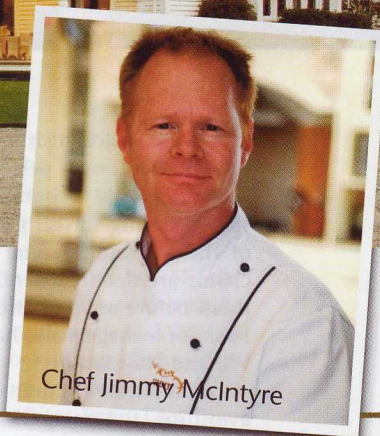




Otahuna Lodge

# A Mere TRUFFLE



Chef Jimmy McIntyre

NEW ZEALAND IS AT THE FOREFRONT OF THE NEW WORLD TRUFFLE INDUSTRY WRITES WINSOR DOBBIN, AND AT OTAHUNA LODGE GUESTS CAN ENJOY THE DELICACY ON THE PLATE, OR GET THEIR HANDS DIRTY IN TRUFFLE COOKING CLASSES.

SIR Heaton Rhodes was a scholar, parliamentarian, visionary, cattle breeder, daffodil grower and stamp collector – a man of taste and refinement.

It is fair then, to hazard a guess that he'd be pretty pleased with the way his beloved homestead, Otahuna Lodge, has been restored by two young Americans who set out to create one of New Zealand's finest luxury lodges.

Built in 1895 and regarded as one of New Zealand's most iconic Heritage-listed properties, Otahuna Lodge is just 20 minutes outside the genteel city of Christchurch – making it not only a country retreat but also a perfect base for visiting the city.

Thirty-something pair Miles Refo and Hall Cannon bought the property three years ago, spent several million dollars returning it to its former glory and upped sticks from Manhattan to run it.

The boutique hostelery – there are only seven suites – has since earned several awards for excellence, is a member of the exclusive Relais & Chateaux group, and a magnet for gourmets from around the globe.

This part of the South Island is lush and green – and home to several farmers of outstanding produce.

The amiable head chef, Jimmy McIntyre, is fanatical about organic produce and Otahuna has a "potager" kitchen-garden with its own full-time gardener to ensure fresh herbs and vegetables throughout the year as well as its own hens and pigs. Guests are even free to pick their own vegies.

During the autumn/winter season, McIntyre takes guests on autumn truffle hunts around centuries old oaks in the nearby forests. He also cooks special truffle dinners each August with the famous white bianchetto truffle as the centrepiece.

New Zealand is at the forefront of the New World truffle industry, growing the Southern Hemisphere's first truffles in 1993 and, more recently, producing the first white truffle, or bianchetto, at nearby Borchii Park truffière.

"It is quite special to have a world-class delicacy available so close to home and it really gives us so much scope for creating exciting menus each winter," McIntyre says. "A degustation menu gives diners so many ways to experience the incredible flavours of the truffle."

The special menu features dishes like truffle and Otahuna porcini mushroom ravioli with parmesan cream.

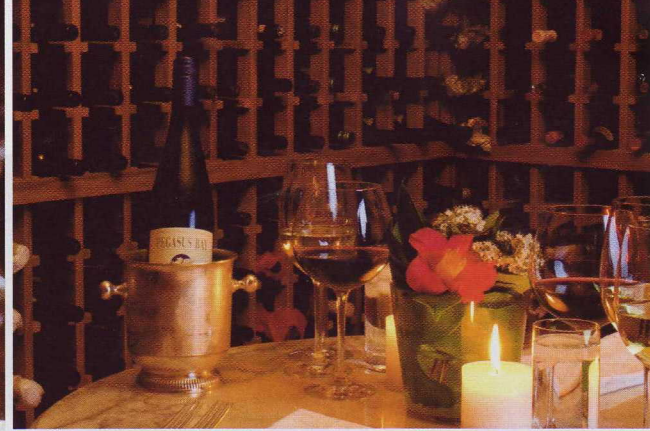
Guests can also take cooking classes at the Lodge, including lessons on how best to match and prepare truffles. The truffle courses are \$350 per person for a half-day and participants receive an Otahuna apron and recipes to take home, while regular classes also concentrate on seasonal fare.

Throughout the year, the dinner menu changes daily with McIntyre sourcing the best local produce, including organic duck, goat cheese and venison.

"I love to cook whatever is at the peak of freshness, and vegetables are often the starting point of my menus," he says.

All guests are invited to enjoy pre-dinner drinks and canapés in the lounge – a chance to mix and mingle with fellow residents before their feast for the senses.

A five-course degustation dinner – a veritable mosaic of flavours – is served nightly and guests wishing to take a vinous journey are offered matching glasses of wine with each course – or the choice of bottles from an extensive cellar. The mood is as relaxed as the food is flavoursome and the service is exemplary. Local duck leg confit and roasted breast with a



shallot tart and puree was a favourite, served with a Pisa Range pinot noir from Central Otago. There is a choice between eating communally or privately.

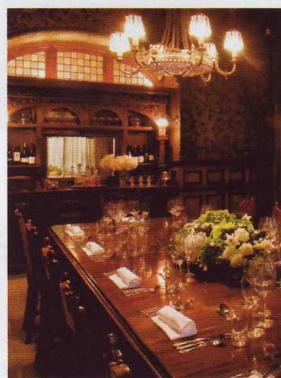
Breakfasts, too, are an adventure with the chef or one of his team advising guests on what is fresh and then cooking to their specifications. Fresh-baked breads and home-cooked preserves are a highlight.

While there is plenty to do on site, including an outdoor swimming pool and spa pool, guests can also take a helicopter from the Lodge's front lawn to the ski fields, fishing spots, wilderness treks or even lunch at Pegasus Bay winery – north of Christchurch – or the pretty nearby fishing village of Akaroa. Horse rides and nature walks are also available.

Back at the lodge, the suites offer comforts like dangerously comfortable beds, wood-burning fireplaces, wireless internet access, spa tubs and toiletries from Penhaligon's of London combined with traditional features like original fireplaces, period furniture and stained-glass windows. The magnificent Verandah suite once hosted King George VI and several suites have views that stretch to the Southern Alps. Little touches like complimentary laundry service and bed-side cookie jars ensure guests feel very much at home.

Otahuna Lodge, a fine example of Queen Anne architecture, also houses one of the most important private collections of New Zealand art. The owners commissioned 35 major works, including some by well-known artists **Peter Beadle** and **Craig Primrose**.

The gardens, too, are spectacular. There are 30 acres in all, with two full-time gardeners. ■



#### DETAILS

Otahuna Lodge, 224 Rhodes Road, Tai Tapu 7672, Christchurch, New Zealand.

Suites start at \$750 a night per person for double occupancy from October 1 to April 30, and from \$550 a night per person for double occupancy May 1 to September 30, plus 12.5% GST. Rates include accommodation, full daily breakfast, evening cocktails and canapés, five-course degustation dinners with wine pairings, as well as use of the Lodge's heated pool, jacuzzi and tennis court.

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