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richard till



Accommodating luxury

French finery has found a home at Otahuna Lodge in Tai Tapu.

THERE'S AN organisation, established in France in 1954, that goes by the name Relais and Chateau and its mission is to spread a unique "art de vivre" across the globe through the prestigious collection of 475 luxury hotels and restaurants it represents. To you and I it's an accommodation website. But, oh, what accommodation it is! One of the seven in New Zealand is Otahuna Lodge, near Christchurch, and I was invited for lunch and a look-see.

When built, the house and grounds were a splendid and substantial statement of

colonial wealth and good taste and now beautifully restored and appointed by the current owners the whole shebang is as old and

stately as you'll find in the country. Executive chef Jimmy McIntyre cooked my lunch with fruit and vegetables from the half acre vegetable garden, duck from a lady down the road and goat's cheese from a little further down the road. It was

a lovely lunch. Deep fried zucchini blossoms – "maybe the last of the season", says McIntyre in his tableside description of the dish – stuffed with the goat's cheese and scattered with tomato, herbs and a little dribble of some olive oil. Slices of duck breast sat atop a little tart shell filled with silverbeet and roasted beetroot slices, with a little duck jus. Then braised quince with a frangipane tart. Tricky to make that frangipane, says McIntyre, but successful on the day.

I looked at his kitchen and toured the beautiful and extensive produce garden. There's an orchard, a partly resorted melon house, an old apple curing and storage house that is now where mushrooms are cultivated, the huge vegetable patch, some kept livestock and a little game, deer and pig.

It's all terribly tasteful and thorough, all New Zealand wines and some quite wonderful paintings commissioned by owners Hall Cannon and Miles Refo as part of the \$10 million restoration they've undertaken since they

bought the place three years ago. They are both in their early 30s and are refugees from Manhattan. Seeking a new lifestyle, Otahuna was it. I understand the stately manor as part of the new lifestyle, but am bewildered when I contemplate how it must be for them to have Christchurch as the big smoke after life in Manhattan. They're both "passionate" about their often exhausting task of running a five-star lodge.

I wouldn't know what to do with myself if I were to be a guest at a lodge like this. Too peaceful, too refined, too classy, I just couldn't relax somewhere this smart and fabulous. Clearly there is a market for Otahuna, and if you ever seek to reward yourself with time out in historic and outstandingly luxurious surroundings then head here. Cannon and Refo describe themselves as the maitres de maison. It's the correct term for what they do very well. They and their enterprise at Otahuna bring a dash of F Scott Fitzgerald to sleepy little Tai Tapu, and Christchurch too for that matter. Charming.

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slice

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Maitre d'hotel butter

50g soft butter
Juice of half a lemon
1T red wine
1 clove garlic finely chopped
Small piece of lemon zest, size of 20 cent piece, finely chopped
1T finely chopped parsley
Black pepper

*Chop together the parsley, garlic and lemon zest as finely as you possible can.
In a small cup, mash together the butter, chopped parsley, garlic and lemon zest with the lemon juice and red wine. Add a few grounds of black pepper and whip all together with a fork.
Lay on a small piece of cling-film and make into a small sausage shape and refrigerate until you wish to use it.*



Host with most: Daffodils are only part of the story at Otahuna Lodge near Christchurch.