



The exclusive Otahuna Lodge, New Zealand.

Fall in love in New Zealand

Otahuna Lodge must drive the locals mad. Try as you might, glimpsing this gracious New Zealand country manor is impossible unless you've been buzzed through the estate's front gates. But it's not just the security keeping you at bay — this was how Canterbury entrepreneur Sir Heaton Rhodes planned it all along.

The three-storey house, one of New Zealand's largest private residences, was built for Rhodes and his Australian wife, Jessie, in 1895 and is protected on all sides by towering century-old trees. This atmosphere of exclusivity is central to the Otahuna experience, as is falling in love with the imposing and impossibly romantic Queen Anne-style building itself.

Miles Refo and Hall Canon searched for a year to find the perfect place to focus their shared love of fine food, the best wines and memorable hospitality. One look at Otahuna and they were spellbound.

The pair, who traded New York for New Zealand, were intent on returning the historic home to its former glory and spent months,



Otahuna's private verandas boast views out to the distant Southern Alps (inset).

and many millions, creating a retreat that celebrated Otahuna's past yet set new standards in luxury travel — no easy task in the birthplace of the super-lodge. The result is an intimate experience where breathtaking attention to detail meets a wholehearted commitment to indulgence.

No two of Otahuna's seven suites are the same; their original stained-glass windows, ornate open fireplaces and carved inglenooks now all beautifully restored.

Enormous beds, fine linens, warm slate-floored bathrooms, a personal supply of just-baked biscuits and private verandas that gaze out at the distant Southern Alps complete the picture. New Zealand artworks adorn every wall, while the original timber panelling of the main areas creates an atmosphere of clubby refinement.

Guests dine communally in the fabulously carved formal dining room — very country-house-party — or in one of Otahuna's many private nooks: earthy open kitchen, cosy library, elegant drawing room or sunken outdoor wine cellar.

And the love doesn't stop with the interiors. A tour of the grounds with head gardener Steve Marcham reveals the symbiotic relationship between house and garden. The original fruit and nut orchard is back, while the organic walled vegetable garden supplies talented executive chef, Jimmy McIntyre, with seasonal produce.

Is this NZ's most beautiful lodge? Quite possibly. Did I fall in love? Absolutely.

Otahuna Lodge, Tai Tapu via Christchurch, Canterbury, New Zealand, +64 3 329 6333; www.otahuna.co.nz. ■