



Clockwise from above: Sweeping views onto the golf course; a wrap-around veranda frames the house; the rustic Tiger Room, the perfect location for cards and board games on a rainy day. *Opposite, top to bottom:* The plantation-style main house; executive chef Barry Frith serves local, seasonal produce; the Virginia Fisher-designed interior offers a welcoming palette.



GREAT ESCAPE

Kauri Cliffs, with its spectacular vistas, is the ultimate getaway, and an event in September with chef Peter Gilmore is a real treat for foodies.

Words by **Michael McHugh**

A 900-year-old kauri tree stands proud within the 6000-acre Kauri Cliffs. It is, like the property itself, which is part of the Relais & Châteaux exclusive club, spectacular. At a circumference of nine metres, a clear bole of nearly 10 metres and a volume of some 64 cubic metres, the tree radiates a magnificent beauty.

Due to the generosity and wisdom of the owners, Julian and Josie Robertson (sadly, Josie passed away in June), the kauri tree is now part of the Queen Elizabeth II Trust for conservation. It even smells good – that beautiful rich strong kauri gum scent – Mother Nature at her best.

When you arrive and drive to the main lodge building of Kauri Cliffs, it is the plantation-style main house you notice first. The Virginia Fisher-designed interior is welcoming with its palette of blue, white, beige and cream, and a mix of antiques – a style she is well known for.

The Tiger Room, with its high stud and rooms off a wide hall matching the wide wrap-around veranda, boasts comfortable sofas, cushions you immediately want to flop into, local art, fresh flowers and rustic floors of wide, rough-split blond totara logs with pale grouting. This room is perfect as a rainy-day retreat (and very kid-friendly), packed with board games, DVD player and flat-screen television.



All this takes a back seat when you first walk in, though, as you are immediately drawn to the view. Stretching out ahead is the cliff-hugging 18-hole golf course, with pathways and bridges linking the David Harman-designed course. Fifteen holes view the Pacific Ocean, six of which are played alongside cliffs, which plunge to the sea; the others wind through marsh, forest and farmland. It continues to be ranked in the world's top 100 golf courses.

The Pacific Ocean is edged by Cape Brett to my right and the Cavalli Islands to my left, where the Rainbow Warrior wreck, a former Greenpeace vessel that was bombed by the French in 1985, is located for divers to explore. The decommissioned HMNZS Canterbury, a navy frigate purposely scuttled to form an artificial reef at Cape Brett, is the largest dive attraction in the area. All dives can be tailored to suit your ability. I want to move the office here and never leave this view.

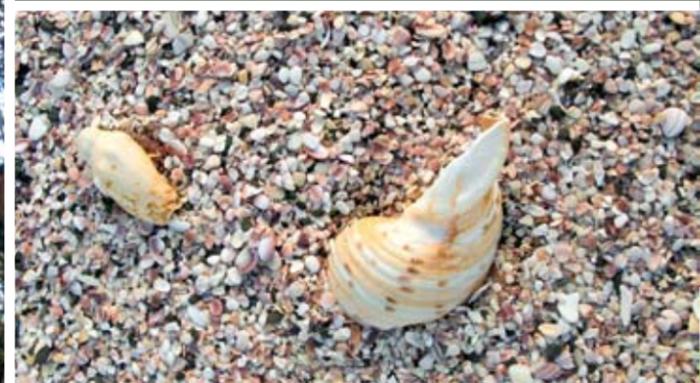
A waterfall surrounded by weeping rimu and other graceful natives is a

surprising relief among the rolling verdant green farm, dotted with sheep, pheasants, wild turkey, quail and hawks overhead. “The full-time pest control staff member Darcy Rhodes has done extensive work on the property to eradicate introduced species such as possums, cats, dogs, pigs and rabbits so the native wildlife and property’s flora and fauna are protected,” says general manager Kerry Molloy as we drive around the property in a 4WD. “Possums are an environmental catastrophe here in New Zealand. They are responsible for major deforestation and have brought some bird species close to extinction, including the kiwi. Rhodes works with the Kiwi Foundation to monitor the kiwis, which now number more than 25 (from almost none 10 years ago),” he adds. Northland is home to many New Zealand native birds, as well as visiting international avian visitors, so you can take a guided tour around the property to view the unique bird life.

You can also swim and picnic around the waterfall, but as picturesque as this is, it is the three beaches that have my pick for returning to in summer; Pink Beach, covered in minute pink shells and lined with Pohutukawa; Waiau Beach, the longest beach and best for swimming with tiny islands offshore close enough to swim to; and Takou Bay, a surf beach with its own Maori Pa, and the one most visible from the Lodge.

The Pink Beach barbecues that are held on Friday nights during the summer season sound wonderful against this picture-perfect backdrop. The cliffs are skirted by the clearest water I have seen anywhere in New Zealand. Cobalt blue-rimmed edges offset the pink shell beach, covered in shells that have been washed ashore and look as though they have made the journey from the Pacific Islands.

Each of the 22 suites, with walkways from the main lodge, look out to the Pacific across the golf course. The stand-alone cottages, all with wireless



Clockwise from top left: The 9000-year-old kauri tree, which is part of the Queen Elizabeth II trust for conservation; crystal-clear water at Pink Beach; a view of the Cavalli Islands; the shells that give Pink Beach its name; Takou Bay surf beach; a walkway through the native forest; a waterfall surrounded by weeping rimu and other natives. *Opposite, top to bottom:* An infinity pool overlooks the David Harman-designed golf course; pretty gardens flank the property's walkways.

internet, are generous in size with gas fireplaces, sitting rooms, large bathrooms with deep baths, walk-in wardrobes and private veranda. Again, Fisher has created a relaxed space with simple touches; white jugs of flowers, antique lamps, cane baskets, floor rugs all in beige and neutral tones. Uncluttered and simple, it never slides into mumsy or twee territory.

There is something quite special about walking through a native forest in the rain to reach your spa treatment. Once there, each private treatment room looks out to the totara forest and fern glen with a meandering stream in front, through floor-to-ceiling windows.

You can enjoy this private garden vista with a treatment al fresco or fireside if you wish. The modern facilities are world class; they would have to be one of the best in New Zealand. There is a couples spa suite, an indoor heated lap pool, sauna, jacuzzi and state-of-the-art fitness centre. My wife, Michelle, said it was the best massage she had ever had. Products used included Decléor, which smell and feel divine, and my new favourite New Zealand brand, Evolu. The

space is light and airy with green accent colours and an almost Scandinavian feel, bringing the outdoors in.

Executive chef Barry Frith's food philosophy is simple: "In using local quality produce, the menu changes daily, with a French base and slant on Asian flavours," he says. "I try to replicate these influences in food. I love this time of year with celeriac, parsnips, roasted vegetables and Northland lamb sourced locally, whereas summer is lighter with more salads."

An unexpected serve of Asian pork buns kicks the meal off, followed by soft-shell crab and a main of fresh snapper caught that morning, with zucchini ribbons, for Michelle. I ordered the local lamb and baby winter vegetables as the support act, which looked beautiful and tasted just as good. We walked back to our cottage, content, after a quick game of cards in the Tiger Room.

Staff are friendly and helpful without being intrusive. They couldn't do more for you if they tried, creating a relaxed, friendly balance. I have discovered the ideal getaway – you will not be disappointed.

The entry to the Kauri Cliffs lodge.



white and red carrots we are growing. Most people don't realise that the orange carrots we know today were developed by the Dutch 250 years ago because orange is their national colour. The original carrot was this multi-coloured vegetable that was cultivated in Pakistan more than 2000 years ago.

Do you have a vegetable patch at home?

I have been growing vegies in my garden for the last six years. We call it a test garden because often I will grow a seed first before I ask a grower to grow it. Things like red-vein sorrel I started growing a couple of years ago. I love gardening, but there have been some disasters along the way.

Do you source most of your ingredients locally?

I try to source locally, particularly vegetables, but sometimes it's not always possible. When it comes to meat products I don't have as many choices locally. My Suffolk lamb is from a fantastic grower in South Australia (Richard Gunner). The lambs are raised for meat so they are more marbled and far superior to regular lamb.

What are some of your signature dishes?

At the moment, my signature

dish is the sea pearls, which are pearl-shaped balls of sashimi tuna, aquaculture caviar, sea scallop, smoked eel, octopus, mud crab and abalone. Also, my chocolate cake has been on the menu at Quay since I started in 2001 – but even that has evolved from a five-textured cake to an eight-textured cake. We now pour a hot chocolate ganache at the table, which sinks into the cake. One of the things I'm most happy with at the moment is a pig jowl dish. We use Berkshire pigs. The jowl is incredibly marbled and we cook it really slowly, for about 10 hours. With the jowl there is an inch of fat between the meat and the skin so you can't use the skin because you would get too much fat. So I thought of making a type of crackling out of maltose. Maltose is a really interesting sugar because, unlike cane sugar, it doesn't stick to your teeth. When you use it to make toffee, it shatters like crackling does. So we cover the pig jowl in this maltose toffee and serve it with prunes, cauliflower cream and Pedro Ximénez noble sour vinegar. The dish is also perfumed with a prune kernel oil, which I found in France.

How do you get your ideas for such intricate dishes?

There are lots of ways a dish comes to be. Often I

will start with a traditional flavour marriage and I just keep tweaking. Other times a dish will start with one ingredient. I spend a lot of time experimenting. I also have a huge collection of cookbooks. I often read through them to get inspired. I may get inspired by a food philosophy or by a particular ingredient they have used. One of the most important things a young chef can do is to read extensively. Not just cookbooks, but books on food philosophies and other creative endeavours like art and architecture, because you never know where inspiration is going to come from. I often go to the art gallery and sometimes I see something that will inspire a dish. For example, my signature sea pearl dish was inspired by a pearl exhibition at Sydney's Museum of Contemporary Art. Before I saw the exhibition I didn't realise that pearls come in all shapes, sizes and colours. I was mucking around with this seafood dish I had on the menu and I thought, wouldn't it be great to take all the seafood elements and turn it into the shape of a pearl?

Do you cook at home?

My cooking at home is really simple, like roast chicken, a quick stir-fry or barbecue. I'm in the process of building a pizza oven at home that I'm excited about. When you are working 70 hours a week in a kitchen you don't really want to come home and cook as well. I prefer it when my wife cooks. It's comforting to come home and have a lasagne cooked for you.

Revered Sydney chef Greg Doyle created a stir [in May] when tried to hand back the three hats awarded to his restaurant Pier, because he did not "want the intensity of it anymore". Quay has won many awards in the past few years including the coveted three-hat rating for eight years in a row (The Sydney Morning Herald Good Food Guide) and the Best Restaurant in Australasia (S Pellegrino World's 50 Best Restaurants 2010). Do you feel awards affect the way you do things?

No, not at all. With or without the awards I would be doing the same thing. What has changed, with the Pellegrino award in particular, is that more and more international visitors are searching us out. The awards help us to stay busy seven days a week and that's a good thing. Fellow three-hatter Greg Doyle's decision to opt out of being rated in the *Good Food Guide* is a personal decision. It's certainly up to him if he wants to change the style of what he is offering his customers. Chefs are all at different stages of development in their careers. Diversity is a good thing. The awards have increased the expectation of our customers, but all that means is that we have to keep evolving and be at the top of our game.

You have worked with Quay for nine years – what keeps you inspired?

The location definitely helps. I can't really imagine a better venue to cook amazing food. For Sydneysiders to bring out-of-town guests here makes them feel very proud. My challenge is to keep changing the menu and keeping it fresh.

Do you think it's necessary or desirable for apprentices to work internationally?

I started my career in Sydney as a 16-year-old apprentice. Then I went overseas for three years, working mainly in the United Kingdom. I think it is really important for a young chef to travel. You can get amazing training in Australia, but I think travel for any person is important. It really broadens the mind. A lot of my training happened when I came back to Australia and worked in small restaurants where I could focus on developing my style. A lot of what I am as a chef is self-taught through experimentation.

What are some of your favourite restaurants throughout the world?

Favourites include Noma (Denmark), The Fat Duck (UK), Michel Bras (France), Per Se (New York) and Mugaritz (Spain). A recent discovery is Blue Hill, which is about an hour out of New York City.

Can you share one of your fond food memories?

Recently I had one of the most amazing experiences of my life. On a trip to France, Michel Bras's son, Sébastien, invited me over to his house for lunch and Michel cooked. It was one of the best meals of my life. We sat down and had some local salamis and cured meats followed by asparagus with lamb and finished with some cheeses. It was such a simple thing, but it was amazing. 



COOK

KEYWORDS:
GILMORE, RECIPES

Prepare some of Peter Gilmore's signature dishes at home.



PETER GILMORE AT KAURI CLIFFS

Kauri Lodge and The Farm at Cape Kidnappers are set to host four Winter Food & Wine Weekends, with a fantastic line-up of guest chefs, winemakers and wine authorities heading to the luxury properties. A particularly exciting event will be the dinner at Kauri Cliffs on September 11, when three-hat chef Peter Gilmore of Sydney's Quay restaurant will prepare a five-course dinner, matched to top Central Otago wines from Mount Edward Winery. Gilmore has recently cemented his position as Australia's rising international star of gastronomy as his restaurant was named 27th in the list of S Pellegrino World's Best Restaurants this year. It was also named best restaurant in Australasia. Gilmore's food will be matched to wines by Duncan Forsyth from boutique Central Otago winery Mount Edward. The price for the event is \$800 per person (double occupancy) per night and includes luxury accommodation, degustation dinner with matched wines, tutored wine tasting, full breakfast and a choice of a round of golf or a 50-minute massage in the day spa. To book or find out more, visit kauricliffs.com, or email reservations@kauricliffs.com

PETER GILMORE TALKS FOOD INSPIRATIONS

You are famous for your unusual ingredients.

Where do you find your amazing produce?

There is a farm in the Blue Mountains where we have a very close relationship with the farmer. We got him to start growing unusual vegetables. Often I suggest that he grow something that I might have read about in a book. Sometimes I may even source the seeds for him. This unusual produce gives our customers something interesting, and as a chef it's great to have a large palate to work from and not to be restricted by what's in the market at the moment. Some of my favourite discoveries are little Chinese artichokes that are called crosne in Europe. They are like a little

water chestnut that grows underground. We have beautiful pink turnips that are a variety from America, and red-core radishes that are really beautiful, like a starburst with pink inside. Other favourites are Mexican sour cucumbers, Japanese white turnips and Japanese eggplants. There are so many heirloom varieties that have gone out of favour for one reason or another. They may be difficult to grow or have small yields, for example. A lot of people think that some of the foods available today are new varieties – like purple cauliflower – but a lot are varieties that have just been rediscovered.

What are some of your favourite ingredients for spring?

Spring is a time for more traditional produce like peas and beans. This spring, I'm looking forward to working with some heirloom pure

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