

Homegrown on the Range

At Otahuna Lodge, guests savor local foods and wines in a landmark residence.

WITH A FIRE blazing in the hearth, we sit around Otahuna Lodge's massive dining-room table discussing the day's activities and past travels. This room has hosted countless such conversations since 1895, when Sir Heaton Rhodes, a member of New Zealand's Parliament, built the sprawling Queen Anne-style structure, the largest residence in New Zealand at the time. For 60 years, Rhodes—a gentleman farmer—not only raised sheep and cattle on his 5,000-acre property (which has since been reduced to 30 acres), but he also made

Otahuna's half-acre organic garden, and the quince in the adjoining orchard.

"The produce in the garden keeps me inspired," says McIntyre. "When you go down to the garden and find something beautiful, you want to showcase it to the guests." Otahuna's bounty includes 95 vegetable varieties, 25 kinds of fruit, and 20 different herbs. Among the property's unexpected culinary treasures are porcini mushrooms, which grow on the roots of two stately English oaks. The gardener says that the spores were on the roots when the trees were transplanted from England a century ago.

For ingredients that McIntyre cannot find in his backyard (Otahuna is also home to a dozen free-range hens), he turns to local farmers and fishers. His menus are spontaneous and combine European, English, Asian, and New Zealander influences. "We are constantly changing and trying different things," says McIntyre.

Dinner at Otahuna is reserved for guests. You can arrange a private dinner in your suite, in the cozy library, or in the former game house, a small brick outbuilding that serves as a wine cellar. (It is stocked with about 700



it a social hub of the Canterbury region of South Island.

As we sip a Pinot Noir from nearby Pegasus Bay, our hosts—Otahuna's current owners, Hall Cannon and Miles Refo—tell us they are avid travelers who moved to New Zealand from Manhattan, where they had worked in real estate development and marketing, respectively. In 2006 they purchased Otahuna out of receivership and initiated an extensive restoration and redecoration of the property—though they left the dining room's original William Morris embossed wallpaper intact. One year later, Cannon and Refo reopened the home as a hotel with seven unique suites.

Chef Jimmy McIntyre, a wry, ginger-haired 45-year-old New Zealander, enters the room and presents his day's work: beetroot soup with chèvre, baked blue-nose sea bass with tropical fruit and a poached crayfish, confit of Tai Tapu duck with a caramelized-shallot tart, ravioli of oxtail braised with gremolata and Parmigiano-Reggiano, and, for dessert, a quince-and-frangipane tart. The beets were grown in

bottles of New Zealand wines, including Stonyridge Larose 1991, Neudorf Moutere Chardonnay 2005, and Bell Hill Pinot Noir 2005.) But most guests prefer to dine communally in the grand dining room, where a different local wine accompanies each of the five courses.

"We are fortunate to be in a country that produces great wines, with a wine industry that is innovative, smart, and moving ahead," says my fellow diner Jim Harré, a wine consultant to Air New Zealand (which presents a nearly 60-page wine guide to select travelers) and the owner of the Gates Country Lodge on South Island.

Gradually our talk strays from wine and turns to other topics favored in New Zealand: wind, rugby, and sheep. Some things may have changed in the dining room of Otahuna since Rhodes' guests gathered here a century ago, but certain subjects of dinner conversation never do. —LAURIE KAHLE

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The walls of the New Zealand hotel's dining room are covered in original William Morris embossed wallpaper.