



## Third Wave Coffee, Psychedelic Cathedrals + Jean-Paul Gaultier: Montreal Turns 375

Posted on [July 17, 2017](#) by [Robyn Dutra](#)



The news at home is perpetually unsettling, the conversation endlessly divisive. So what better time to hop the quick flight over the border to one of *BlackBook's* most beloved destinations than during Montreal's dazzling, year-long [375th](#) birthday celebration? Canada's grooviest city has divided the events into four seasonal themes – with summer and fall still to go, obviously.

On our most recent trip, we immersed ourselves in the celebratory cultural offerings, while also taking time to stroll the beautiful McGill campus and the city's many green parks, imbibe a few fizzy champagne cocktails at the Ritz Carlton, and indulge in the city's exceptional designer and vintage shopping.

Here were some of our faves...

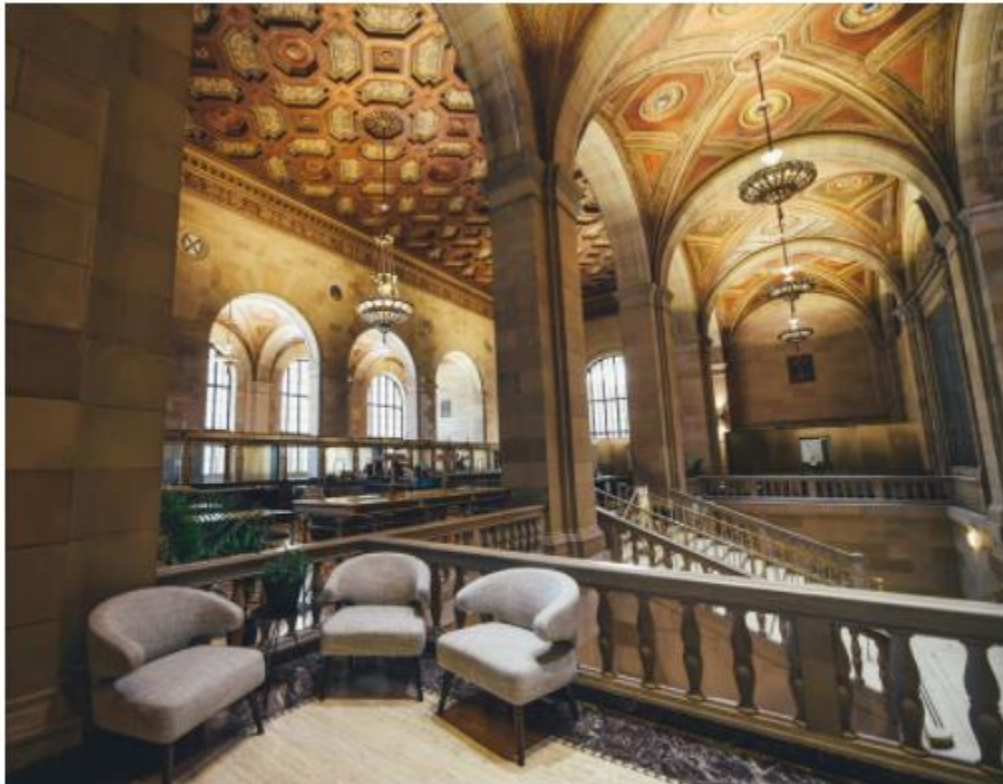
### **Divine Lighting**

Montreal's Notre Dame Basilica is hosting [AURA](#), a radical new show of music and illumination. Revealing the Basilica's exquisite collection of statuary, Moment Factory (the same design and production studio that is artfully lighting up the Jacques-Cartier Bridge nightly) has designed an immersive experience that both sonically and visually captivates – enlivening the grandness of the cathedral interior with a psychedelic multimedia spectacle, featuring august orchestral sounds and a dramatic light spectacle. You'll never look at being in church the same way again.



## The Daily Grind

Montreal's perpetual buzz might partially be due to its residents' obsession with coffee. And not just any coffee, but 'third wave' coffee, where sourcing and production, origin and output all get equal attention. This artisanal focus is being championed by numerous local purveyors, which is why scheduling a cafe crawl with Thom Seivewright, the founder of [Living Like a Local](#), is the best way to experience some of the city's best offerings in the grooviest spots. These include [Dispatch](#), where the sleek, minimalist interiors and packaging design rival the handpicked, farm-to-counter coffee selection. Some other must-sips are [Cafe Osmo](#), in the Notman House, [Le Moineau Masque](#) in The Plat (one of the city's hippest 'hoods), and [Crew Collective & Cafe](#), which is also a members-only co-working space and basement nightclub, located in the utterly spectacular former Royal Bank building in Old Montreal.



*Crew Collective & Cafe*

## Avant-Garde Circus Folk

Cirque du Soleil was actually birthed in Montreal. And the experimental circus troupe's latest show, [VOLTA](#), is a spellbinding story about the freedom to choose and blazing your own trail – albeit in flamboyant costumes and roller skates. As you might expect, the transformational sets, lighting, original music and general choreographed mayhem assault the senses from all sides. [VOLTA](#) even features a full on BMX park, mounted on stage, where riders drop in to deliver breathtaking stunts.





## Plugged In, Well-Fed

We were particularly privileged to spend time at the [Society for Arts and Technologies](#). Set up in an abandoned public market in Montreal's former Red Light District, the 20-year-old SAT bills itself as an incubator of talent, and center for research in emerging technologies. Inviting "visionary artists, techno-poets, enlightened artisans, atypical engineers and unconventional thinkers" to connect and create original work, it boasts over 30,000 members. The non-profit is also community-minded, even lobbying successfully to legalize skateboarding in the adjacent Peace Park.

Dining at [Foodlab](#), atop SAT, is as adventurous as the centre's programming. We were served a locavore-driven, eclectic menu (no poutine here), complemented by a renowned wine selection. Exchanges between chefs, sommeliers, mixologists and "audacious foodies" are also hosted regularly here. Post-dinner we were ushered into a Buckminster Fuller-esque dome, where we laid our well-fed bodies on giant beanbags and tripped out in the semi-dark over a cosmic show of mesmerizing light and sound.



## Curated History Lessons

You may wonder (as did we) what those captivating projections on the buildings are as you traverse Old Montreal by night. Created by Michel Lemieux and Victor Pilon, [Cité Mémoire](#) invites viewers to meet a cast of notable historical characters involved in the evolution of the city. More than 20 poetic tableaux are brought to life through image, words and music, emerging from the walls and the ground, infused with just the right dose of whimsy. You can download the free app for maximum effect.

The newly opened [Fort Ville-Marie](#) pavilion at the Montreal Archaeology and History Complex, [Point-a-Callière](#), has dusted the former musty fustiness off the site of the city's birthplace. The museum itself is built atop a restored sewer tunnel, which now features a walk-through light installation by the aforementioned Moment Factory. Props to the museum's passionate curatorial team, who created a uniquely engaging experience – where visitors can view the actual archaeological dig site through a reinforced glass floor (the only one like it in the world, we were told), allowing the opportunity to connect with the very origins of the city.



## Room With a Dazzling View

[Au Sommet Place Ville Marie](#) rightfully boasts the most beautiful view of Montreal. The 360 degree observation deck also currently hosts the #MTLGO exhibit, an interactive video portrait series of 55 notable Montrealers. We playfully clicked our way through the various personalities and perspectives, getting to know Olympic athletes like Jennifer Abel and Caroline Ouellette, choreographer Marie Chouinard, comedian Sugar Sammy, conductor Kent Nagano, DJ Ghislain Poirier, circus troop Les 7 Doigts de la Main, and restaurateur Martin Picard. (Alas, no Arcade Fire pics.)

From hockey to gastronomy, performance art, language (of course, everyone here speaks fluent English and French) and neighborhoods like the Plateau Mont-Royal and Vieux Montreal, we loved tagging points of interest on iPads as we moved along the exhibition's perimeter, enjoying the panoramic view. As a nice little touch, everyone receives a printout of their customized journey to pursue at leisure.

Our hunger for knowledge turned to actual hunger – so we dined at the observatory’s spectacular restaurant, [Les Enfants Terribles](#). Serving a mix of old and new Quebec cuisine (paired with a glass of one of their refreshing roses), the only thing we enjoyed more than the frites was the jaw-dropping view.



*Au Sommet Place Ville Marie*

## **Puppeteers and Fashion Shows**

After a mouthwatering morning croissant – Montreal, by the way, has seen a boom in [boulangeries and pâtisseries](#) all across the city in the last few years – we set out for an arts-focused final day.

[A Nous la Rue](#) brings together 60 street theatre companies from six countries (France, Spain, Australia, the United Kingdom, the Netherlands and, of course, Canada), taking over Montreal’s streets every day in July with over 800 performances. We were particularly enchanted by the Big Little Girl, who brazenly squatted to pee as part of her performance; the dog who ‘panted’ as he trotted close behind her; and the enormous Deep Sea Diver. The “giants” enacted a touching story of Montreal via pulleys and strings controlled by dozens of energetic, red velvet-clad puppeteers.

Being as we are so sartorially obsessed, we also made a point of visiting the McCord Museum’s [“Fashioning Expo 67”](#) and Jean Paul Gaultier’s landmark show [“Love is Love”](#) at the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts – both up through October, and not to be missed.

(N.B. We’re planning to return for [“A Crack In Everything,”](#) a paean to the recently deceased and deeply lamented Leonard Cohen, coming to the Musée d’art contemporain de Montréal (MAC) in November.)





*Jean Paul Gaultier at the Museum of Fine Arts*