VILLERAY AND ITS ARCHITECTURAL HOTSPOTS

by Ève Lemieux

“Metro, bike, condo.” That's pretty much been my reality since summer 2010! Having grown up crossing the bridges from the North Shore (Papa) to the South Shore (Maman), it was out of the question that my cozy adult nest could be anywhere but in the heart of Montreal.

A proud owner of a modest apartment in Villeray, I learned to discover my much-adored neighbourhood on foot and by bike. A fan of architecture and “old things,” Villeray is pretty much my paradise on earth. Let me share a few of my favourite spots with you, as an actor, not a historian!

NOTRE-DAME-DU-SAINT-ROSAIRE CHURCH
A place so dear to my heart! One day, Grandmaman told me that her two older sisters got married in this church. Now, every time I walk by it, its steps adorned with flowers, I imagine Gaby and Denise in their white wedding dresses, their hearts aflutter, climbing the steps to Saint-Rosaire, thinking to themselves: “This is where my new life begins!” In August 2014, I participated in the filming of Anime, a post-apocalyptic short feature by Arnaud Brisebois in which the façade of Notre-Dame-du-Saint-Rosaire is featured in the opening scene. Who would have thought that 60 years later, I’d be standing on the very same steps—without the white dress—of the church where Gaby and Denise proclaimed “I do”!

Every evening, at 6 p.m. on the dot, the bell of Notre-Dame-du-Saint-Rosaire tolls, reminding the parishioners of Villeray that it’s time to pray (or not). From my small back balcony, I watch the sun set between the two greenish bell towers of this magnificent church built in 1930.

FORMER NATIONAL BANK OF CANADA
Built in 1928, this light coloured commercial building livens up the corner of Villeray and St-Hubert. The former offices of the National Bank of Canada and then the National Bank, this building no longer houses financial operations. For nearly five years, it was the HQ for yoga fans in the neighbourhood, and for the last few months, l’Espace 7680 (the name of the yoga studio) has been for rent. I’m sending this out to all you entrepreneurs and fans of Villeray: It’s your turn to breathe new life into this building rich in history. A tearoom? Vegetarian bistro? Microbrewery? Yes, yes and yes! It would be a dream come true, and just what the neighbourhood desperately needs!

SAINTE-CÉCILE CHURCH
This majestic piece of architecture built between 1923 and 1926, is the very heart of Villeray. Surrounded by the bistro L’Enchanteur, the café Larue & fils, a “self-serve” piano (the first in Villeray, yay!) which, depending on the level of skill of the pianist, enchants passers-by and restaurant patrons, and the bike path along Henri-Julien, Sainte-Cécile is a real head turner. Every year, tens of thousands of people assemble on its esplanade to celebrate our Fête nationale with great pomp. June 23, 2015, will forever be etched in my memory: corn on the cob, good beer by the keg, De Castelnau street closed to traffic for the occasion, and balconies overflowing with people, proud and festive, with Loud Lary Ajust (my faves!) getting thousands of Quebecers up on their feet and dancing on the steps of Sainte-Cécile, and, to top it all off, a light show on the bell towers! #Jemesouviens

D.-ARMAND-TAILLEFER BUILDING
Built in 1929, this building is a fairly typical example of a Montreal caretaker’s house of a bygone era. Its heavy timber front door, the ornamental details on the windows and its attractive cube-like shape give it the appearance of an old school, like the one in the movie A Little Princess (girls my age know what I am talking about!). Located just steps from the colourfully painted leisure zone with swings, giant flower pots and a Bixi station, this apartment building has, as
Maman would say, “a lot of attitude”! Every evening on my way back from the gym, I pass by this building and imagine living there, like in an American Christmas movie: a big family sitting down to a huge turkey dinner, a golden dog dozing by the fire, a huge tree decorated with candles, snow flakes dancing outside the window—in short, this building takes me right inside a modern-day fairy tale!

**ANTIOCHOISE ST. GEORGE ORTHODOX CHURCH**

Its exotic look (a kind of East meets West) and the mythical fresco, painted on the adjacent building, have made for colourful mornings for over six years. This is not only a “parking” spot for my bike (the pole at the bottom of the church steps is a much better bet than the miserable bike rack outside Jean-Talon metro), but it's also the best place for a smoke while waiting for a lift, a date, the bus…or just to take a couple of minute out of a busy day.

For me, Villeray is all about beautiful historic buildings, delicious restaurants (Tapeo, Tandem, Mesón, etc.), neighbourhood bars (Miss Villeray, Huis Clos, Etho, etc.), municipal pools, parks, and colourful leisure zones. It's also about all my friends who share in my enjoyment of this neighbourhood. It's a wonderful place to live, a place where you can still park your car without ending up swearing up a storm for 20 minutes! Villeray is a way of life, a haven of happiness that inspires me each and every day.