Jane Hobbins and Ken McAuliffe have a glorious site and superb food going for them at the Rectory on Ward's Island.

Direct hit at the Rectory

The Rectory's setting is so fabulous, you wouldn't care if the food sucked. Fortunately, it doesn't. By STEVEN DAVEY

THE RECTORY (102 Lakeshore, Ward's Island, 416-203-2152). Complete dinners for $45 per person ($30 at lunch or brunch), including all taxes, tip and a $7 glass of wine. Average main $15. Open daily 10 am to 10 pm. Licensed. Access: barrier-free. Rating: **NNNN**

FROM THE DOCKS AT THE FOOT OF Bay Street, the Dude Man and I chug across the harbour aboard the William Inglis on our way to the Rectory, the recently reactivated café on the island.

After days of monsoon rain, we've taken the window of opportunity the sun has provided this hazy, humid afternoon to bring our bikes with us. Having missed the Ward's Island express, we debark at Centre Island.

Forget Rochester. Here's another country in our own backyard that's only a six-buck 15-minute boat trip away. Combined with the recent downpours, the sudden heat wave has made the island's greenery explode. Weeping willows drape over quiet lagoons where great white swans flap about in calm water. Garter snakes – small cute ones, ophidiophobes – slither across warm sidewalks. Honking Canada geese fly in formation overhead across a gauzy blue sky.

You don't often encounter this kind of wildlife in the concrete canyons of the core. But other than a few German tourists cruising about on rented two-wheelers and a group of 100 or so teenagers taking digital pictures of each other on their cells, we have the park all to ourselves.

After a bumpy five-minute ride east along an empty boardwalk – come summer, a virtual DVP of roller bladders – we reach the Rectory on Ward's south shore. Nestled in a grove of tall pines and originally erected during the 50s for the contractor who built the concrete retaining walls that rim the islands, it's since seen use as a church – hence, it's handle – a senior's centre and a very part-time eatery that island types have come to refer to as the Hippy Dippy Café.

That's why I've dragged along the Dude Man. Looking like something straight out of the comic pages of the Fabulous Furry Freak Brothers, his 60s fashion sense is idiosyncratic at best. But over here, it's me in my striped button-down shirt and khaki Calvins who's out of place on the Rectory's converted shuffle court patio.

Seven years have passed since I last visited the secluded spot. Since then, a second bricked terrace has been added, the building's been renovated inside and out, and for the first time ever, starting just last Tuesday, it's a full-time restaurant open seven days a week from 10 in the morning till 10 at night. The new crew have also sprung for fancy wrought iron patio furniture with latticed table tops.

"Cool," notes the Dude Man. "When you drop your food, you don't fuck up the tablecloth."

Although the Rectory has separate brunch, lunch and dinner cards, they're basically the same thing. First-timers can expect all-day dishes like coarse quail pâté paired with Forbes's foraged gooseberry jam and petite sourdough Melba toasts over bitter inner leaves of endive and radicchio ($7.25), or Many Many Many Mushrooms ($14), a local favourite made with meaty cremini, portobello, Chinese and shiitake – alas, none magic – 'shrooms and a cheesy tangle of macaroni-esque gemelli noodles. But, then, the kitchen could serve baked beans on toast and the Rectory would still be the most bucolic bistro in town.

Our first course quickly served, the Dude Man encounters goat cheese – chèvre to us foodies – for the first time that he remembers. His fabulously creamy starter – a baked hockey puck of the stuff crusted with crushed hazelnuts ($9) – comes plated over al dente spring asparagus stalks drizzled with herbed pumpkinseed oil. He likes.

I tuck into chef Tom Hayes's feature soup ($5.50), today a more than creditable steaming bowl of pulpy Italian-spiced tomato purée swimming with spring veg: snappy green beans, miniature broccoli 'n' cauli-flowerets and tiny new potatoes the size of peanuts. Puréed and chilled, this will make an excellent hot summer gazpacho.

Speaking of legumes, peanuts appear in the tasty curried rice salad that, along with a mess of organic mesclun and iceberg lettuce dressed with raspberry hippie hemp oil, side my steak sandwich ($15). Thin slices of marvellous medium-rare flank get layered Philadelphia-cheese-steak-style with melting Swiss on grilled Fred's Bread focaccia spread with blue cheese beurre. This is also the Dude Man's first brush with Brie, the buttery fromage found on his first-rate, pink-centred, jus-squirting lamb burger ($13).

"Dude, that's good cheese, man," he announces to no one in particular.

I don't hear a thing, since I'm enjoying the relative silence. As wind rustles through the trees above, I can barely make out the distant squeal of a colony of seagulls and the far-off sound of a prop plane. I drift off.

"Dude, wake up, man," the Dude Man barks, startling me back to consciousness. It's definitely time to head home.

But before catching the ferry back to the mainland, we grab the bikes and follow the boardwalk further east until it turns into a dirt path. Once through the scrub, we emerge onto a long concrete jetty that juts out into the harbour. Across the channel sits the Breeze, the about-to-go-into-service five-storey car ferry to Rochester.

We'll do that burg another time. For now, a relaxed trek to the Rectory has to be Toronto's hottest day trip.

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• Critics' Pick NNNNN = Rare perfection NNNN = Outstanding, almost flawless NNN = Worthy of repeat visits NN = Adequate N = You'd do better with a TV dinn