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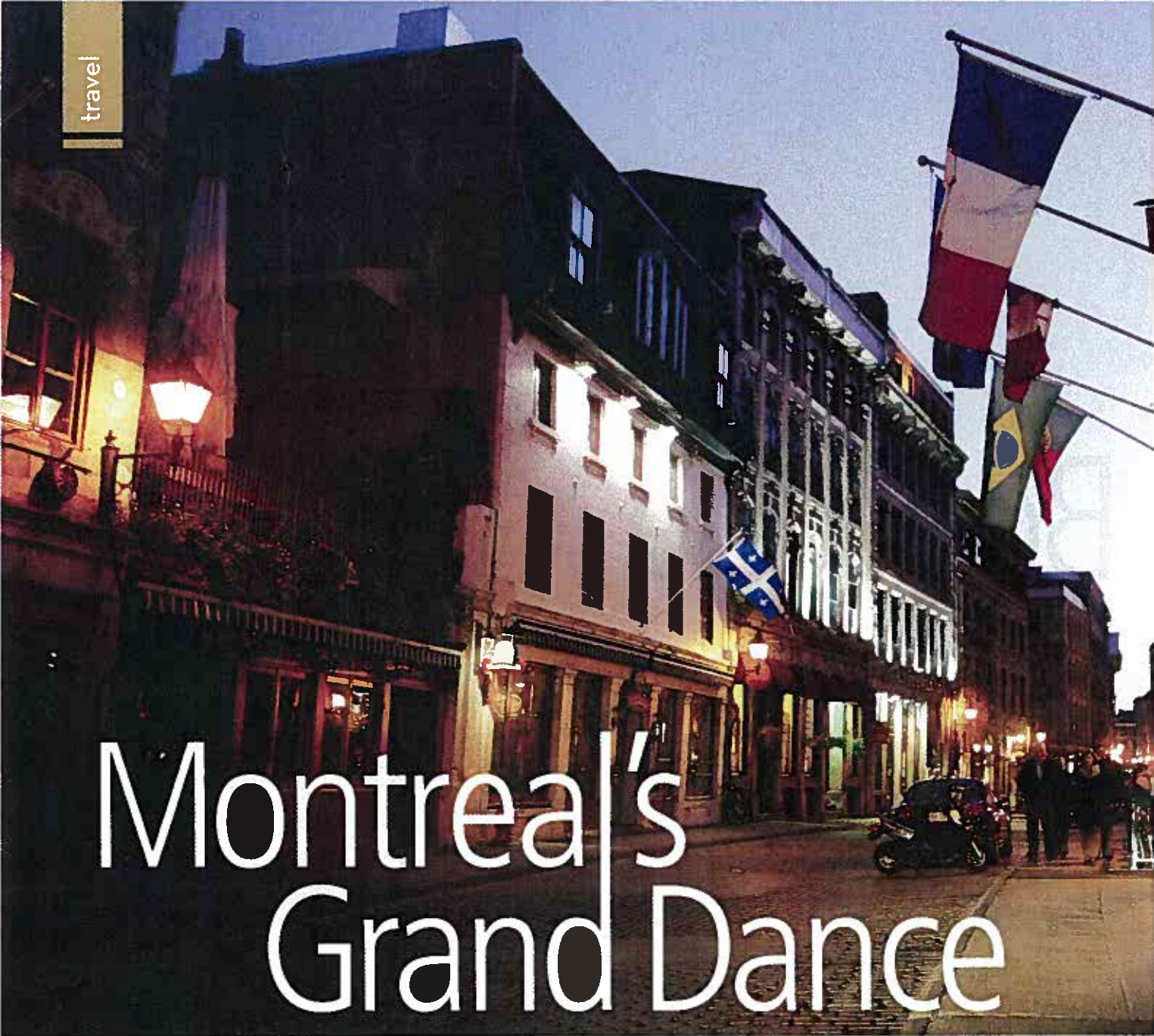
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Montreal's Grand Dance

From its beauty to its nightlife to its legendary celebration of gay pride, Montreal offers visitors plenty of reasons to kick up their heels.

BY JASON GUTIERREZ

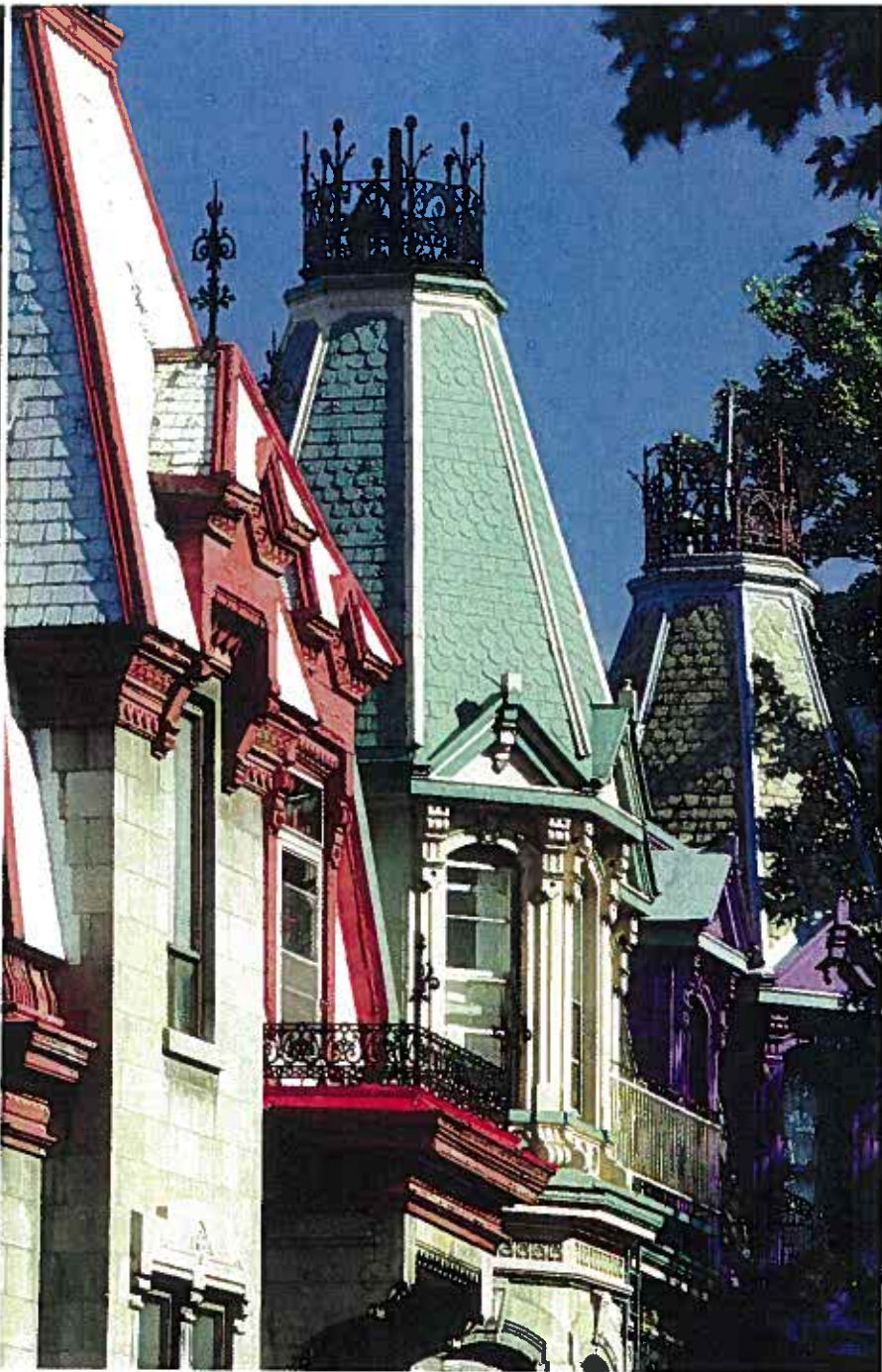
THERE'S AN AIR OF SEDUCTION about the city of Montreal. By day, its citizens celebrate the city's beauty and rich history, but it is the nightlife that beckons you to abandon your inhibitions and take a chance on the unknown.

Though nowadays it seems that most major cities have a gay district (or at least a part of town they are trying to promote as one), Montreal's is very well established. Americans refer to this district of pride and openness as the Village, but to natives of Montreal it is called *Le Village Gai*. Not even the bitter cold of winter can darken the heartbeat of this gay center, but it is during the summer months that Le Village really lets her hair down: specifically, for August's annual gay pride festival. The festival, more commonly known as *Célébrations de la Fierté*, is held August 13-16.

Known as "The City of Festivals," Montreal knows how to party, and its gay pride festival is no exception, according to Daniel Craig, novelist and former general manager of Opus Hotels in Vancouver and Montreal. Craig says it's the city's *joie de vivre* that makes its gay pride celebration so *magnifique*.

Craig says that, as an out gay man, he loves the culture and lifestyle in Montreal. "Montreal is a bit more formal than other cities. The 't-shirt and jeans everywhere' culture of other North American cities doesn't fly here; people dress up for dinner ... and they do it with style," he says. "After dinner they change into t-shirts and jeans and head out to the clubs."

A native Canadian, Craig has been to many gay pride festivals in Vancouver and the United States, but he says there is nothing like gay pride in Mon-



PHOTOS LEFT TO RIGHT BY EDWIN SANTIAGO, PIERRE ST-JACQUES.

treel. Gay Pride attracts a huge and diverse group from all over Canada and the U.S., but the bulk of participants are Quebec residents. The French culture adds a touch of sophistication to the festivities and ensures there are always lots of beautiful people around to admire. A wide range of events are held, from cultural to political, but many of them focus on what Montrealers love to do most — dance.

Appropriately enough, the main event of *Célébrations de la Fierté* is *La Grande Danse*, a large outdoor dance party with world-class DJs and performances. The event engulfs the main street in the Village, *Rue Sainte-Catherine*. Last summer the street was even shut down, allowing the restaurants, bars and cafés to expand and setting the perfect scene for outdoor dining, drinking and people watching.

When it comes to indoor nightlife, Craig recommends *Le Parking* (parkingbar.com), which attracts a diverse crowd and has great music but can get very crowded on weekends. He also suggests Sky Pub Club (complexesky.com), which is a bit more casual and has three floors, each with a different flavor, and *Le Saloon Bistro* (lesaloon.ca) for a casual, lively dinner with DJ. When he's hosting out-of-town visitors, Craig says, "Stock [stockbar.ca] is a must-see with its beefcake strippers who take it all off."

Dancing all night at Pride parties is going to require days of relaxation and nourishment. Step outside of the Village and into Montreal's rich mixture of old and new culture to find what you're looking for. Restaurant Koko and "Resto-Lounge" Suco at Hotel Opus Montreal are top spots where locals and visi-

From Left to Right: Saint Vincent Street and examples of Victorian architecture.



(Above) A view of Montreal from the top. (This photo) Productions de l'œil gets things spinning. (Right) Pride festivities in action.



PHOTOGRAPH BY JAMES HARRIS FOR METRO SOURCE. PHOTOGRAPH BY PHILIP HARRIS FOR METRO SOURCE.

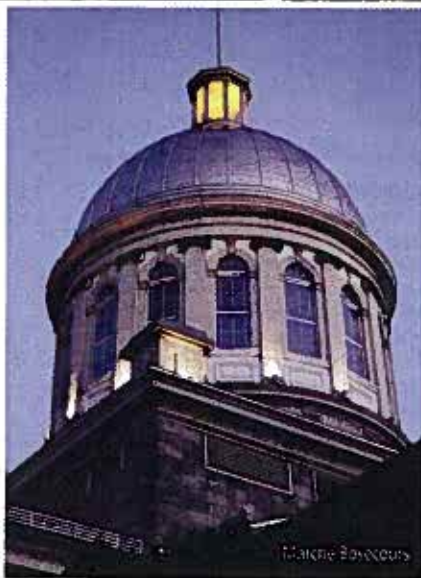


tors unwind. The Opus is also one of the most sought-after places to stay in the city because it is steps from the city's vibrant entertainment district and minutes from both picturesque Old Montreal and the hip — once bohemian, now gentrifying — neighborhood of Plateau Mont-Royal.

Another attractive aspect of Montreal is its abundance of fine dining. Most restaurants have a strong French flair or influence; true to European tradition, meals in Montreal are never a quick 30-minute in-and-out task — especially dinner. This is a time for friends, family and exquisite cuisine that is certain to last a couple of hours. If you're lucky enough to dine in restaurants such as the Koko (kokomontreal.com), Newtown (1476 rue Crescent), Brontë (bronterestaurant.com) or Café Méliès (cafemelies.com), your inner foodie is guaranteed to awake as you savor flavors beyond taste-bud-belief. It's just one more way in which the city seems built on a foundation of seduction.

Ready for a break from the bustle of chic hotels, gourmet dining and fabulous festivals? It's time to cleanse your senses in the verdant natural wonderland that is the Montreal Botanical Garden. With its outstanding collection of more than 22,000 varieties of plants, Montreal Botanical Garden is considered one of the world's best. Lose yourself in the grounds, which span 180 acres and include 10 exhibition greenhouses and over 30 outdoor gardens.

Once you're done experiencing the *Célébrations de la Fierté*, an ideal way to drink in Montreal's beauty one last time is to cycle through it. Tourism Montreal (tourisme-montreal.org) can set you up with a professional guide that will take you on an easy-paced, three-hour journey. See the spectacular panoramic view of the city from the Quays of the Old Port; take in the theatrics of the Quartier Latin; nab a snap of photogenic Lafontaine Park; detour into an unusual alley in Le Plateau; take a pastoral pause in Mount Royal Park; revel in the Victorian ambiance of the Golden Square Mile; plunge into the depths of the Underground City; emerge into the bustling Business Centre; and get one last look at the rich history of Old Montreal. It may be time to say *au revoir* to the City of Festivals, but you'll be bringing home plenty of memories worth celebrating.



Celebrations Checklist

For those of you ready to place Montreal's gay pride celebration on your to-do list, we highlight some of the official events you may want to experience while making your way along the rue Sainte-Catherine during the *Célébrations de la Fierté*:

Thursday, August 13, 2009 »

- 9pm *The Importance of Being Earnest* at Théâtre Ste. Catherine (also performs on Friday in French and Saturday in English and French; times vary)

Friday, August 14, 2009 »

- 4pm-11pm Café des Arts featuring Per7eption/The Exposition:HIV, Yvon Goulet and Kat Coric at Place Émilie-Gamelin
- 6pm Opening of the Place Émilie-Gamelin: "Omagedom" show
- 8pm "Dream Académie 80's Show," hosted by Dream at Place Émilie-Gamelin
- 9pm Porn Flakes Show at Place Émilie-Gamelin
- 10pm Official parties own the night in participating clubs and bars around Montreal!

Saturday, August 15, 2009 »

- 11am-6pm Community Day on rue Sainte-Catherine
- Noon-8pm The Tropical Zone: A multiethnic, urban and caliente T-dance at Place Émilie-Gamelin
- 1pm-10pm BBCM Pride Party with DJs Alain Jackinsky, Stéfane Lippé and Patrick Guay at Club Altitude 737 atop Place Ville Marie
- 8:30pm Michel Dorion's "C'est la fête" at Place Émilie-Gamelin
- 9pm "Les Gaydailles" show with Jasmin Roy at Cabaret du Musée Juste pour Rire
- 10pm More official parties at the clubs and bars!

Sunday, August 16, 2009 »

- 1pm Pride Parade, theme: ¡FIESTA!
- 1pm-11pm MEGA T-DANCE at Place Émilie-Gamelin with DJs Mark Anthony, Stéfane Lippé and Oscar Velasquez
- 9pm Closing Show: STONEWALL REVOLUTION, with the RADICAL 5 at Place Émilie-Gamelin
- 10pm One last night of partying around town!