**. Centaur Theatre, 453 St. Francis Xavier. Tickets are \$15, \$10 for students and seniors and \$40 for a festival pass. For tickets and information call 514.288.3161 or go to www.centaurtheatre.com. **January 9 to 20.**

ART

■ Quebec artist **Geneviève Chevalier's** new installation is a meditation on NDG's not-so-distant agrarian past, when apple orchards and melon patches dotted the landscape. Maison de la culture NDG, 3755 Botrel. Free entry. Information 514.872.2157. Vernissage **January 11 at 5 pm.**

■ Painter **Zhu Lan** is inspired by the written characters of his mother tongue – Chinese – in a series of abstract paintings. Admission is free.

Maison de la Culture Côte-des-Neiges, 5290 Cote des Neiges. For information call 514.872.6889. Exposition opens **January 25.**

DANCE

■ Inspired by the oeuvre of German Dada artist Hannah Höch, Ce qu'il en reste is choreographer **Louise Bédard's** second work in a series exploring the experiences of female artists from foreign cultures. Free. Saydie Bronfman Centre for the Arts, 5170 Cote St. Catherine. Tickets and information call 514.739.2301 or go to www.lbdanse.org. **January 13 at 8 pm.**

■ Speed is choreographer **Suzanne Miller's** duo for dancers that plays on the themes of movement and speed. Tickets are free. Maison de la culture NDG, 3755 rue Botrel. Tickets and information 514.872.2157. **January 30 at 8 pm.**

AT THE NEW FORUM (BELL CENTRE)

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January 13 Jean-Pierre Ferland
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January 27 Snoop Dogg
January 31 Justin Timberlake
February 5 Billy Talent
February 14 to 16 Gregory Charles
February 19 Barenaked Ladies
February 21 Gipsy Kings
February 23 Jonas
February 24 Rod Stewart
March 28 Christina Aguilera
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A VIVVA CITY GUIDE

BOOK REVIEW

Two for the Money,
Not the Reader

BY CATHERINE MCKENZIE

Babyproof
by Emily Griffin*Dark Assassin*
by Anne Perry

Some of you may remember my fairly positive review of Emily Griffin's first two books, *Something Borrowed* and *Something Blue*. Unfortunately, I cannot be so positive about Griffin's latest offering, *Babyproof*.

A Good Start

The premise of *Babyproof* follows from the name, and is a good one. Claudia, a successful book editor in her thirties who has never wanted to have children, meets a good-looking, smart counterpart who also has no desire for parenthood. They quickly fall in love and get married. They

are blissfully happy, until their best friends (people they always thought were equally against procreating) announce that they are having a baby. Suddenly, Claudia's husband, Ben, amends his stance. Now he wants a baby, and he wants one badly. This about-face leads to the quick demise of their relationship, and the rest of the book is taken up with Claudia's struggle to re-establish her future without the man she loves.

A Bit of Fluff

It all sounds like the makings of a good read. And, on a beach-reading level, this book is good: it is light and fast and ties everything together in a neat little bow at the end. But I found this book more frus-



trating than entertaining. This frustration stems mostly from the fact that Griffin never seems to delve deeply enough into any of the characters' motivations, so that in the end, they aren't believable. For example, Claudia doesn't dislike kids, but doesn't want any for essentially unexplainable reasons, such as they don't really fit into her life. Maybe there are a lot of people out there who don't have kids for this reason, but wouldn't it have been more interesting – wouldn't the character have been more complex – if she simply hated everything about kids?

More troubling was the lightness with which Griffin treats the very real problems that many couples go through when one person decides they want kids and the other doesn't. This must be a heart-wrenching experience: do you leave a person you love simply because they won't give you one thing that you want, given how important that thing seems to you? Instead of really exploring this, Claudia's reaction to Ben's reversal on this issue is essentially reduced to the Seinfeldian concept of "WE HAD A PACT!"; and the characters in this book are about as deep as Jerry, Elaine, George and Kramer.

A Predictable End

While of course this book had to have a romantic ending, I found it to be a complete cop-out. Without giving too much away, I can only say that it seems as if Griffin's imagination is not strong enough to conjure up a realistic woman who is firm in her desire *not* to have kids, no matter what the consequence. So in the end, this is a safe commercial venture for Griffin, but it doesn't show us anything new or that we couldn't have imagined ourselves. For hopeless romantics only.

A Monk's Tale

I was equally disappointed with Anne Perry's latest offering, *Dark Assassin*. This book is the latest in the Monk series, and the usual cast of characters is in place.

Monk, now working for the river police, witnesses the apparent suicide of two ex-lovers off a bridge. However, Monk soon learns that the woman's father had also recently committed suicide, and that she was not the type of person to have taken her own life. She was in fact in the middle of investigating the reasons behind her father's death, which she believed were related to his concerns about the safety of London's underground sewer systems.

This book follows the pattern of the most recent Monk books. Monk gets a case that he has difficulty cracking. His wife, Hester, somehow comes into contact, quite independently, with persons related to Monk's case, and decides to investigate for herself. She keeps this from Monk for a while, and when her involvement comes out, Monk is both angry at her and grateful for the insights she provides. They work together to solve the crime and right some social injustice.

Nothing to See Here, Folks

It is difficult to pinpoint why exactly this well-worn path was so uninteresting to me this go around. I confess that I own, and have enjoyed, all of Perry's previous novels, including the 20 or so in her other long-standing series involving Inspector Pitt. In the end, I have come to the conclusion that it is exactly because the path is so well worn. There is nothing new here. Not in the way Monk and Hester interact, not in the details of the case, not even in the latest injustice that Perry has unearthed in Victorian England. In short, I found the book boring. Perry ought to have wound this series up two books ago when Monk finally discovers what he had been doing the night he lost his memory, and concentrated on her new series set during World War I. For Monk die-hards only.

Catherine McKenzie is a Montreal lawyer.

Vivva

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THEATRE: TRACEY POWER SHINES AS MARY PICKFORD

Silent Screen Star Celebrated In One-Woman Show

BY KRISTINE BEREY

When *Living Shadows: A Story of Mary Pickford* premiered in Montreal last summer, CBC Montreal called it the best show at the Fringe Festival and the Montreal *Mirror* predicted the production's life to be "guaranteed to extend well beyond the fringe circuit." Now, as winner of the 2006 Off the Main award, the show returns as part of the **Centaur Theatre's** 10th Wildside Festival.

Audiences will have a chance to enter and revel in the vanished world of **Mary Pickford** – actor, film producer, feminist, Hollywood pioneer and Canadian.

"In our history, we tend not to celebrate our heroes and heroines very well," says **Gordon McCall**, artistic director of the Centaur Theatre, which will host the five independent productions taking part in the festival. "Often historical figures that broke ground are forgotten. It's very exciting to see a young theatre artist take on this artistic icon and cinematic heroine and do it with such flair."

Writer/performer **Tracey Power's** connection to Pickford was immediate. "On the internet ... I came across Canadian women in history. One paragraph and that was it," Power said. "I was drawn to the determination and strength of Mary Pickford not only to survive, but to then become a major player in the art of motion pictures. Her love and dedication to that art was without limits."

Power's research took her from libraries to Los Angeles, where she gained access to Pickford's personal letters and scrap-

books at the Mary Pickford Institute.

"While researching her life I couldn't help but become completely lost in her world to the point where I actually felt like I was a part of it. It is amazing how close you can feel to someone even though you have never met her."

Power approached director, documentarist and colleague **Brian Dooley**, knowing that he would understand her desire to tell this story. "I was intrigued by both the subject and the theatrical potential, not to mention Tracey's tireless enthusiasm and curiosity for this silent screen icon," Dooley said. Before the project, Dooley knew only the "broad strokes" about Pickford: "Silent screen star, founder of United Artists and, ironically, 'America's Sweet Heart.' The amount of research material was daunting and illuminated much; Mary Pickford, I quickly learned, was at one time the most famous woman in the world."

A Play about Movies

The story of Pickford's career is also the story of how film evolved, as an art and as an industry, from the silent one-reel "flickers" of 1909 to the beginnings of lavish productions with sound and colour by the mid-1930s.

The play begins at the premiere of *Sunset Boulevard*, a film about an aging silent screen star refusing to fade away. Although we remember **Gloria Swanson's** superb performance in the eerily tragic role, director **Billy Wilder** had actually offered it first to Pickford. She declined for lack of creative control of the storyline.

In *Living Shadows*, Pickford recalls a meeting with Wilder, where she tells him the story of her life.

"I wanted to capture the mood of silent film," says Power. "The scenes that are in the past are like a silent movie with title cards at the top of the scene. The movement is slightly heightened in comparison to the rest of the play. Silent film actors could not rely on words to tell the story, so their eyes, hands and bodies had to be much more expressive." Power's performance, partnering words, music and movement in this homage to Pickford, has been hailed by critics as both stellar and luminous.

Pickford and Chaplin United as Artists

At the height of her career, Pickford was earning up to \$350,000 a year, as much as her colleague and friend **Charlie Chaplin**. She and her husband, **Douglas Fairbanks**, ruled Hollywood for nearly 14 years, both in the public's imagination as the most popular couple in the world and economically as founders, with director **D. W. Griffiths** and Charlie Chaplin, of United Artists, a company that allowed them artistic and financial control over the films they made.

The roles that made America fall in love with Pickford and catapulted her to international celebrity are the young girls with the golden curls featured in films like *Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm*, *Pollyanna* and *The Poor Little Rich Girl*. These child-characters, often coming from disadvantaged backgrounds, were vulnerable, but feisty, as they overcame adversity against all odds and gave Americans something to hope for and something to smile about. "Make them laugh, make them cry, and back to laughter. What do people go to the theatre for? An emotional exercise," Pickford said.

A Canadian Background Story

Pickford's performance in these roles rang true because to some degree she was playing herself. Pickford began performing in a Toronto theatre as a child, out of financial necessity. By the time she turned 10, she was the main breadwinner of her single-parent family. She had to develop an iron discipline and an awesome sense of responsibility – qualities that guided her throughout her life. Her father had died when she was 4 years old and in many ways, she felt she never had a childhood.

During her years in cinema, she became

interested in every aspect of filmmaking and learned from everyone around her. It was during some "fun" with her first director, D.W. Griffiths, that they thought of moving the big heavy box that was the camera closer to the stage, and experimenting with filming at various distances. Reactions to the resulting close-up, or "a big disjointed head," were varied, and included objections on the grounds that "it would scare pregnant ladies."

From Camera to Sound

She and cameraman **Billy Bitzer** came up with what would become standard practice in shooting silent films: aiming the camera into the light with reflected light in front of the subject, providing a surreal glow without blackening out the face. Pickford also infused the hopelessly gloomy script of *The Poor Little Rich Girl* with humour and refused to prance around "like chickens without heads" as directed, at a time when it was unheard of for an actress to challenge a director.

Financially and creatively, she always insisted on being treated as an equal to men, prompting **Samuel Goldwyn** to remark, "It often took longer to make one of Mary's contracts than to make Mary's pictures."

As the era of silent film came and went within one generation, Pickford had to deal with the world as it changed around her. As she made her way into the talkies, even though she won an Oscar for her adult role in *Coquette*, the world no longer seemed interested. At one point she wanted to burn her work for fear of being laughed at.

"*Living Shadows* resonates with fulfilled dreams that haunt and entrap," Dooley says. "Mary Pickford's life was complex: filled with dogged pursuit, a need for survival, tragedy and a haunting realization that our successes can prove a crushing burden. Not only is Mary Pickford a part of Canadian cultural history, but her pioneering spirit and contribution to the art of movie-making make her an important part of film history around the world."

Living Shadows: A Story of Mary Pickford plays at the Centaur Theatre on **January 11, 13, 16 at 7 pm. January 17 at 9 pm. January 20 at 3 pm.** For more information about the 10th Annual Wildside Festival call 514.288.3161.

Kristine Berey is a Montreal-based writer.



MATERNALLY...*continued from page 1*

Doumeau, who came up with the concept of “the social liberation of a family with young children” (they are parents themselves, of course!). Kavaloo is geared towards families with children ages 6 months to 7 years and hosts two dining rooms, both airy and bright – one for adults and one for families where little ones can have fun in an adjacent play room with a slide, play structure and a pool of balls. There is also a little house in the dining room with toys. High chairs as well as booster seats are available. The walls are decorated with bright, colourful paintings and what I liked the most is that the whole wall facing the street is a window. Airy and bright!

The menu is French and very health-conscious. The “Junior Menu” includes a choice of quiche, ham or chicken served with vegetables, rice and cheese sprinkles for \$4.50. A variety of purees, such as carrot and salmon or squash with tomato and chicken, are available for babies for \$3.25, and are made with spring water and no added salt or fat. The menu is coded to alert parents to dishes that may contain allergy-triggering foods: “O” for foods that contain eggs, “G” for gluten, “N” for nuts... you get the idea. After the children have finished eating, a damp facecloth is brought over so that you can wash your child’s face and hands. They have certainly thought of everything!

I sampled a delicious tomato and goat cheese quiche served with a salad and thoroughly enjoyed it. The desserts were also very tempting: fresh fruit with yogurt, milk chocolate tart, lemon tart, several fruit mousses and all sorts of different homemade fruit purees for little ones. Everything is simple, fresh and tasty. And very affordable.

Apart from all of this great food, activities are offered for children ages 6 to 36 months accompanied by an adult and for children aged 3 to 7 years unaccompanied.

These activities include arts & crafts, puppet theatre, dance, singing and storytelling. There are six to eight children per group. For those who would like a break from parent duty, you can leave your 6- to 36-month-old to be supervised for a maximum of two and a half hours. Every week, Kavaloo offers a range of activities and workshops. To receive their list of weekly activities and events, e-mail info@kavaloo.com. Birthday packages are also available. Kavaloo is open from Tuesday to Sunday from 11 am to 9 pm. Kavaloo, 1298 Van Horne (corner of Outremont Avenue), 514.270.7715, www.kavaloo.com.

Snow Forts

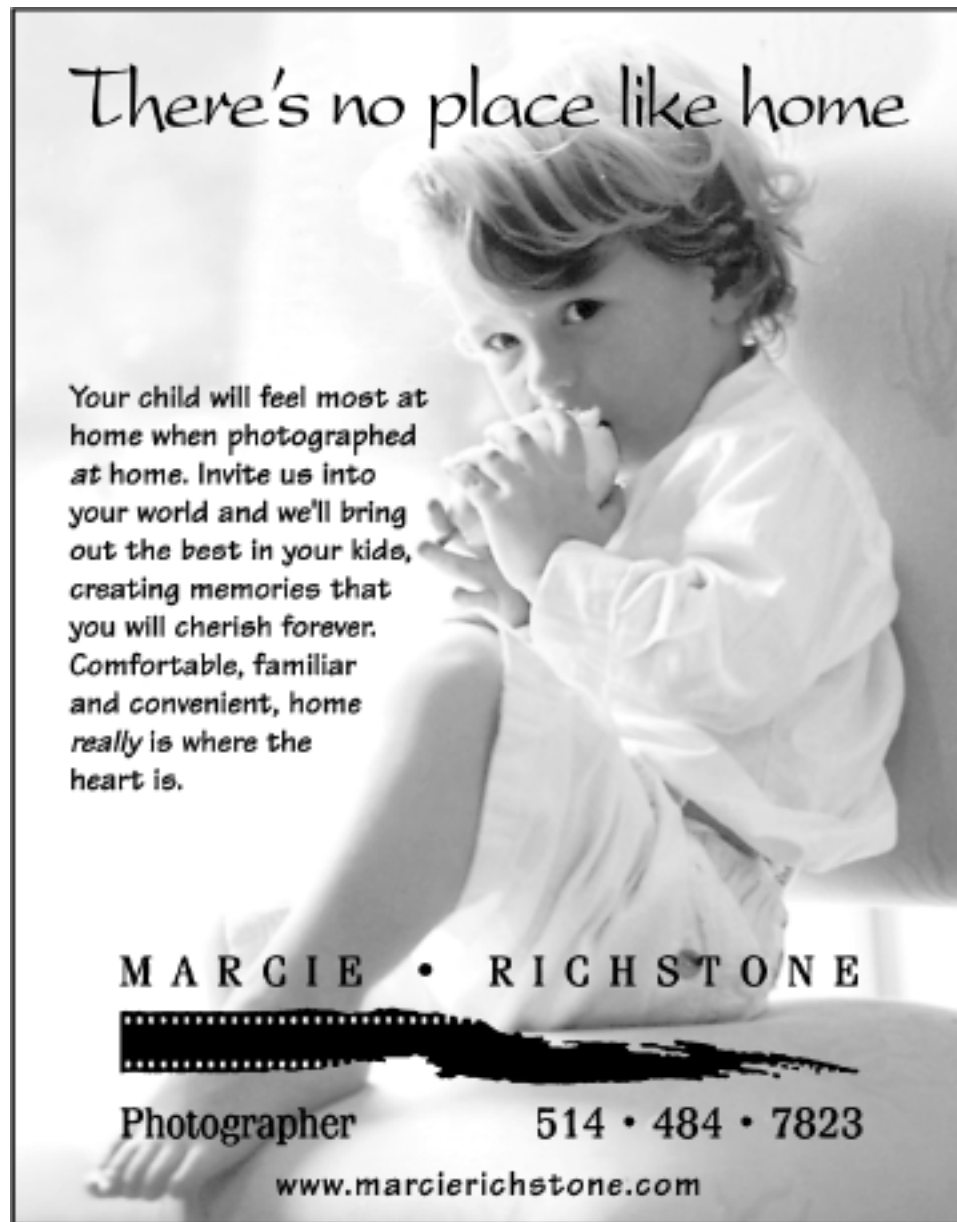
The Canadian Centre for Architecture is having a Sunday outdoor activity for families on **January 14 and 21** called **My Snow City**. Families are invited to build forts, caves, houses and castles in Baile Park to create an imaginative snow city. Wear your snowsuits and enjoy a hot cup of hot chocolate afterwards. This workshop is offered at 10:25 am and at 2 pm and lasts two hours. Admission is \$6 for adults and \$4 for children. This activity is suitable for children ages 5 to 12. In the event of bad weather an indoor workshop will be offered. Reservations are required. Canadian Centre for Architecture, 1920 Baile Street, 514.939.7026, www.cca.qc.ca/familyprogram.

Music and Food

For 33 years, **Place des Arts** and **Jeunesses Musicales du Canada** have been presenting an eight-part musical entertainment series to families called **Sons et Brioches** (translation: sounds and pastries!). Families are invited to arrive early, have a cup of coffee or juice, munch on pastries and then listen to a concert.

My daughter Amel and I went to the December concert and really enjoyed it. We arrived early as we were told that there is always a lineup for the brioches and only the first 500 spectators will have access to the food. Amel, who is 4, enjoyed the concert, but I wouldn’t recommend it for younger audiences simply because I don’t think that they would sit through it. The show lasts an hour and is presented in French (even if your little one doesn’t understand French, they will surely enjoy the international language of music!).

The next concert, which will be presented on **January 28** is **Skarazula**. A trio will sing in different languages and play unusual musical instruments and melodies inspired by medieval times. Doors open at 10:20 am so you can check your coats and have a bite. The show begins at 11 am at the Piano Noble at the Salle Wilfred-Pelletier. Admission is \$8 per person and \$25 for the family package



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(2 adults, 2 children). Reservations are recommended. *Sons et Brioches*, Place des Arts, 514.842.2112, www.pda.qc.ca.

More Parenting Info

I have recently discovered a wonderful, free and informative website for Montreal mummies: www.mummieslist.com. Through this website, mummies receive information on activities and events for babies and children and also get discounts at kid-related businesses in Montreal. This is also a great place to swap tips and resources with other Montreal mothers. Andrea Rich is the founder of Mummieslist and a mother herself. She has managed to recruit 300 mothers and the list is growing. Check it out!

Last but not least, enjoy some one-on-one time with your little ones. Between work, keeping the house tidy and getting meals on the table while desperately trying to remain sane, it is easy to forget that the most important thing is spending time with your child. An afternoon playing in

the snow or skating will always be remembered as a special time. Happy New Year!

Annika Melanson is the author of THE MONTREAL POCKET PARENT and LE BOTTIN DES BAMBINS.

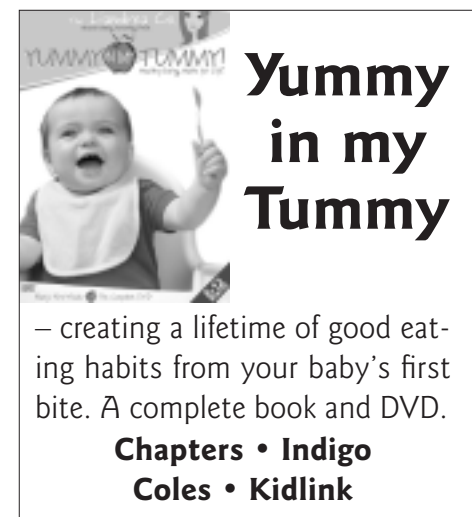


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COUNTRY DOCTOR

Winning the Weight War

By DR. VIRGINIA HEESE

It's that lovely time of year again. We've all come through a stressful holiday season, rife with high expectations, high bills, and quite possibly higher numbers on the bathroom scale. The holiday season is a classic time to pack on a few pounds, but here are a few tips to help melt them away and even get a jump on some of your New Year's resolutions.

Professional Help Helps

All right, time for a shameless – but important – plug for my colleagues. I do HIGHLY recommend a check-up with your family practitioner for a detailed and individual review of your health history, a physical exam, and possibly even some general screening for underlying conditions that may predispose you to weight gain (and make it just that much harder for you to lose unwanted poundage!). This kind of evaluation would be useful to assess your individual need to lose weight – and help you set some safe and appropriate goals for yourself. To boot, people are generally more successful at losing weight – and KEEPING it off – when they have the continued monitoring and support of trained health professionals.

Why Fads Fail

First off, let me address the weighty issue of popular or fad diets. As is obvious

by turning on the television, picking up almost any newspaper, or doing even the most cursory of internet searches, there are a plethora of different diets available. Common sense dictates, though, that if there were any one diet that worked safely and effectively, everyone would be on it! The very fact that there are so many different options available means, sadly, that there is no one easy answer, and that none of these specialized diets works especially well. The danger of fad diets lies in the fact that they often focus on eating particular foods in limited quantities. Many result in the rapid loss of water weight, which rebounds right back when you resume your regular eating habits. Of even greater concern is that omitting certain foods can lead to missing out on vital nutrients that your body needs to work at its optimum. The simple, boring and undeniable truth is that true weight loss can only be achieved when your body burns off more calories than you consume in a day. The further, unglamorous truth of the matter is that the key to any healthy diet is variety and adequate nutrient intake. Slow, but steady and safe, changes in your diet are the best way to make those extra pounds go away for good.

Eat Often ... but Right

I recommend eating small but frequent meals – this will help you feel full, reduce the likelihood of overeating at your next

meal and keep your metabolism in high gear. Some folks think that skipping meals is a good way to reduce your daily caloric intake – absolutely not! Eating regular meals and snacks can help reduce cravings and lower your tendency to overeat later. Whatever you do, don't skip breakfast. It is of key importance to kick start your metabolism after your overnight fast. Your body needs fuel to help burn off extra weight. Make sure the fuel you choose is high quality and nutrient-dense.

Get familiar with food labels, portion size, and the calorie and fat content of your usual diet. Try using a salad plate for dinner to help keep your portion sizes under control. Be particularly wary of any food labeled “fat free”; remember that fat free does NOT mean calorie free. Reduce your intake of empty calories, and limit your intake of sweets. Don't try to eliminate sweets altogether, though – telling yourself you can't have a certain food may only make you crave it more! Moderation, as always, is the key to success.

Look Out for Liquids

Be aware that beverages can make a big difference. Alcohol and regular soda have calories that can quickly add up. A 12-ounce can of soda pop can contain between 9 to 12 teaspoons of sugar. Switch to low-calorie flavored water, regular water or nonfat milk.

I'm a big fan of keeping a food and exercise journal. Be honest! This will help you to actually see what you are consuming daily and may reveal some easily changeable bad eating habits. Remember as you review your journal that small but consistent changes in food choices are most effective at encouraging permanent weight loss.

You have many wonderful options for dining out in this city. Don't let your weight management goals be derailed by restaurant foods. Consider eating only half of what is served to you – restaurant portions can be gargantuan. Take half home and enjoy it the next day. You may also want to share your main meal with a friend, or have an appetizer as your meal. Try requesting a lunch-size portion – many restaurants are willing to accommodate your needs. Never be shy to substitute lower calorie side dishes like salad, baked potatoes or soup for french fries.

And Yes: Exercise!

Last, but certainly not least, don't discount the many benefits of adding more exercise to your routine. Exercise helps you lose weight faster than with diet alone and can also help with stress-relief, boost your immune system, and increase your energy overall. Again, consult with your health professional about the kinds of activities that are best for you.

Remember that weight loss can be very slow going. Don't hesitate to consult a professional to help you achieve your goals. Most importantly, stay motivated and be patient. Weight gain didn't happen overnight and neither will permanent weight loss. Keep some of these dieting tips in mind and watch their effects add up and your holiday weight come off.

Dr. Virginia Heese is a Canadian and American Board-certified family physician and a graduate of McGill University. She currently resides in Vermont. She cannot stress enough that the general advice supplied above should not, and cannot, replace the individualized advice and care of your own family physician.

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RESTAURANT...

continued from page 1

The concept behind the restaurant originated in Zurich, where a sightless pastor blindfolded his guests before supper. His intentions were to heighten the sensual appeal of the food and to share, if only for a few hours, the experience of blindness.

The idea has spawned successful restaurants in London, Paris and Moscow. Though unaffiliated with its European counterparts, O.NOIR has been booked solid since it opened in September.

What remains to be seen is whether the restaurant's novel concept is more than just a fad.

Dark Dining

The restaurant is split between the pitch-dark dining room and a dimly lit waiting area where diners stash their valu-



All you will see of the restaurant.

ables in metal gym lockers and consult the menu. When I arrived for the 9 pm seating on a recent Friday night, the antechamber was swarming with expectant diners, as two sighted hostesses worked their way through the crowd taking orders.

The menu – a conservative, Italian-inspired affair in two courses – is a mandatory table d'hôte with an eyebrow-raising average price of \$30. I opted for the “chef's surprise” menu, which takes the traditional chef's tasting menu to playful extremes, requiring the diner to *guess* what he's eating.

After a brief delay, a woman in dark sunglasses – one of the visually impaired servers who works in the darkened interior – appeared from behind a thick velvet curtain and introduced herself as our waitress and “guide.” I was instructed to place

my hand firmly on her shoulder and was thusly conducted to the table, the server shouting “*Attention!*” to warn of our approach.

The immediate darkness was unsettling and eerily tactile, the visual equivalent of deafening silence. It was only by locating a dimly glowing exit sign – the only lighted object in the room – that I oriented myself during the meal.

Robbed Blind

The restaurant does not serve soup, which has the potential to scald. Instead, our meal commenced unostentatiously with a warmed ciabatta bun that we ate before the entrees in order to eliminate clutter and confusion on the table.

My first “surprise” was a mess of flaked lobster wrapped in a wet noodle (lobster ravioli, I guessed correctly). The dish was served in a dousing of tomato sauce that tasted unmistakably of burned garlic. My companion's carpaccio was in worse shape: thin, semi-frozen slices of beef encrusted with ice crystals, topped by a glutinous mayonnaise-based sauce. Unthawed, the meat was leathery, flavourless – a shock to our denfenseless palates.

The “surprise” main was a charred filet mignon in gravy served beside lukewarm, machine-whipped potatoes, cooked carrots and asparagus. (Apparently, temperature control was a serious problem in the kitchen.) My companion's sun-dried tomato risotto was the evening's success, if only for its comforting, uncomplicated blandness.

My disappointment with the meal, though not unexpected, was unexpectedly severe. The dismaying feeling of having been had was amplified by the “surprise” dessert – a \$7 add-on to an already expensive meal – that turned out to be an uninspired orb of chocolate tartufo.

Bedlam

The experience confirmed my worst fears about fad restaurants. For all the brashness of its concept, O.NOIR failed to meet basic expectations of food quality and customer care. A poorly conceived restaurant is not improved by turning out the lights.

The dark should have been a way of experimenting with the vivid contrast of

flavour or of allowing for the sensuous exploration of aroma and texture. Instead, no concession was made to the unique plight of the sightless diners. We were served mediocre food at rickety tables, to a soundtrack of tinny new-age techno and the servers' disconcerting volleys of “*Attention!*”

When I lost my napkin and began wiping my mouth with the next best thing (the tablecloth) – after having eaten most of the meal with the only implements I could trust in the dark (my hands) – I realized the evening had veered into bed-

Where to go:

O.NOIR Restaurant

1631 St. Catherine St. West

514-937-9727

www.onoir.com

Open for dinner seven nights a week.

First service: 5:45 pm

Second service: 9 pm

Robin des Bois

4403 St. Laurent

514.288.1010

www.robindesbois.ca

Monday to Friday: 8 am to 10 pm

Saturday and Sunday: 6 pm to 10 pm

lam. A large party hollering into the void at my left made conversation impossible. My companion was unimpressed with the physical set-up, after reaching for a glass of water and brushing up against our neighbour – whose table, it turned out, was pushed flush against our own. The *pièce de résistance*? An announcement by one of our fellow diners requesting the large group to stop throwing food. Not the restaurant's fault, but they did set the stage...

In the end, O.NOIR failed on two accounts: in showing a base amount of care in the kitchen and in plausibly representing the experience of the blind. Overpaying for mishandled, wedding-calibre food is not a worthwhile culinary experience; nor is it, I hope, a regular experience of the blind.

Good News Story

After rough handling at O.NOIR, I was wary of any restaurant purporting to offer a novel dining experience. So it was with apprehension that I made a reservation at Robin des Bois, a restaurant unique in that it pairs fine dining with charity.

Staffed mostly by volunteers, Robin des Bois donates 100% of its profits to local charities.

The restaurant is the brainchild of Judy Servay, a first-time restaurateur who had

an epiphany about the importance of strong community on a recent trip to Africa.

“It's a cliché,” Servay admitted, “but for all the problems in Africa, you don't see the kind of misery we have here. That's because there's a sense of community, a sense that you're never alone.”

When she got back to Canada, Servay quit her job as a media executive and asked herself what work would benefit others. Her answer – an upscale restaurant on St. Laurent – is not the most obvious one, but for Servay, it was a way of making volunteerism accessible for people intimidated by front-line outreach.

The idea – making charitable work literally palatable – is especially appropriate in a province where per capita donations to charity are half the Canadian average. But good ideas won't cook a casserole. The proof, as they say, is in the pudding.

High-End Comfort Food

Robin des Bois's menu was conceived by Toqué! alumna Miriam Pelletier – one of a minority of staff that draws a salary – and features high-end, French-inspired comfort food – what an elegant gourmand might have on hand for solitary meals.

The venison was the envy of the table, cooked beet-red and served atop a turnip puree, Swiss chard and a carrot, split

continued on page 12

Alpenhaus

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Alpenhaus is located between downtown Montreal and Westmount in Shaughnessy Village. The restaurant recently celebrated its 39th anniversary. Alpenhaus is a romantic restaurant that offers authentic fondues, as well as other excellent European dishes.

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POKER...

continued from page 1

fact, it's still not illegal in the majority of the 50 states (see below for legal resources).

(To see this writer's foray into the gambling industry see advertisement on p. 11.)

What is Internet Poker?

Poker hosting companies provide their members access to virtual poker rooms. There, for play money or real cash, people from around the world can sit and face one another at games like Texas Holdem, Stud or Omaha poker, or in poker tournaments.

There are several advantages to playing poker online, rather than at a real table:

- A lack of experience will not be readily apparent. New players can fumble chips and cards, blink, sweat, blush or let slip any number of other giveaway clues (known as "poker tells") about the strength or weakness of their hand.
- You can play more hands. Online sites deal hands more rapidly than a human dealer. You can also sit down to as many as four tables at a time on most sites, so you'll see many more hands per hour than at a live game.
- Convenience. Poker is available 24/7 on the internet, which means you can play

anytime, anyplace, anywhere.

- Shallow learning curve. Poker tools showing you live odds for your hand, the pot value and more are readily available, helping new players come to grips with this complex game. Try taking a how-to-play-poker book to a real-world poker room and see what reaction you get!

Some Poker Terms

Pocket pair: any two cards in your hand that are paired. The best are aces, which count high and low in most poker games.

All-in: every chip you have is in the current pot. Nobody can make you bet any more. You will always see the hand out to the end.

Board: the community cards in shared games like Texas Holdem. Five cards are dealt in the centre. The first three are the flop, the next is the turn and the last is the river.

Calling station: an inexperienced, weak player who calls too often and plays far too many hands.

Shark: a player who is aggressive and experienced, who preys on the inexperienced "fish" in a poker school.

How Do Poker Sites Work?

Begin by downloading your chosen poker site's software, then sign up using a



Full Tilt Poker is typical of internet poker hosting sites.

unique username and password. You'll now have the option to play for free against other human players forever, if you so choose, or deposit cash into your account and begin playing for real money. Your cash balance will be reflected in the cashier screen of your poker account.

In each hand dealt for real money, the poker site acts as dealer, banker and manager. The dealer holds onto the pot until it's finished, when he pushes the cash to the winning player. A percentage, known as "the rake", is deducted from each pot. This is how poker sites make their profits.

Assuming all goes well, you may cash out your poker chips at any stage. The stack of chips on the table will be converted back to real dollars in your poker cashier screen. These can be withdrawn from the poker site any time you wish.

Poker tournaments work differently. Everybody starts with a set amount of chips – the "buy-in" – which costs a dollar-value. Everybody's buy-ins are pooled together to form the prize fund, which is then shared among the top few finishers. Nobody may cash in until the tournament ends.

This way, a relatively small buy-in can give you a shot at a large prize. (This is how internet qualifiers raised the \$10,000 stake for the World Series of Poker main event in Las Vegas.)

The Unlawful Internet Gambling Enforcement Act

Space does not allow me to examine this in detail. However, an excellent article by a legal specialist has saved me the trouble! The upshot is that no new law was created and gambling is no more illegal in the US

than it was the day before the act passed. Read the article by Allyn Jaffrey Shulman at http://cardplayer.com/poker_law/article/1446 

Poker resources

I hope this brief introduction to internet poker has whetted your appetite. Want to find out more about any aspect of the game? Visit these websites, or feel free to write me for advice anytime: ashley@church-of-texas-holdem.com.

Poker Tracker

Software that stores your hand history and provides you with stats about how profitable various combinations and plays are for you. www.pokertracker.com

Poker Odds Calculator

This doesn't work in real time, but it's a very powerful tool to help new players get a grip on the math of Texas Holdem. www.cardplayer.com/tools_tips

Gambler's Bookshop

Simply the best selection of books about gambling of all kinds. www.gamblersbook.com

United Poker Forum

A great place to chat to other poker players, ask their opinion of poker situations, tournament play and more. www.unitedpokerforum.com

The Church of Texas Holdem

Probably the funniest internet poker website. But I would say that... www.church-of-texas-holdem.com



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WINE

New Year's Resolutions

BY CAROLA PRICE

I can safely assume that the resolutions that we made a few days ago, with swelled egos during a boisterous evening full of libation, have already been broken. Perhaps hangover cures take away head-throbbing and well-meant resolve?

So with this first article of the year, what do I re-resolve? I will drink more! I will eat more! I will learn more! And, for me, it is all career building. (Nice work, if you can get it.) As a sommelier and wine writer, these are the experiences that I need. But it won't be easy: the finer the food, the greater the disappointment when eating everyday concoctions with Grandma and the kids. It may turn out to be the other way around, however, with a need for good old home cooking because my palate is constantly bombarded with foie gras and truffle oil. Who knows how the year will pan out, but I will rage on in search of great wines at fair prices as well as news and events in the wine world. Welcome to 2007!

Italian Bubbles

After all the bottles of bubbly consumed this past holiday, it is becoming apparent that **Prosecco** is on its way to becoming the world's most purchased sparkling wine. Italy creates this fresh sparkler in the region of Veneto from a 400-year-old tradition. The top areas to seek out are **Valdobbiadene** and **Cortizze** DOCs. Keep in mind that Prosecco is best enjoyed up to a year from the vintage. Although it can be cellared for two years, it really keeps the freshness and acidity well in the short term. At best, Quebec will see a dozen labels this year, so the ones to seek out for sampling are **Nino Franco** and **Astoria**.

Feeling Hot, Hot, Hot

The love affair with all things Spanish, as well as things Portuguese, continues this year, which introduces still wine made from the glorious grapes of Port. Not only are the Spanish and Portuguese offerings at an all-time high at the SAQ, but the price-to-quality ratio can be where the love of these wines begins.

While exploring Spain, forget **Rioja** this year. Look to the newer regions like **Ju-milla**, **Valdepenas** and **Yecla**. Amazing fruity and stronger reds and rosés are coming from these areas and can match with everything in your fridge. Portugal may be new to you and will be a welcome

surprise. Steer clear of any port and head to the **Alentejo** and the **Douro** for easy throat-coating wines with supple tannins. Wines to drink this year include **Pedras Do Monte** and **Cortez de Cima**.

No Ice, No Wine

This global warming thing may be a real threat to Canada's lead in a specialized wine market. To date, no grapes have been picked for our famous ice wine. If the temperatures don't start dropping, this may be the first time that ice wine will not be available to sell. What a dilemma we face. I like not wearing boots on the streets of Montreal in January, but the sweet nectar in a glass by a roaring fire after skiing on a blustery March day is almost the only thing that keeps me from moving to the embracing warmth of the Caribbean and shunning ice in all its forms. The most sought-after ice wines are made by **Inniskillin** and **Jackson Triggs** from the Niagara region in Ontario. Everyone pray for cold and maybe the industry won't have a complete meltdown this year.

Global Glut Continues

In 2005, over 430 million bottles of wine were turned into fuel and cleaning agents in France alone! In California, there is so much wine produced and not enough buyers to purchase it, that it is also being turned into something we couldn't possibly put in our glasses. The number of vineyards that are being dug up shows me that a wine glut may be the best thing for all of us. Thinning out to a respectable bunch of quality producers at great prices is what we wine professionals are looking for.

As for the general public, I think you prefer not paying upwards of a hundred dollars a bottle for good quality wine anymore. Sure there are the egos that only buy top quality **Bordeaux** and **Burgundy** at staggeringly high prices, but for most of us the time has come to be more informed when making wine choices. There are so many great wine countries making so many affordable wines. Why pay that kind of money for something so fleeting? Remember, friends, we only rent food and drink. Although the memory may last forever, the question may be whether it was worth the price paid.

So happy drinking and all the best for this new year. May you learn something in every bottle and walk away wanting more. I will be here to keep you aware of the changes and the excitement of the wine

world today. Remember: eat, drink and be merry.

Wines for 2007



17/20 Nino Franco, Prosecco di Valdobbiadene DOC, Italy
SAQ# 00349662 \$18.45

A delicate sparkling with hints of pear and grapefruit in the nose, and crisp green apple and almond in the mouth. Use it at brunch, as well as with smoked salmon appetizers before dinner.



19/20 Osoyoos Larose, Okanagan Valley, Canada
SAQ#10293169 \$39.00

This is a Bordeaux/Okanagan collaboration and what a great job they've done. I will warn you that it is not likely to be readily available, but if you see some, snap it up. The price tag is not in my usual range but the thick rich black fruit and subtle cedar and earthy component in the mouth, with all the body expected of a good quality Bordeaux, is enough for me to buy several bottles for the cellar in the hopes of drinking in five years.



17/20 Tannat, Don Pasquale Reserve, Uruguay
SAQ#10299122 \$12.70

Hone your decanting skills for all to see. This baby needs some aeration and a wide bottomed decanter will do nicely. On the mouth it has a thick black cherry and plum flavour with some pepper and cedar components. It has a smooth finish, but there is alcohol present all the way down the throat. Well matched with grilled beef, short ribs and roasted vegetable lasagna with gorgonzola, this is wine for winter eating.



17/20 Merlot, Mission Hill Five Vineyards, Okanagan Valley, Canada
SAQ#00496109 \$15.05

This is a good everyday wine for chili, stroganoff, cassoulet or roasted chicken with a rosemary and porcini rub. With loads of blackberry and cherry in the nose and a hint of

dark chocolate and plum in the mouth, this medium-bodied red does nicely when you have a need to be patriotic. It is readily available and can keep in the cellar for up to three years.

Carola Price is a sommelier, chef and co-author of the bestselling MONTREAL FROM BREAD TO WINE. She is a member of the Canadian Association of Professional Sommeliers and The International Sommelier Guild. She can be reached at carola@ivvmontreal.com.

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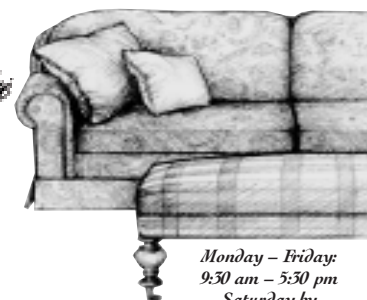
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MOVIE REVIEW: THE BAD SHEPHERD

He Said ... She Said ... And They Agreed

He Said:



The Good Shepherd is **Robert De Niro's** movie about the birth of the CIA from its beginnings as World War II's OSS until the early 1960s, as told through the eyes of one agent/spymaster (Edward Wilson/**Matt Damon**).

Oh, was this bad! It is interesting that filmmakers can make *unreal* worlds real (think the initial *Star Wars* movies, or *Star Trek* with the *Next Generation* cast, or even the *Harry Potter* films), but can also make the real world (or at least a story based on actual events) seem ridiculous. How did *The Good Shepherd* do this?

(1) **Hackneyed, decoder-ring dialogue.** The CIA is planning the Bay of Pigs invasion, so we hear agents telling one another "to bring their dancing shoes" for the Havana nightclubs and/or "a bathing suit." A Latin American leader has been removed from office, so – of course – "the doctor is not accepting any more patients" as a result of "malpractice." An agent who posed as an academic is on his way out, so the pro-

fessor will be asked to "tie his shoes." All that is missing from this gem are secret handshakes and a backyard treefort. Did the early CIA use code-words? I am sure they did, but I am also sure that it didn't sound like recycled John le Carré scripts when its agents did so. Their words had a serious context that *The Good Shepherd* does not provide or make believable to us. As if bad dialogue weren't enough, there are lots and lots of fedoras, trenchcoats and briefcases, just so we know we're in a spy movie.

- (2) **Bad acting and casting.** I would have preferred to be watching an **Angelina Jolie** spy movie with gadgets and kung fu fighting, but what her 21st century sexiness and moxy were doing shoe-horned into this movie (as the daughter of an east coast, establishment senator!) is beyond me.
- (3) **Mish-mash of messages and themes.** Is the movie opposed to what the CIA actually did in the 1950s and 1960s (e.g. toppling governments in South America)? Or is the movie an indict-



Damon acts and Jolie is in the movie, too.

ment of the spy's friendless and perhaps amoral life in a general sense? ("Get out while you still can," young Wilson is told, in a nod to *Godfather: Part III*.) Or is it a psychological examination of Edward Wilson and the consequences of his emotional repression? (He is trapped in an unhappy marriage and his love-starved son is undone by his search for affection. An American *Remains of the Day*?) Or, even more tantalizing, is *The Good Shepherd* an attack on American WASP-ocracy and elitism? (Wilson is a traditional Yale man who becomes a member of the Skull and Bones secret society. He is recruited into an OSS that is off limits to "negroes, Jews and Catholics" – ironically at the bidding of Franklin Roosevelt, a man who did more to disband America's WASP-ocracy than anyone else. He later goes on to say that Italians, Irish, Jews and blacks are "just visiting" the United States of America.) Who knows what De Niro wanted to say? The film lurches from one theme to the next without really examining any of them in any detail or engaging us on their merits/demerits.

The CIA is a great subject for a movie. Maybe this train wreck will inspire some other filmmaker to tell its story.

She Said



Although this movie was long enough to eat four or five boxes of popcorn, I am giving it two boxes for essentially the same reasons listed above by David. The extra box of popcorn goes to Matt Damon, who is the only bright light in this slow, slightly confusing and self-aware exposé.

Yes, this movie is long, and boring, and doesn't really tell us anything we haven't already gleaned from dozens of previous

spy movies. A spy is always alone; he can trust no one. A spy will always be betrayed by those who are also spies (in this case, several times). A man with a British accent might seduce you for a while, but he is probably evil. Don't trust any woman who throws herself at you for no apparent reason: there is always some kind of trap in that. Your Russian counterpart will be obsessed with you, but slightly in love with you, too (or was that just respect?), so you can count on him to do what you want when you really need him to, etc....

What Makes A Bad Movie?

As I was watching this movie, I was reminded of my reaction to what I call "the desert movie" (*The English Patient*). That movie was beautifully shot, acted and written, and yet I was looking at my watch after 45 minutes. What had gone wrong? The answer for that movie was editing: there was none. This movie also demonstrates that you can shake good actors, script, cinematography and direction together and still come out all wrong. The cause in this instance: bad writing and some bad casting (Jolie in particular).

So why is this movie getting raves from the critics? (For example, *The New Yorker* is hailing it as "One of the most impressive movies ever made about espionage.") Is it just that critics are in love with all things De Niro? Are David and I out to lunch?

I think there has been such a dearth of good movies this year that critics are starving to have something positive to say. Where is this year's *Brokeback Mountain*, or *Walk the Line*, or *Capote*? Does this film stand up to those? Not by a long shot. For my money (or yours) you would be better off renting the much better, but less self-serious, *Spy Game* from 2001, starring **Robert Redford** and **Brad Pitt**. **V**

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A “selling” agent could be the ideal agent to sell your property ... if you only knew who they are and how to find them!

BY BARRY SCHREIBER



We all know what **listing agents** do. They sell your property, right? Their “SOLD” signs say so and their ads show all the listings they’ve *sold*. But that’s only half true.

The majority of the time, the sale could not have happened without the collaboration of another agent who represents the buyer and is known as the **selling agent**. (I always thought they should be called buying agents, but they’re not.)

Few people know who these top selling real estate agents are, or, for that matter, what they do – because no matter how many properties they sell and how successful they are, they are not permitted by Quebec real estate laws to take *public* credit for their sales, unless the listing agent agrees to allow them. (And what listing agent in his right mind would allow his competition to take such credit?)

So, the selling agent remains relatively unknown, often living a successful, but unintentionally secret life. Why is this important? Because understanding the skill sets of these two different kinds of agents can make a huge difference in the:

- 1) time it takes to sell your property;
- 2) amount of advertising exposure you can expect;
- 3) personal customer service you may receive and;

4) typical personality you will be working with.

Both the listing and the selling agents are defined by the roles they play. Sometimes, both agents are one and the same, but not generally. Most properties are sold through the involvement of both. So, let’s look at the typical profiles:

Typical Profile of a Top Listing Agent

You can detect a top listing agent simply by the fact that they usually advertise their long catalogue of listings and their ads proclaim that they are among the top agents in their brokerage. These agents tend to become less personally involved with clients because they have so many properties to sell. They often have a team of assistants to help them. The top listing agent undoubtedly has pressure in having to deal with many vendors and a contracted timeframe to sell a property. But the fact is he will have hundreds of selling agents with clients who visit his listings to help sell the properties; and if he loses a property or two, he has a long list and more signing up based upon his/her reputation.

Typical Profile of a Top Selling Agent

Typically, a top selling agent will have few listings, but mainly work with buyers. To work with buyers, one needs a lot of energy, persistence, and the ability to listen well to their needs and preferences. It takes all of these personality components to trudge out with buyers week after week, month after month, with no contractual assurance that the buyer will not turn around and use another agent to buy a property. Selling agents also tend to like

working closely with buyers. And they are often great negotiators and “closers” because they bring the client to the table and help negotiate the sale. Often, when someone buys a property, he’ll use that selling agent again as his listing agent when he wants to sell. It’s probably a very good choice because that agent has demonstrated most of the traits necessary to perform admirably as a listing agent. Here are some more reasons:

- 1) It’s likely that a selling agent doesn’t have a huge catalogue of listings, so he can afford to advertise your property in as many ways as it takes and so can *feature* your home. Top listing agents, on the other hand, may have 20 or more listings and that means significant advertising costs, hence the use of small photos and simultaneously advertising many listings.
- 2) A selling agent should have the time to give you and your property his personal attention because without a plethora of listings, you can expect this agent to be personally available at your open houses and client visits. Top listing agents, on the other hand, tend to have a team of assistants who often act in their place.
- 3) A selling agent may very well be hungrier and more motivated to show what he can do.
- 4) Finally, given the typical profile of the selling agent, this type of agent should have the energy and enthusiasm you’re looking for.

But how do you find a top selling agent if, as I’ve said, they generally can’t advertise the properties they’ve sold? Well, sometimes they will advertise the fact that they work with buyers, but many new agents do this and they might not have the experience of the top selling agents that I am writing about.

Finding “Agent Right”

One way to locate a top selling agent is to call a broker in your area and ask for an agent that generally works with buyers,

has several years of experience, and also has a strong marketing background. With these credentials you will probably find the agent that has all the experience you need and who can give you the personal service, time and advertising exposure for your property to make it stand out. Don’t worry, this type of agent undoubtedly also has the experience of listing properties.

Of course, as a selling agent turned “TOP” listing agent, he can now advertise his successes. After a few years of self-promotion, he’ll be a top listing agent ... probably the #1 agent in lower Westmount, or perhaps western NDG, or Montreal east of Guy. And then he’ll be just another top listing agent without a secret life, but with a team of assistants! But if you call me, I’ll find you another selling agent. In fact, I know one quite intimately that I’d recommend right now ... and what a sense of humour!

Barry Schreiber is a marketing specialist and affiliated real estate agent with Sutton Centre-Ouest. If you have a question for him, he can be reached at 515.781.2425 and schreiberb@videotron.ca.

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DRIVING: RENTALS IN THE RAIN

A Cautionary Tale for Snowbirds

BY JORDAN W. CHARNESS

My friend Peter and his wife Mary went on vacation to Grand Turk Island, which is the capital of the Turks and Caicos. It measures about seven miles long, by only one or one and a half miles wide. Depending on who you speak to, it has a full-time live-in population of about 2,500 or 3,100 people. It is, however, blessed with a beautiful tropical climate and friendly residents.

A Fun Idea

To make it more fun, Peter decided to rent a four-wheel-drive vehicle that came with a roll bar, but no roof or windows. It seemed like a great idea at the time.

Peter was asked to sign a rental receipt that didn't say much about insurance and said even less about the terms of the rental. He rented the car from an agency located on the beach that consisted of a chair next to some scooters and Jeeps. The owner of the vehicles asked him to pay \$100 up front, and he was told that he could leave the car anywhere on the island. He was told to throw the keys on the floor and give the owner a call to tell him where to pick it up.

While this may work on Grand Turk, I would not suggest that you do it anywhere else. Legally, you're responsible for a vehicle that you have rented and even your own insurance company will refuse to cover a theft claim made by someone who left the keys on the floor in a car that was open to the world.

A Special Situation

In this particular case, the owner explained to Peter that since everyone on the island would recognize these rental cars, no one would take his. Besides, the island had only one paved road and a few dirt ones. Where could the thief take the car? Peter was pretty safe in relying on the owner's instructions and if he were ever sued for a disappearing car, he could certainly raise the special circumstances as a defense.

Nothing is ever as simple as it seems to be. Peter and Mary loaded the kids and their swim bags into the car along with the snorkels, masks and fins they had rented from the same guy on the beach. When they got to their first stop, it occurred to Peter that he couldn't leave anything in the

car, since it was fully open and could not be locked.

The three-paragraph rental agreement said nothing about insurance for contents and although the islanders were probably honest, Peter wasn't entirely sure about the boatloads of tourists. (In any case, no insurance would cover items that were taken from an unlocked, open-to-the-air vehicle. Peter would be fully responsible for any theft that occurred.) He decided



A nice looking vehicle, with a few hitches.

that the safest thing to do would be to carry the five snorkelling kits as well as the three swim bags while they toured the island's 200-year-old jail.

Mother Nature Intervenes

About an hour before they were to return the vehicle, the skies opened up with a drenching downpour and thunderstorm. Since they had no windows or roof, Peter's family and the car were thoroughly soaked. Ordinarily, Peter would be responsible for water damage caused to the interior of the car. However, since this rental did not include either windows or a roof, Peter was blameless. The rental guy found the sight of Peter's bedraggled and wet family quite funny, and they all had a good laugh.

Jordan W. Charness is the managing partner of Charness, Charness & Charness. He brings a wealth of legal knowledge perfected in almost 20 years of giving legal advice live on Montreal's top radio stations.

He writes a weekly column in THE GAZETTE entitled "Steering You Right". "Rentals in the Rain" is an excerpt from his recent book STEERING YOU RIGHT: GREATEST STORIES and is used by permission.

This column is of a general nature and may not be applicable in all situations and jurisdictions. If you need legal advice, please consult a lawyer.

RESTAURANT... continued from page 7

down the middle with part of the green stalk intact.

The black boudin – not to be confused with white boudin, which is similar to terrine – is really the French version of blood pudding: rich, dense and nutty, with a somewhat offensive appearance.

The cod cakes were mild-mannered: two pucks of shredded fish and potatoes, pleasantly rounded out by a mound of fresh salad and diced beets. A light meal, perhaps better suited to lunchtime than dinner.

Good Samaritan

On the surface there is nothing to distinguish Robin des Bois – with its dim, candle-lit interior and sparse yet appealing decor – from a number of other low-key, casually elegant Plateau eateries. But by carefully attending to the details – the heirloom veggies, which in the summer are raised in the backyard garden; the unpretentious pre-meal "tastings" designed to whet the appetite; the homemade, super-sweet desserts, like potato-and-sugar doughnuts – Robin des Bois attains the refinement of equilibrium: a restaurant comfortable in its own skin.

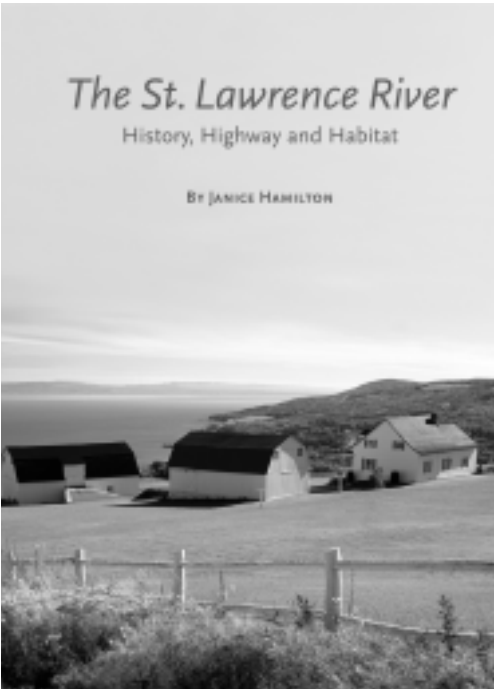
That's not to say the evening was without faults (and neither am I charitable enough to overlook them). My biggest complaint wasn't with the food, but the cooler-than-usual room temperature. This was so pronounced that the red wine was served unpalatably chilled.

Food is Not the Only Story

The audacity of allowing anyone to walk in off the street, don an apron and get to work lends the experience a theatrical flair. I was so intrigued by the apparent good cheer of the volunteers – who number as many as 22 per day and up to eight per shift – that on a recent Monday night I went to the restaurant's website and volunteered to work in the kitchen.

After four hours meting out ingredients, helping to clean a serving station and clearing the odd table – with only a bowl of dahl soup to show for it – I wondered how over 1,600 volunteers had been enticed into this demanding occupation. For me, it was the desire to step out of my everyday life, however briefly, into something bigger.

Stuart Woods is the assistant editor of VIVVA MONTREAL.



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– J. D. Gravenor in the Montreal Gazette (June 30, 2006)

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SPOTLIGHT ON MONTREAL FICTION:

Robert Michael McKenzie

Former Dawson mathematics professor Robert McKenzie has just published his first novel, *The First Thing We Do* – a Charles Dupont mystery. Two subsequent Charles Dupont mysteries, *Two in the Blues* and *Three in the Canal*, are scheduled for spring and fall 2007. Here is a sneak peek:

CHAPTER 2 (Part 2)

Abrams continued, “The financial set-up really galled Cormier. He was the top lawyer in billings for the firm but made less money than the preferred partners. I’m the only survivor of the original four. Mulholland’s partnership passed on to his son Jamie, who is the managing partner now, but Franklin and Herscovits had no children in the firm. So it came down to Jamie and me, and I was going to retire and leave my preferred partnership to Danny.”

“Did Cormier get along with the other members of your firm on a day to day basis?” asked Dupont.

Abrams frowned. “He didn’t. He started making an issue of language soon after he became a partner. Staff meetings were always in English and he thought they should be in French. Back then, we were eight English and two French speaking lawyers. All the English speakers spoke French perfectly, but that didn’t mean we had to speak French in our own offices.”

He paused and finished his drink. “So we told him he could speak in French at meetings if he wanted, and that satisfied him for a while. We kept expanding, hiring more francophone members so that by the time Bill 101 was passed, we had more than fifty people working in the office including secretaries, clerks and so on. Cormier thought it was our obligation, under the law, to have French as the working language in the office, to apply for one of those damnable francisation certificates.” He slammed his fist on the side-table where his glass was sitting and nearly toppled it. “I told him that we were going to get one of those certificates when hell froze over, that I was prepared to fight a Supreme Court case on it. That shut him up temporarily, but it’s still a source of friction.”

Dupont rose and went to the bar to replenish his drink. “May I offer you another drink, Mr. Abrams?”

Abrams thought about it a second. “It’s been a terrible four days and now, telling

you about the troubles with Cormier has me all disturbed. Yes, I will have another small one.”

Retrieving his glass, I went to the bar. Dupont remained there as Abrams continued:

“I wanted to retire five years ago, but there was so much turmoil in the office I was afraid of what would happen to the firm without me. Cormier wouldn’t listen to any of the others since he’s been a partner longer than any of them. Do you remember what the late premier said about the relationship between the French and English?”

“Like scorpions in a bottle.”

“That was us. Scorpions in a bottle.”

“What about the other partners?” asked Dupont, as he wandered back to his desk and handed Abrams his drink. “Would any of them have a motive for killing Danny?”

Abrams thought for a minute. “I can’t say really. Danny didn’t get along well with a couple of them, and there was the animosity of some because he was my son. They knew he would be a preferred partner when I left, and some felt he didn’t merit it. But to kill him for that!” He shrugged and held his palms upwards.

“Mr. Abrams, I’ll take your case,” said Dupont, “but there are some conditions. First, I need a retainer.” He mentioned an amount in five figures. “If I arrive at the same conclusion as the police then the retainer will be returned less expenses. Is that agreed?”

“Yes.”

“Second, I need to meet with all the partners in the firm and do not intend to chase after them. Please arrange to have them here at 8:00 pm tomorrow. Third, I would like to place an ad in the local newspapers to find out if anyone saw the killer either waiting for your son or scouting the location. We should offer a reward of at least \$10,000.”

“Certainly.”

“Of course, you’re sitting shiva for Danny this week. Could Gerry come by tonight?”

I made a face at Dupont. He knew damn well it was the one night of the week I minded working: the Monday night jam session at Hernando’s was something I rarely missed.

Abrams replied, “Of course. I’ll give you the address. You’ll be welcome after 7:00 pm.”

“One more thing. It would be useful to have a list of the members of the firm and their specializations.”

“I’ll have my secretary fax you that in the morning, and I’ll write you that check.... Could you call me a cab?”

I reached for the phone on the corner of Dupont’s desk and phoned for a taxi while Abrams made out his cheque. I gave him my card with the fax number for my office, and he wrote down the address for his son’s house in Hampstead. He rose slowly from his chair, extending his hand to Dupont.

“I’m used to dealing with people who are in trouble, Monsieur Dupont. Now it’s my turn. I certainly hope you are able to discover something.” He turned to leave



the room and seemed to wobble a bit, but righted himself and headed for the door.

The cab arrived and I offered to help him down the long flight of stairs to the street, but he assured me he was alright. When I returned to the office, Johnny was standing there talking to Dupont. “Is it time to cook?”

“Yes!” Dupont and I both replied.

“A few minutes then,” Johnny said, as he left for the kitchen.

“You know you’ll have to do most of the work on this one,” said Dupont.

“What else is new?” I said.

He gave me a look. “I have to talk to Johnny about dinner for tomorrow.”

“I’ll join you in a minute,” I said, “as soon as I make a phone call.”

I called Nadine. It was late and I was afraid she might have left for the day, but she replied on the second ring.

“How’s my favourite criminal lawyer?”

“Tired. I don’t suppose you’re calling with an offer of a drink and dinner?”

“Nope. I’m working. Maurice Abrams just hired Dupont to investigate the death of his son, Danny. I have to grab dinner here and head over to their place to talk to his widow.”

“Well, I couldn’t go anyway. I’m working, too. I was just going to order in because I have a case to prepare for tomorrow. Are you going to Hernando’s tonight?”

“Yup, but I don’t know when I’ll get there. Probably after 9:00. Did you know any of the people in Abrams’ firm?”

“When I was in the prosecutor’s office I encountered most of the criminal lawyers including Danny Abrams and René Cormier.”

“I remember you talking about Cormier before. If you can meet me later, I’d like to know more about these people, especially Danny.”

“And I thought you were interested only in me.”

“I am. I am. Outside of work.”

“OK, I’ll try to make it if I get enough done.”

We said goodbye and I headed for the dining room where Johnny was entering with a plate of noodles in one hand and the Thai style beef in the other. The beef was intensely aromatic and I could tell just from the smell that it would be fiery. He returned to the kitchen to cook another dish while Dupont and I started eating. He had brought out three bottles of Saint Ambroise beer, his current favourite microbrew. A few minutes later Johnny arrived with a plate of shrimp and joined us at the table, the usual practice unless Dupont had company, and I didn’t count as that.

Johnny explained how the shrimp was cooked. “This is the dish that I make special for you, Gerry. It’s called ‘Lemony Shrimp’ or in Thai, ‘Goong Pla’. The shrimp are broiled, then tossed with this sauce.”


“What’s in the sauce?” I asked.

“Many things, garlic, chilies, lemon juice, lemon grass, fish sauce, Maggi sauce, the kitchen sink.”

The shrimp had a complex lemon flavor with a spicy afterbite.

“My compliments, Johnny,” I said.

Dupont seconded my praise; Johnny bobbed his head in acknowledgement.

During dinner I discussed my program for the evening and following morning with Dupont. Before I left for Abrams’ house he gave me the copy for the ad I was to place in the suburban papers the next day. 

PRACTICAL POINTS

Hot Tech Trends for 2007

BY NEXUS

Happy NU Year to all of our readers! This issue I would like to discuss some of the hot technology that you'll see over the coming year:

Voice Over IP (VOIP)

This is becoming a real player in the marketplace. **Vonage** is making particular strides in user-friendliness and call quality. If you are paying too much for long distance and have contacts in North America or the rest of the world, check out Vonage (www.vonage.com) for some great deals. All you need is a high-speed internet connection, a VOIP adapter and a regular analog phone to get going.

IP PBX

Companies used to have to pay a large sum of money just to buy a PBX (i.e. a hardware switch that allows multiple extensions into an office: "Dial 1 for sales, dial 2 for tech support" etc.). Now all of this can be done with software, which makes it considerably more cost effective, especially for small companies. What's also great is that you can expand to up to 100 lines in some cases, whereas before you were limited by the hardware.

Wiki

This is a tool that allows for collaboration between members online. You can add to a Wiki, edit a Wiki, etc. The best ex-

ample of a Wiki is Wikipedia (www.wikipedia.org). This is an online encyclopedia that is actually edited and maintained online. Wikis are currently used by geeks to organize groups or clubs. However, they are quite simple to use so are great for anyone wanting an easy way to organize and collaborate amongst several people. You can start your own Wiki by going to the following website: www.pbwiki.com.

HomePlugs

A HomePlug is a power line communication device that allows you to network through your standard AC power outlet. This technology is ideal for small offices and homes where it can be difficult and expensive to run your own wiring through the walls. With the HomePlug, you simply use the building's existing wiring. This will allow you to connect various devices such as printers, desktops, TVs, etc. HomePlug will be complementary and in some cases augment current wi-fi (wireless) setups.

For more information about hot new tech items for 2007 check out: www.nufrontier.ca/hottectrend2007.html

With over 10 years of technical experience working for medium-sized and multinational corporations, Nexus helps individuals working from home and small offices. Email your technical questions to him at nexus@nufrontier.ca or visit www.nufrontier.ca.

TOWNSHIPS CALENDAR

Winter Warmth

Unseasonably warm temperatures this winter have hampered the ski season and allowed at least one Quebec golf resort to remain open into the new year.

Last week *The Gazette* reported that golfers at the International 2000 Golf & Country Club in St. Bernard de Lacolle were still booking green times as temperatures remained steadily above zero, adding that the resort would stay open until the snow stays on the ground.

The View from the Mountain

That didn't stop Ken Rourkefrew of **Owl's Head** from putting a brave face on the situation, describing balmy temperatures and rainfall as a "hiccup" in the ski season. "All things considered we're holding up well. What we do have open is in excellent shape," he said, adding that Owl's Head takes advantage of its altitude to make snow at every opportunity.

Last December was the warmest on record in the Townships, with an average temperature of -2°C, 6°C above the norm. Snowfall amounts were less than a third that in past years.

The Big Picture

"It's normal for temperatures to change from cold to mild," said Environment Canada meteorologist Guy Héroux, stressing the variability of the Quebec climate. But with the effects of El Niño expected to hit by mid-January, it's likely that warmer-than-average temperatures will continue.

For updated information about Eastern Townships' ski mountain conditions consult the resources at right.

Information is up to date as of January 3, 2007. **V**

Jay Peak

www.jaypeakresort.com
1.800.451.4449 – 802.988.2611
Adult day pass: \$59
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Ski Bromont

www.skibromont.com
1.866.BROMONT
Adult day pass: \$52
Open runs: 22/104

Mont Orford

www.orford.com – 1.866.ORFORD1
Adult day pass: \$45
Open runs: 12/56

Owl's Head

1.800.363.3342 – www.owlshead.com
Adult day pass: \$37
Open run 12/44

Mont St. Bruno

450.653.3441 – www.montsaintbruno.com
Adult day pass: \$33
Open runs: 10/14

Mont Sutton

www.montsutton.com
1.866.538.2545 (snow report)
Adult day pass: \$48
Open runs: 8/53

Montjoye

819.842.2447 – www.montjoye.qc.ca
Adult day pass: \$27
Open runs: 3/17

Mont Shefford

450.777.0909 – www.montshefford.com
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EASTERN TOWNSHIPS EVENTS

Movies

Theatre Lac Brome screens *Geraldine's Fortune*, a comedy about how the prize money of a TV game show brings excitement and chaos to the life of a woman living in small-town New Brunswick. Loosely based on Michel Tremblay's play *Les Belles Soeurs*. Tickets are \$7, \$5 for members. Arts Knowlton, 9 Mount Echo Rd. Call 450.242.2270 for more information. **January 7 at 5 pm.**

Theatre Lac Brome screens Deepa Mehta's *Water*, the controversial and highly regarded film about Hindu child widows. Tickets are \$7, \$5 for members. Arts Knowlton, 9 Mount Echo Rd. Call 450.242.2270 for more information. **January 7 at 5 pm.**

Books

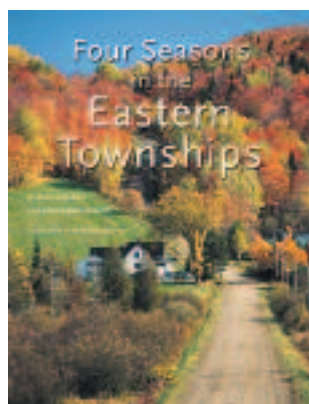
Meet *Gazette* columnist Bill Brownstein, promoting his new book, *Schwartz's He-brew Delicatessen: The Story*, about the history and lore of Canada's most famous smoked meat sandwich. Staff from the deli will be on hand with free nosh. Mazel Tov! Admission is free. Brome Lake

Books, 264 Knowlton Rd. For information call 450.242.2242. **January 13 at 1 pm.**

Lecture Series

Historian **Jim Manson's** inaugural lecture in the Winter Lecture Series concerns the life and times of **George Baker**, a Conservative MP from Brome who gave his life serving the country during World War I. The series, which continues throughout

the winter, features a lecture about the life of **Captain John Savage**, an Empire Loyalist who led the settlement of Shefford, and **Sydney Fisher**, who, under Sir Wilfrid Laurier, fought to protect the autonomy of the educational system in Brome. Presented by The Brome County Historical Society. Admission is free. Old Court House, 15 St. Paul Rd. For information call 450.243.6782. **January 6, 13 & 20 at 1 pm.**



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Eastern Townships Living by Lois Hardacker

Chartered Real Estate Agent



QUINTESSENTIAL COUNTRY ESTATE 150 acres off the beaten path between Bromont and Brome Lake. This 1865 farm has a story and a place in the history books of Brome County. Impeccably restored and expanded brick home, charming small barn, great view, private lake, enchanted woodland.



GET OUT OF THE CITY and come home to a quiet neighbourhood in Knowlton, near Brome Lake. Live on one level with an enormous master bedroom and its garden exit, refreshed décor and exterior finish, fireplace, two guest rooms tucked in the peak. Wide lot, private landscaped grounds. \$349,000.



CONDO TO STEAL Here's a great deal for you in Knowlton! This is a two-bedroom condo with a wood-burning fireplace, upper level for luminosity and a breezy balcony. What also makes it really special is the inside parking garage, a secure building with intercom and, of course, the price. \$150,000.



TWO MINUTES FROM THE AUTOROUTE and you're home in Foster. The perfect country retreat in the heart of the ski region and featuring a x-country trail across the road. Well-renovated with a fireplace, wood floors, yummy kitchen and a lower level ready for you to finish. \$189,000.



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Westmount Walk to Greene Ave and downtown from this elegant 4-storey stone beauty with preserved architectural details. Expansive entertainment area, walk-out to terrace with panoramic views of Montreal. **Asking \$1,500,000**



Westmount This house is filled with exceptional design and quality renovations – creations of the owner/architect. The brick and stone terrace and landscaping offer incredible privacy in the midst of the desirable Victoria Village. Three levels of front bay windows facing south, a professionally finished basement/office accessible by way of private entrance at street level, spacious rooms, new hardwood floors, a wood fireplace and ornate mantle are just a few of the gems this house has to offer. A beautiful gourmet kitchen plus dinette opens onto a secluded back terrace, garden and park. **Asking \$995,000**
Virtual tour: www.mcguiganpepin.com/571213



Westmount Spectacular, 6-bedroom family home, loaded with architectural details and quality renovations. Deluxe eat-in kitchen/family room/office. Beautifully finished basement. Absolute move-in. **Asking \$1,525,000**
Virtual tour: www.mcguiganpepin.com/571408



Westmount Beautiful Victorian townhouse facing Staynor Park. Three bedrooms, plus two bedrooms in basement, parking, garden. Walk to Atwater and Westmount Square. **Asking \$570,000**
Virtual tour: www.mcguiganpepin.com/571163



Downtown Situated at the back of a quiet courtyard in a prime downtown Montreal location, this house has potential for renovators. With 4 bedrooms, plus two in the basement, house is bright with windows on 3 sides. **Asking \$599,000**



Nun's Island Lovely condo in Jardin de l'Archipel. 1465 square feet offering wonderful views of the river. 3 bedrooms, 2 baths, garage, central air. Offers. **Asking \$259,000**



The Canal One bedroom condo, corner unit, walk to Atwater Market, metro. Pleasant view of park. Garage, air conditioned. **Asking \$189,000**



La Mauricie Pristine heritage property with 2 private pollution-free lakes, surrounded by over 100 acres of natural woodland. Less than 2 hours from Montreal and Quebec City. Includes vintage log cabins. **Asking \$880,000**

514-937-8383



*Wishing you a world of peace
and happiness now and
throughout the New Year.*

