



Montreal

WHERE ON EARTH

Le 9e

EATON'S RESTAURANT IS REBORN *by* MARK STACHIEW

MONTREALERS OF A CERTAIN AGE have fond memories of the restaurant that sat atop Eaton's downtown department store, but it's not the food that they remember; it was the restaurant's soaring Art Deco dining hall with its towering murals and sweeping architectural flourishes that left the biggest impression.

PHOTOS THIS SPREAD FROM TOP The original Eaton's restaurant was modelled after an ocean liner dining room; The new restaurant, restored to its Art Deco glory.

Legend has it that during an Atlantic crossing on the S.S. *Île-de-France* in the 1920s, Lady Flora Eaton fell in love with the ship's Art Deco interior. She later asked renowned architect Jacques Carlu to use the design of the ocean liner's first-class dining room to guide him while drawing up plans for a new restaurant atop her husband Lord Timothy Eaton's department store in downtown Montreal.

The restaurant eventually opened its doors to the public in 1931 and generations of customers, especially women who came there

to luncheon, would flock to the restaurant which offered affordable meals in a luxurious setting. That all ended in 1999 when Eaton's declared bankruptcy. The restaurant was abandoned and the nine-storey building on St Catherine Street, the city's busiest shopping thoroughfare, was gutted to be transformed into a shopping centre.

Many thought the restaurant was lost forever, but the Quebec government had quickly declared it a heritage site so it was never touched during the building's renovation. Two and a half decades later, a group of heritage-minded developers and

investors have breathed new life into the space to lovingly restore the restaurant to its former glory.


Now known as Le 9e (Le Neuvième, for the "ninth floor"), the space consists of the 120-seat Île de France restaurant, two additional multipurpose rooms that can seat up to 20, a cocktail bar and ground-floor café as well as La Grande Salle, the Art Deco hall where the original Eaton's restaurant once stood.

The hall is now a venue equipped to host a wide range of events including live shows, exhibitions and private functions like its use as the setting for the finale of this year's Top Chef Canada show on the Food Network.

In the future, restaurant management hopes to use the hall for special dining events so that Montrealers can get a taste of what the space might have been like back in its days as Eaton's restaurant.

Not only was no expense spared in Le 9e's restoration, the space's new owners wanted to make sure that the dining experience at the Île de France restaurant was as exceptional as the setting so they signed up some of the city's top culinary talent.

Overseen by Executive Chef Liam Hopkins (Hopkins, McKiernan, Park) and Culinary Director Derek Dammann (Maison Publique, McKiernan, Fifteen), the Île de France offers a fine dining experience of French and Mediterranean cuisine inspired by the original establishment's menu.

Open Saturday and Sunday for brunch, Tuesday to Friday for lunch and every day except Monday for dinner, Île de France doesn't fully recreate the Eaton's experience that you might remember, but it's a worthy addition to Montreal's exceptional culinary scene that honours the past while moving towards the future. 



Le 9e
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MARK STACHIEW is a Montreal-based writer who has loved to travel ever since his parents took him on epic cross-country road trips as a child. He believes travel can be a force for good in the world and hopes his stories inspire others to encounter different cultures in order to gain a greater understanding of how we are all connected.