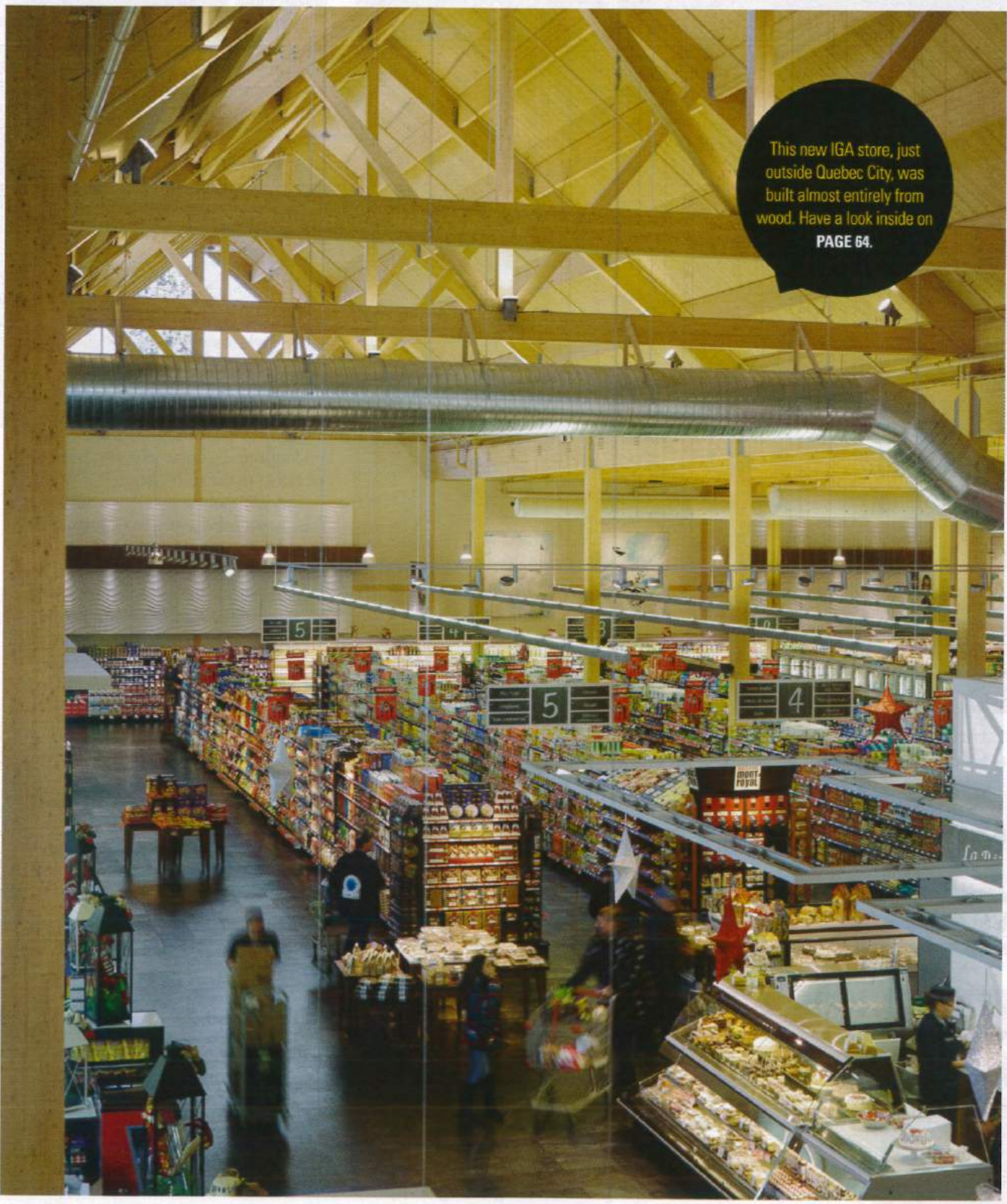


EXPRESS LANE

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This new IGA store, just outside Quebec City, was built almost entirely from wood. Have a look inside on **PAGE 64.**



“This looks like a cathedral to food”

Alain Gagné's latest supermarket soars to the heavens. But down below, it's all about pleasing shoppers

By Mark Cardwell // Photography by Brühmüller

Standing on the mezzanine of his newest IGA store, Alain Gagné looks across its cavernous interior like an artist admiring his latest work. “This is how I imagined the perfect store,” he says. “It’s a dream for me to see the realization of the ideas I had in my mind.”

To be sure, Gagné’s new store, called

IGA des Sources, is a visual feast. Built on a hilltop overlooking the St. Lawrence River, just east of Quebec City in the town of Boischatel, the 37,000-sq.-ft. structure is made almost entirely of wood—a North American first for a supermarket, says the Quebec company that built it, Nordic Structures Bois.

Designed according to Gagné’s vision,

the \$15-million store is lit by a mix of natural light from large windows in the massive sloped roof and artificial light from stylish fixtures of different shapes and designs.

On the floor, centre store aisles spill into the fresh food areas, not at the checkouts. “It improves in-store circulation [and] increases sales per transaction,” explains Gagné, who first introduced this aisle system in the IGA he built in nearby St. Augustine des Desmaures in 2010.

Another novelty in Gagné’s new store (his fifth IGA, plus an IGA Express convenience store) is the mezzanine. Mostly dedicated to organic and gluten-free foods, it also has a small frozen yogurt and ice-cream stand and a licensed, bistro-style restaurant that offers both stunning views of the river below and high-quality meals made by a chef using ingredients from the store. The IGA also sports 90 parking spots in a heated underground garage, with escalators and elevators to the store above.

This IGA, which opened in September, is an impressive return to Gagné’s roots. He grew up in Boischatel and worked as a butcher in his parents’ grocery store. When it was destroyed by a fire in 1986, his family moved to Saint-Augustine-des-Desmaures, on the west side of Quebec City, and opened a successful butcher shop. It later became Gagné’s first IGA.

But Gagné vowed to one day return to Boischatel. And now he has. “This one is my masterpiece,” he says. “One of my buddies told me it looks like a cathedral to food. In some ways, I think he’s right.”

The 36-foot meat counter





Natural light from windows in the roof helps give the store a warm feeling

1

TIMBER KING

The most striking feature of Alain Gagné's new store is its massive wood frame. The 37,000-sq.-ft. structure contains 650 cubic metres and more than 1,000 custom-cut Quebec timbers.

2

BEFORE SHOPPING, A LITTLE DINING?

The store's upstairs full-service, all-day

restaurant is aptly named La Charpente (or, The Frame). It's led by chef Simon Martel. When Gagné asked him to run the restaurant, Martel jumped at the chance. "I've never seen or heard about anything like this," he says. The restaurant's 25 employees prepare and serve meals made with fresh ingredients from the store below. "It's like working in a pantry," Martel notes.

"The food we use helps reduce waste."

3 LET THE PRODUCE DO THE TALKING

Gagné wanted his produce department to be uncluttered, with emphasis on the vibrant hues of fruit and vegetables. "There is no pollution from signs or other things," he says. "And we stack produce low on tables and islands so that people see everything in a single glance. It's an ideal environment for the sale of fruit and vegetables."

4 AISLE MOVEMENT

Centre store aisles that run parallel to the front line of check-outs, rather than at 90-degree angles,

enhance convenience and lead to higher sales. "It helps people move around easier," says Gagné. "Each grocery aisle leads directly into fresh food departments, where items are usually higher priced."

5

MEAT LOVERS

As a second-generation butcher, Gagné's favourite spot is meat. But the size and service level of the meat department in his new store has taken that pleasure to a whole new level. With a steak tartare bar, a 58-day beef-curing fridge and a 36-foot-long counter with specialized service that runs seamlessly into the deli, what's not to like?

6

FREE FROM...

It isn't the placement given to gluten-free and organic items on the mezzanine, right next to the restaurant, that Gagné likes most. It's the big selection in the half-dozen aisles. "Our offer is unique," says Gagné, who has a full-time manager dedicated to finding and stocking the section. "I see a bright future for organic and gluten-free."

7

STYLISH CHEESE

This old wood-and-glass beer cooler (behind counter) was converted into a display case for Quebec cheese. Other elements here include a long glass counter and bins that open toward the customers.

8

BREWING SALES

Did somebody say beer? If so, Gagné heard the call. "I've got every beer you can imagine: international, Canadian, Québécois," he says, walking through Les Bières department. And munchies? Salty snacks and peanuts are stocked cheek by jowl with suds. **CG**

This fridge is stocked with beers from Quebec

