

# The Gazette

## Travel: Quebec City lights up the night

By David Johnston, THE GAZETTE January 1, 2012

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The lighting on the fortification wall below the Château Frontenac simulates cannon fire. After dark, every 15 minutes, the lights flash for three consecutive minutes. Photograph by: Marie-Josée Deschenes, CCNQ.

While in Quebec City last month, I met a fellow journalist who said it was her first visit to the provincial capital in 15 years. She said she didn't know whether it was her imagination or not, but to her, Quebec City looked even more beautiful than she had remembered it.

I wonder how many other people who have visited Quebec City recently, for the first time in a while, have been thinking the same thing.

To be sure, millions of dollars spent on renovations for the city's 400th birthday in 2008 have given the historic city a fresh look. But there's something else many people may not be aware of: the change in the way the city now looks at night. Quebec's innovative Plan lumière has given la vieille capitale a spectacular look and feel after dark.

As part of the preparations for the 400th, the provincial Commission de la capitale nationale du Québec proposed a new light plan, or Plan lumière, for Quebec City. In 1998, the CCNQ identified 63 important public and private properties for special lighting projects, with costs to be shared by public and private sources. The goal was to install new showcase lighting on as many of these 63 properties as possible by 2008. In the end, 22 projects were completed – the last one being the Price Building in Old Quebec, whose cornerstone was laid on Oct. 29, 1929, the day of the Black Tuesday stock-market crash. After a four-year pause, a second phase of new showcase night lighting is to be unveiled in 2012.

Quebec's Plan lumière, which Montreal has been studying very closely, is based on architectural-lighting plans that were introduced in Europe in the 1980s; the main inspiration for Quebec City has been Lyon, France.

“The fact that Quebec City is a Nordic city means our winter nights are long, and so creative night lighting can be used to beautify the urban environment and encourage people to go outdoors,” says Véronique Koulouris, a Université Laval-trained CCNQ architect who is in charge of Quebec City's Plan lumière.

On a mild Saturday night last month, my teenage son and I took the railway funicular from Dufferin Terrace down the steep slope of Cap Diamant to Rue du Petit Champlain. From there, we walked a few blocks west and looked back up at the Château Frontenac, which was the first of the 22 properties to see new beautification lighting installed, in 1999.

But what we had really come to see was the lighting on the fortification wall just below the hotel, a wall that was built in 1878-79 to support the construction of Dufferin Terrace. There are 54 square holes in that wall designed to look like cannon ports. In 2001, special red LED lights simulating cannon fire were installed in those 54 locations. After dark, every 15 minutes on the hour and quarter hour, those lights flash for three consecutive minutes. Sure enough, my son and I arrived at 8:57, and we only had to wait three minutes before the simulated cannon fire began and continued until 9:03. What made the

visual scene all that more impressive were the 350 white and amber flood lights running along the base of the wall, illuminating the whole section from the Frontenac to The Citadel itself, built between 1820-32.

My son and I walked back east along Rue du Petit Champlain to Place Royale, where the historic Église Notre Dame des Victoires was outfitted with CCNQ-inspired lighting in 2008. The church is famous because it was built on top of the ruins of the very first building erected by Samuel de Champlain in 1608. He called it the Habitation de Québec, whose residents gave rise to a name, habitants, that came to be associated more broadly over time with French settlers more generally in New France – and still later, as a nickname, Habs, for the Montreal Canadiens.

In 1993, archeological digging around the site managed to identify the precise perimeter of Champlain's original Habitation. As it turns out, the church itself was built slightly off-centre from Champlain's original fort. That detail served as the basis for the kind of lighting that the Plan lumière gave to the church property. Lights were installed on the sides of adjacent building in Place Royale that project down onto the ground around the church a precise an outline of the original Habitation perimeter.

The other distinctive lighting feature at Notre Dame des Victoires is the blue lighting incorporated into the two circular windows above the church's front doors. It was created to match the same historic medieval French bleu royal colour of the trim around the church's windows.

After taking the funicular back up to Dufferin Terrace, my son and I walked over to the Price Building to take a closer look at the lighting. The accent lighting is green as well as white, the green suggestive of oxidized copper. The 22 properties that have been lit up under the Plan lumière aren't just situated in Old Quebec. Historic church properties in Sillery and Charlebourg have been outfitted with new showcase lighting as part of an effort to beautify historic village cores in the Quebec City metropolitan area. All 22 projects were financed through a cost-sharing arrangement between the CCNQ and private sources, although the share borne by the CCNQ varies from project to project. Quebec City's Plan lumière represents a breakthrough in urban planning in Canada. Most Canadian cities have landmark properties that have been the objects of individualized special light plans. Quebec's Plan lumière has taken architectural lighting to a more collective level – and yes, it has made a very beautiful city even more beautiful than it used to be.

If you go:

There is frequent bus and rail service between Montreal and Quebec City. Motorists take Highway 20 or 40, depending on where they live in the Montreal region. For more information about Quebec's Plan lumière, and to see pictures of landmark properties that have received new showcase lighting under the plan, visit the Commission de la capitale nationale du Québec's website, at [capitale.gouv.qc.ca/realisations/mises-lumiere.html](http://capitale.gouv.qc.ca/realisations/mises-lumiere.html)

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