



RESTAURANT

Inside Vladimir Poutine, Montreal's Dictator-Themed Restaurant

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Yes, there is a Trump burger.

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This year, Montreal has been celebrating its 375th anniversary (i.e. when it was "discovered" by white people) with multimedia installations, concerts, free events and official ceremonies throughout the city. It's a gorgeous town, with the culture of London and the romance of Paris and the food of New York all mashed together. But sometime in the past few years, the number of restaurants per capita in Montreal actually surpassed that of New York, and one of the newest additions to the many eateries in the food-crazy city is [Vladimir Poutine](#).

Yes, it's a pun—a clear play on Russian president Vladimir Putin's name—but if there's anything Canadians are serious about, it's [their national dish](#) of [French fries smothered in cheese curds and gravy](#).



Vladimir Poutine opened this past spring in the Golden Square Mile district of Montreal, right next to a brand new, chic, vegan brunch spot—LOV—no less. The long black awning beckoning from the sidewalk leads inside where faux Russian-red regalia reverberates a tongue-in-cheek decorative sensibility.

On each table is a menu where every item is named after world dictators and politicians, though the poutine alone lays claim to the autocrats: "The Vladimir" is fries smothered in beet confit, smoked meat, onion, veal stock gravy, white wine, and Russian dressing. "The Mussolini" includes sausage on the cheese and fries, and "The Napoleon" might give you a heart attack with its decadent addition of foie gras.



Then, you could always opt for "**The Trump**" burger—it's *hannage* and topped with an orange, toupee-like sprinkle of shredded carrots and sprouts—or you could try the "Barack" salad and be sensible and healthy all in one go. But of course, don't forget to wash it all down with politically inspired libations like the vodka-based Molotov or gin-based Red Square cocktails.

Co-owners Annie Clavette and Stefan Jacob (who is also the head chef) were approached by DJ and Virgin Radio host Mario Tremblay when he was looking for partners in the restaurant industry to open up a *poutinerie*.



"I was juggling with a few ideas for a powerful name for a poutine franchise that would stand out," says Tremblay. "My wife and I were in Quebec City to see Celine Dion, and it hit me in the middle of the night after the show. I woke up my wife and said, 'I found the name.' She went, 'Uh huh,' sleepily, and I said 'Vladimir Poutine, but 'teen' like 'poutine.' She told me to go back to sleep, and I was then convinced."



Tremblay wanted to collaborate with seasoned professionals, and Clavette and Jacob had had success with the two-year-old decadent comfort food spot Le Gras Dur and four years with their three food trucks: Das Truck, Le Bacon Truck, and Schnitzel Truck. They've also won a few prizes for their poutines, which is pretty much like winning an Oscar for a Canadian.

Jacob was the mastermind behind all the pun-intended dishes, and his expertise as a saucier with over 30 years in the business shines through when it comes to the restaurant's poutine. "He knows that the secret is in the sauce," says Clavette, his wife of 15 years.



"The people get our sense of humor," says Clavette, who was raised in restaurants that her grandmother and mother ran throughout her childhood. "In the beginning, everyone told us it was not a good idea to play around with politics; they said Russian people would be offended by it. But I can tell you it's been the opposite. They find it funny, and they like the controversy surrounding it."

"Even one of our staff members who's been working with us since the opening is Russian, and she and her Russian husband love it."