



“Cabin” of Grandeur

SOME OF THE ELABORATE LOG HOMES of today bear little resemblance to their humbler forebears, but when it comes to log-home luxury, Quebec’s Le Chateau Montebello tops them all. Nearly a century after its lightning-fast construction, the private-club-turned-hotel still stands as the world’s largest and perhaps grandest log structure and a testament to logs’ long-lasting qualities.

When Swiss-born millionaire Hubert Saddlemire envisioned the project in the late 1920s, he wanted to create an indulgent resort patterned after the Alps chateaux from his childhood. He hired Finnish master builder Victor Nymark, who had construction crews practically ready to break ground before architects were even hired. Through much of the building’s construction, workers built ahead of blueprints. With crews numbering as many as 3,500, working in shifts around the clock, the resort was built in just four months in the spring of 1930, with all the log work requiring only two months.

That such a magnificent log structure was erected so quickly and efficiently in a time of widespread economic misfortune is commendable in itself, but the chateau’s true legacy is its enduring presence. History has seen many large log buildings, notably the Great Camps of the Adirondacks, fall into ruin due to lack of maintenance, but 81 years after its construction, Le Chateau Montebello still stands, just as strong and proud as ever.

With 10,000 logs to maintain, upkeep is a constant job that requires 15 full-time maintenance employees, including grounds workers. Routine tasks include inspecting, caulking, painting, repairing and capping deteriorating logs and replacing them when necessary. Renault Vauchon, the hotel’s director of maintenance, estimates that 20 logs have been replaced since he started in 2003 and three times that number in the years prior, a process that requires three to four days per log and considerable effort.

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“We have to change out a lot of the caulking and paint every year,” says Vauchon. “We do it in parts — one summer is not long enough to paint the entire hotel.” It has undergone several major renovations over the years, including projects to strengthen the foundation and replace and reinforce the roof.

Le Chateau Montebello has been an important landmark in Quebec since its inception and has hosted celebrities and dignitaries over the years. Until 1970, the chateau served as the main “playhouse” of the Seigniory Club, a private social league whose star-studded membership included Monaco’s Prince Rainier and Princess Grace. In 1981, the hotel welcomed heads of state to the G7 Summit, among them British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, who reportedly remarked that it must certainly be the world’s largest “log cabin.” More castle than cabin, Le Chateau Montebello continues to wow famous and regular guests alike with its stunning architecture and rustic beauty.

—Danielle Taylor