

GLOBAL BAZAAR

With its music and art scenes soaring,
Montreal embraces its diversity

text: LAURA MARCUS photography: JORGE CAMAROTTI





Every Sunday locals gather at the foot of Mount Royal, also known as "Tam-Tams," to play instruments,

"The multiculturalism and the genuine bilingualism are such integral parts of what makes Montreal unique."

—Safwan, tattoo artist

There's been a lot of buzz about Montreal in the past few years, and being a native Montrealer, I felt a surge of pride anytime I would overhear others singing the praises of my hometown. But at some point, you have to question where the hype ends and reality begins. Growing up in one of Canada's most vibrant cities, I never fully appreciated how lucky I was until I left. My return to Montreal was a homecoming of sorts, a chance to reexamine the city that has officially put itself on the map. Six years ago when I would tell people where I was from, they would say: "Oh yeah, isn't Montreal near British Columbia?" That isn't the case in 2007, when groups like The Arcade Fire, Wolf Parade and Rufus Wainwright have brought Montreal's music scene to the forefront. But it isn't only the musicians that seem to be pouring out of Montreal like liquid. Is the city's existence as a transcultural Mecca that makes this island unique. What other city in the world could play host to the unification of a Venezuelan diva and a bookish Jewish entrepreneur from New Jersey? My parents are proof of Montreal's ability to bring opposites together, and spin tales of love so unique they become their own miniature citiscapes within the larger framework.

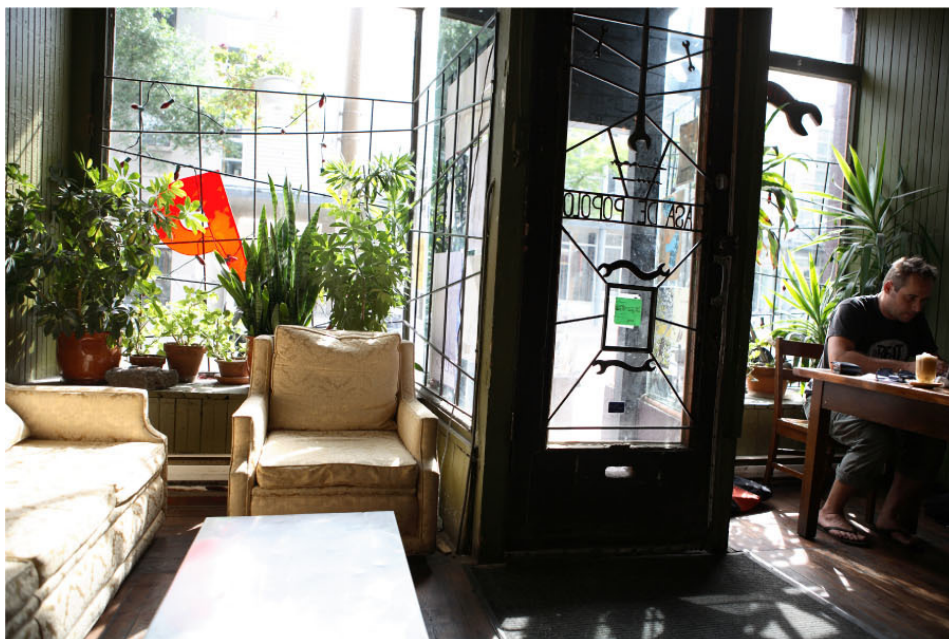
Established as one of Canada's first port cities, in what was once called Hochelaga in the 16th Century, Montreal became the epicenter of Canada's thriving fur trade.

The Hudson's Bay Company, founded in the 1600s, is the oldest commercial corporation in North America, and one of the oldest in the world. Its original form was restricted to the fur trade, but what began as business allowed some of Canada's first traders and trappers to forge early relationships with the First Nations as well as create a network of trading posts that stretched into western Canada and the United States. The

Hudson's Bay Company still exists to this day, and has been transformed into department stores throughout Canada. Montreal is now Canada's second largest city and is largely recognized as its creative capital by Montrealers and Canadians alike. That distinction needs to be made: Montrealers are very different from Canadians. What they have learned from experience and conflict has distinguished them as some of the feistiest and most passionate of city dwellers around the globe.

With French as the official language, Montreal was once a place of great tension between Anglophones and Francophones.

The "Quiet Revolution" saw the creation of the FLQ (Front de Libération du Québec), which led to an onslaught of terrorism directed at English institutions. For a decade Quebec was plagued with bombings, robberies and attacks. Most people don't know about this dark chapter in Canadian history; those who do have tried to forget it. The Referendum of October 30th, 1995, was another moment when the world took notice, as Quebec voted on its sovereignty from Canada. After so many ups and downs within the English and French communities, it would seem like the reconciliation of both groups would be painful and difficult. What I experienced on returning home to Montreal was something absolutely amazing. There is a genuine sense of synergy between the communities now, a sense of hope and cooperation that was never palpable while I was growing up. Whatever tension may have existed in the past has dissipated. What remains is something wholly uplifting and inspiring. The people I met come from a wide range of disciplines that stretch across the city. From music to art and fashion, everyone shared one commonality: an undying passion for the city that has cultivated their talent and continues to support them.



Up-and-coming bands make it a point to play at Casa del Popolo, a coffee shop by day and music venue by night located in Le Plateau

“Montreal is now Canada’s second largest city and is largely recognized as its creative capital by Montrealers and Canadians alike.”

“When you come to this city, it’s not too hard to integrate yourself...you tend to find common-minded people regardless of your background, and Montreal has so much to offer.”

—Amon Tobin, music producer

A tattoo artist normally brings to mind a mean-mugged tough guy. But when I met Safwan a few years ago, I knew right away that he was a sweetheart. He wears his passion on his sleeve (literally), and has a commitment to his clients as well as his city. Born in Egypt, his family made their way to Canada when he was just a year old. “People always ask me about my name. I think it was my parents’ way of giving me a souvenir since they knew I would be growing up in Montreal.” As the owner of one of Montreal’s premier tattoo studios, Safwan has taken Imago to extraordinary new heights and garnered international acclaim. “We have tattoo artists who come from all over the world to do stints at the shop. It’s great because about six months out of the year if you walk into the studio you can get tattooed by artists from Paris, Barcelona, you name it,” said Safwan. After grabbing a breakfast of eggs and coffee, Safwan walked me down to the Old Port for my next interview with renowned producer Amon Tobin. The walk, which is quite a hike from the Le Plateau area where the studio is located, gave us a chance to catch up. I asked him about his experience tattooing Cirque de Soleil owner and founder Guy Laliberté. “I traveled with him for almost two years. He’s such a busy guy and he just took me along for the ride so I could tattoo him on his crazy schedule. It was amazing. I went to Brazil with him on his private jet, and Las Vegas. I ended up tattooing his entire back and his legs as well.” Safwan’s skills extend beyond the needle, with almost 20 years as the front man of his band Akuma. Rock ‘n’ roll, tattoos and a smile have made Safwan a familiar name in both the art and tattoo community, and you can’t help but feel a kinship with such a friendly soul. “Montreal is amazing because it’s the bridge between Europe and North America, it’s really the meeting point between the two. The multiculturalism and the genuine bilingualism are also such integral parts of what makes Montreal unique.”

Next I met with photographer Jorge Camarotti on the cobblestone streets of the Old Port. The Old Port, or Vieux Montreal as the locals call it, is a hot spot for tourism. Walking along the narrow streets, you’re bombarded by the sheer number of souvenir shops and knick-knacks that embrace almost every Canadian stereotype imaginable. From stuffed animals dressed as Mounties (the nickname for the Royal Canadian Mounted Police) to candies made from Canadian maple syrup, you’d be hard pressed to find a spot in the area that doesn’t cater to the out-of-towner. During the summer it is both beautiful and relaxing to walk by the water and take in all the sights. As a kid I used to come down to the Old Port to rollerblade and hang out with my parents because of its palpable old world charm. It was among the horse and buggies and small shops that Jorge and I found Amon Tobin.

Nestled away in a side street, Amon’s home studio is airy and bright, a sanctuary of sorts where the musician has harbored his creativity for the past four years. Originally from Brazil, Amon Tobin has become one of, if not the most successful electronic music producer in Canada. His alliance to Montreal was formed in the ‘90s when he first signed to Ninja Tune Records. Seated on pillows sprawled across the expansive floor, we talked about music, the difficult process of becoming an “adult” and life in Montreal. Soft-spoken and humble, Amon spoke about his career with the calm and ease of an appreciative veteran. “I did a show the other night and there were 40,000 people there. It was amazing to see so many people,

dancing and moving together.” Being so successful hasn’t dampened Amon’s enthusiasm for his art or Montreal. “When you come to this city, it’s not too hard to integrate yourself... you tend to find common-minded people regardless of your background, and Montreal has so much to offer,” he said.

A few days later, I found myself back in Vieux Montreal, this time to speak with gallery owner Yves Laroche. His gallery, which is the only “low brow” gallery in the city, sits among contemporary and classic spaces. With recent shows displaying the work of Ron English and Van Arno, Yves’ gallery is making waves in otherwise calm waters. What is immediately apparent upon first meeting Yves is how inspired he is by his work. He isn’t the stereotypical gallery owner, snotty and condescending, but rather a man of warmth and modesty. His eyes lit up and his speech quickened when he talked to Jorge and I about the artists he has been working with. After a few hours together, my French thankfully returned to full capacity. Yves acted as my second tour guide, and after a quick interview at the gallery, he invited Jorge, the gallery’s curator Kimena and myself for ice cream next door. “This is the best ice cream the city has to offer,” he said. “Its maple ice cream, and this company knows how to make the best kind!” Jorge and I sampled our generous scoops and eyed each other with total delight.

Yves drove us through the city to a corner of the island called Mile End. Located near the Plateau area, Mile End has changed tremendously in the past six years. What was once considered a rough neighborhood has transformed itself into a hot spot full of shops, cafes, restaurants and spacious housing options. The Plateau area used to be the most popular place to live for the creative voices of the city, but as its popularity soared so did its rent prices, and people began moving north. For New Yorkers, this kind of outward momentum is expected, but for Montrealers, and especially for myself, I am always amazed when these kinds of changes happen. Mile End is cool now, and so is St Henri, an area near downtown that until a few years ago was only frequented by warehouse workers and industrial giants. Yves described the warehouse he was taking us to, where he rents out an entire floor to provide spaces for local and visiting artists. As we pulled up to the massive Mile End warehouse, Yves told us about up-and-coming Cuban artist Carlos Quintana, who is currently staying in one of the spaces. “He’s amazing and he’s going to be huge.” As he showed us around the warehouse, we were introduced to some legendary characters indeed. Yves led us into a room full of costume sketches and hair, and introduced us to the woman who makes the wigs for Cirque de Soleil, as well as other high-end theater productions in the city.

Our next stop was a visit to the studio of Alain Poirier, one of Canada’s finest master printers. As I looked over the giant printing presses that are over hundreds of years old, I was amazed at the sheer volume of creativity that has come out of this city, and it seems that Yves knew every source. The best part of our visit to the warehouse was the panoramic view of the entire island from the tenth floor. We stepped out onto the roof and the scenic backdrop was awe-inspiring. I could see the Olympic Stadium and the river, the buildings of downtown Montreal, the many church spires and the most beautiful sight of them all, the one and only mountain on the island, and its namesake: Mont Royal.



DENIS GAGNON

Location: Le Plateau, 2:30pm

Age: 45

Occupation: Designer

Where were you born? Alma Town, Saint-Jean Lake

What do you love most about Montreal? The people and their personalities.

What in your opinion is the biggest misconception about Canada? That we are all Native Americans.

What's your favorite thing to do in Montreal? Riding my bicycle

Describe yourself in three words. Shy, generous, in love.

What is your favorite type of poutine? All dressed.

What gives you the ultimate high? Seeing my new collections every season.

What are you capable of doing for love? Completely reinventing myself.

What is your guilty pleasure? Drugs.

How would you define art? Spontaneous.

What was the last experience that moved you? When I lost my boutique.



Typical row houses of the Mile End



Summertime is when Montrealers let it all hang out



YVES LAROCHE

Age: 55

Location: Vieux Montreal, 2pm

Occupation: Art dealer, publisher, owner of Yves Laroché Galerie

Where were you born? Quebec City

What do you love most about Montreal? The multiculturalism.

What in your opinion is the biggest misconception about Canada?

That making money is a bad thing.

What's your favorite thing to do in Montreal? Drinking some good Bordeaux.

Describe yourself in three words. Intense, energetic, hardworking.

What is your favorite type of poutine? Galveau's peas and chicken poutine.

What gives you the ultimate high? Training every morning at 6:30am for an hour.

What are you capable of doing for love? Tout.

What is your guilty pleasure? I'm a collector. I collect art, toys and vintage finds.

How would you define art? Food for the soul.



Milan Gervais

Age: 27

Location: Le Plateau, 5pm

Occupation: Choreographer, dancer

Where were you born? Montreal

What do you love most about Montreal? The diversity of accents I hear when I'm walking down the street. It feels like being in a city where different people from all around the globe have found a little home, and have taken the chance to transform it.

What in your opinion is the biggest misconception about Canada? Canada is so big, and its name seems to restrict the variety of worlds and people that it contains. I think of it as a country full of different villages that share the same landscape but interpret, live and name it differently. Etymologically Canada is an Iroquois word meaning "village".

What's your favorite thing to do in Montreal? Riding my bike all around the city in the summer. The soft soundscape of the urban activity all absorbed by the snow in winter.

Describe yourself in three words. Body, mind, spirit.

What is your favorite type of poutine? I don't really like poutine.

What gives you the ultimate high? Sweating. Investing myself in a deep layer of being and sharing it with others.

What are you capable of doing for love? Listening and acting. Going beyond my personal conceptions and beliefs to understand someone else's reality.

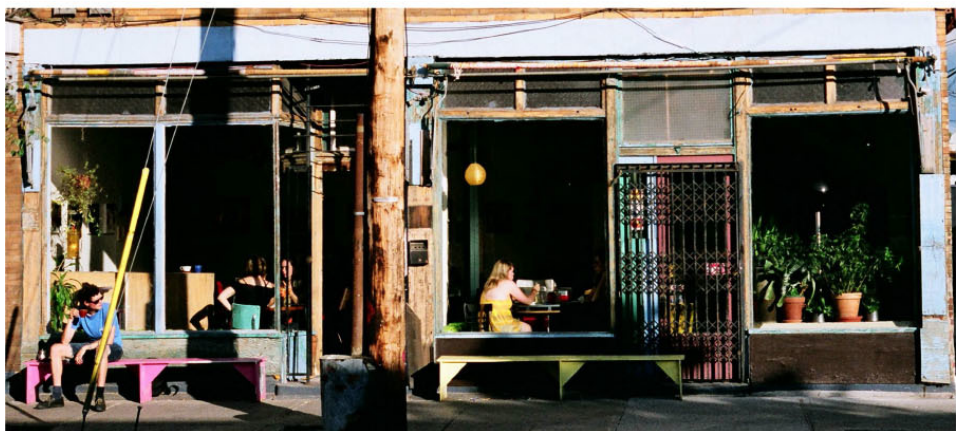
What is your guilty pleasure? Chocolate ice cream. Spending a night and the early morning dancing!

What's the last experienced that moved you? Walking at night along a stretch of beach at Les Îles de la Madeleine, totally immersed in the violence of the wind, the movement of the ocean and the black infinite horizon.



"It feels like being in a city where different people from all around the globe have found a little home, and have taken the chance to transform it."

—Milan Gervais, choreographer



Artists congregate at one of Le Plateau's many coffee houses



DAN CLIMAN

Age: 20

Location: Montreal West, 2pm

Occupation: Artist, student

Where were you born? Montreal

What do you love most about Montreal? The good museums, the good food and the good skating.

What in your opinion is the biggest misconception about Canada? Probably that every city is as cool as Montreal, because they aren't really.

What's your favorite thing to do in Montreal? I skate a lot, but probably walking around downtown and eating \$2 chow mein.

Describe yourself in three words. So so fresh.

What is your favorite type of poutine? Lachine Arena's Poutine

What gives you the ultimate high? Creating a new piece that exceeds the rest.

What are you capable of doing for love? I'd give away a really good painting. It's been done.

What is your guilty pleasure? Fiji water, expensive water. Also, I listen to way too much Lil' Wayne.

How would you define art? Being able to take all your separate influences and bring them together. Not being too serious, but making people think.



ELISA DAHAN & ERAN ELFASSY

Age: 28 / 28

Location: Montreal North, 12:30pm

Occupation: Designers, Mackage Designs

Where were you born?

Elisa: Montreal

Eran: Tel Aviv, Israel

What do you love most about Montreal?

Elisa: The quality of life

Eran: The people

What in your opinion is the biggest misconception about Canada?

That when it comes to politics we're always on the sidelines.

What's your favorite thing to do in Montreal?

Wakeboarding and relaxing up north. The nightlife is amazing, but having a peaceful oasis is great too.

Describe yourself in three words.

Elisa: Passionate, lively, headstrong.

Eran: Creative, easy-going, dreamer.

What is your favorite type of poutine?

Elisa: Shed Cafe's three pepper poutine

Eran: La Banquise's poutine

What gives you the ultimate high?

Seeing a collection when it's finished.

What are you capable of doing for love?

Elisa: Giving everything up.

Eran: I do what's necessary to work it out, I'm the great compromiser.

What is your guilty pleasure?

Elisa: Buying shoes.

Eran: Gambling, and driving my motorcycle with no license.

How would you define art?

The pleasure of admiring and appreciating things.

What was the last experience that moved you?

Elisa: Going to Jerusalem to be with my four sisters and four nieces.

Eran: Going to "The Box" in NYC.



SAFWAN

Age: 35

Location: Le Plateau, 11:15am

Occupation: Tattoo artist and owner, Imago Tattoo

Where were you born? Cairo, Egypt

What do you love most about Montreal? It's multiculturalism, the blend of French and English, the little bit of European flare it has...and all the pretty girls.

What in your opinion is the biggest misconception about Canada? They think we're woodsmen.

What's your favorite thing to do in Montreal? Walking around the different 'hoods, roaming streets and back alleys. It's also a great city to skate around, skateboard that is.

Describe yourself in three words. Stubborn. Passionate. Opinionated.

What is your favorite type of poutine? Classic! Cheese curds and gravy, made in Québec.

What gives you the ultimate high? Attacking merchant vessels, plundering and pillaging island towns, partying in Tortuga with my crew while spending all our booty in one crazy drunken dance.

What are you capable of doing for love? I'm capable of letting go.

What is your guilty pleasure? Surfing the web.

What's the last experienced that moved you? The party week we had for my tattoo studio's 10th anniversary. I was pretty touched by all the wishes and props I received, and moved by the coming together of old friends and regular customers for the occasion.



DANY LAFERRIERE

Location: Carre St Louis, 12:30pm

Age: 54

Occupation: Writer

Where were you born? Port-au-Prince, Haiti

What do you love most about Montreal? The quality of life. The Little neighborhoods. The calm and the trees. All the amazing cultural events that unfold in this small city.

What's your favorite thing to do in Montreal? Sitting in my favorite café, Les Gâteries, reading a magazine.

Describe yourself in three words. Persévérance, patience, paresse (lazy).
Trois Ps.

What is your favorite type of poutine? I don't eat poutine.

What gives you the ultimate high? Sleep.

What are you capable of doing for love? I can only live for love.

What is your guilty pleasure? Eating anything sugary up until the ambulance arrives.

What was the last experience that moved you? A play I saw called "Forest" by Wajdi Mouwad. The German film *The Lives of Others*. And dreaming about my grandmother... she looked so radiant.



Hardcore volleyball addicts play every weekend near the foot of Mount Royal



BRIAN NEUMAN & MEYER BILLARCU

Age: 29 / 30

Location: Le Plateau, Casa Del Popolo, 4pm

Occupation: Concert and cultural promoters, Blue Skies Turn Black

Where were you born? Montreal

What do you love most about Montreal?

Brian: The freedom to do what we want.

Meyer: The pace of life is definitely the best thing.

What in your opinion is the biggest misconception about Canada?

That we live in igloos.

What's your favorite thing to do in Montreal?

Brian: Eat

Meyer: Bike riding, I can bike anywhere and its only five minutes away.

Describe yourself in three words.

Brian: You describe me in three words.

Meyer: Nervous and weird.

What is your favorite type of poutine?

Classic. Original.

What gives you the ultimate high?

Brian: A good glass of whiskey.

Meyer: Pulling off a good show where everyone had a good time and everyone is happy at the end.

What are you capable of doing for love?

Brian: Whatever it takes.

Meyer: A lot more than I probably should.

What is your guilty pleasure?

Brian: Watching Big Brother.

Meyer: Drinking every night at a show.

How would you define art?

Brian: There is no definition, anything can be art.

Meyer: The freedom for one to express themselves however they see fit.

Which is actually the definition of punk rock.

DL

Age: 21

Location: Downtown Montreal, 4:36pm

Occupation: Promoter and event organizer, Peer Pressure

Where were you born? Montreal

What do you love most about Montreal? The diversity. The bilingualism; learning from each other because we're all so different.

What in your opinion is the biggest misconception about Canada? Being so close to the US, people assume we don't have our own culture. History has made people think that we're not assertive either, but they just don't get it.

What's your favorite thing to do in Montreal? Going out and meeting people.

Describe yourself in three words. Focused, happy, amblious.

What is your favorite type of poutine? The Frank (with merguez sausage) at La Banquise

What gives you the ultimate high? Right now I'd say as a promoter, chasing the perfect party.

What are you capable of doing for love? Anything. Whatever it takes.

What is your guilty pleasure? Immediate gratification.

How would you define art? It's the approach to what you're doing, the personal value you're putting into it and the personal motivation behind it.

What was the last experience that moved you? Watching *Lost In Translation* again.

PHOTO EQUIPMENT Jean Charles Savard, www.photoservice.ca