



To The Manor Born

If perfection has a name, it comes from the south island of New Zealand, where an immaculately restored manor house now sees service as an exclusive lodge. **Otahuna Lodge** combines fine food, wine and sublime service and hospitality for an experience that you will never forget - or want to leave. **Story James McRory**





it looks, and the photographs, as good as they are, actually don't do the property justice. Otahuna Lodge, from the moment you drive through the gates, is like stepping into another world. Round the sweeping driveway, the magnificent manor house comes into view and you would have to be jaded indeed not to be impressed.

The property itself dates back to 1895, once the grand home of Sir Heaton Rhodes, it was built for his young bride and became the hub of the local area. The gardens, brought back to life by the current owners, sport botanic varieties from all over the globe and the 'working garden' provides seasonal produce, which in the hands of McIntyre becomes magnificent feasts for the guests to enjoy.

Over time, Otahuna was allowed to slip into disrepair and the grand property and gardens were in a sorry state when Hall Cannon and Miles Refo visited from the States and fell in love with the place. The pair had been looking for a change from a high-charged life in Manhattan and on New Zealand's south island they found the perfect location.

Taking on such a property was no small task, and the considerable time and money (more than eight million dollars) invested in bringing Otahuna back to life is obvious. The attention to detail throughout is difficult to comprehend, from the restoration of the building itself, to the gardens (both working and ornamental), the tremendous thought and effort is evident.

From a purely visual perspective, the property is stunning both inside and out, but the key to Otahuna is the sublime service and attention. Not overdone mind you, but the feeling from the first is that you are being warmly welcomed and that you are a special guest.

There are only seven suites at Otahuna and each has its own unique theme and feeling. All are beautifully appointed and again, the attention to detail is extraordinary. Each has at least one fireplace, lit at your request, bathroom floors and towel racks are heated of course, and the view from any window is nothing short of exquisite.

01 The gardens have always been a feature of Otahuna Lodge.

The wind swoops down from the surrounding mountains, rustling the leaves in the expansive gardens and bringing with it the beginnings of a good south island winter. The temperature and season will determine what master chef, Jimmy McIntyre serves for dinner tonight, Otahuna Lodge either growing the ingredients for its award-winning fare on site or sourcing the finest from the local region.

Inside the sumptuous residence, the fires are burning in the hearths, early evening drinks are being served and from at least one of the seven suites, there is a faint, anguished moaning.

No, this is not a ghost from Otahuna's past. On this particular occasion it is the author fighting back tears at the thought of having to leave the next morning. Otahuna Lodge is an experience you get very used to very quickly – it is the style to which many would very much like to become accustomed.

At this point, best take a look at the images before you read further, because this is a case of an image being worth a thousand words. Yes, it is as good as





02



03



04



05



06

02 Master chef Jimmy McIntyre. 03&04 Every meal is a work of art. 05 Each suite has its own character and special charm. 06 The elegant dining room.

The house is filled with features from its past, be they photographs or even old rifles used in the hunt way back when. These are interspersed with tasteful art pieces and curios, all designed and arranged to add interest to an already engaging property.

The heart though, as in any good home, is the kitchen. Well, two kitchens to be precise, both presided over by Jimmy McIntyre, arguably New Zealand's most celebrated chef and one of the nicest, most approachable people you could meet.

To use the hackneyed phrase, Jimmy makes it look easy. The menu is governed by what is in season, what is in the expansive estate gardens at the time and of course, what the guest would like.

Not only is it a matter of what you would like, but where you would like it. Guests can elect to dine in their suites, or in any of the public rooms in the manor house, from the library to the main sitting room. Depending on the season, a quiet dinner is always available in the converted game house which now serves as a superbly stocked wine cellar, or indeed by the pool or, for traditionalists, in the dining room.

For me though, it was the informal kitchen, a big room where Jimmy McIntyre will conduct cooking lessons for interested guests, and where breakfast is served (to order of course) each morning.

Embracing the very best produce from the local area, the dishes are many and varied. From the more traditional Otahuna lamb with autumn vegeta-



07



08



09



10

bles, to a mexican-influenced prawn and salmon chilli rellenos with salsa rancheros and avocado.

Try McIntyre's roast Jerusalem artichoke soup with truffle oil, followed by a Yellow Fin Tuna carpaccio with citrus, pinenuts and herbs. And if the Lodge's orchards are in season, there is no better way to end than with an Otahuna Granny Smith apple tart with apple sorbet, all perfectly matched to the finest wines from the region.

And so it was, having been spoilt rotten for two glorious days that on my last night, I shuffled off to bed. The fire in my suite was crackling away in the hearth as requested but, without giving away too many personal habits, it was the realisation that the staff who serviced my room had noted which side of the bed I obviously slept on and amended where they put my glass and bottle of mineral water – and of course my handmade chocolate – that sealed it. This is how life is meant to be lived.

It's often the little things that leave the greatest impression, but Otahuna Lodge is a complete experience. Certainly no shame in stifling a sob at the thought of leaving. //

07 The restoration was a massive undertaking. **08** Nothing like a stroll through the gardens. **09** Always a fire in the hearth. **10** A well-stocked cellar, of course.