



COOKS' TOUR

Stellar chefs Thomas Keller and Heston Blumenthal made an impressive double act at a luxe dinner at New Zealand's Cape Kidnappers.

PHOTOGRAPHS NICHOLAS WATT WORDS TANYA BUCHANAN

PASSENGER

THIS PAGE The lodge at Cape Kidnappers is constructed of river stone and weathered wood in a rustic style. OPPOSITE PAGE Impressive artwork in the dining room is by Dick Frizzell.





What would it take to get Thomas Keller of The French Laundry and Per Se, and Heston Blumenthal of The Fat Duck, two of the world's most famous chefs, to leave their award-winning kitchens and ancillary enterprises to cook dinner for just 70 people in a lodge in New Zealand?

Quite simply, golf. The lure of a game at one of the world's top 50 courses and a respite at its equally impressive lodge was all it took to get these two men – from the US and UK respectively – to agree to prepare their signature dishes for an exclusive group, including New Zealand Prime Minister John Key, at The Farm at Cape Kidnappers in Hawke's Bay, New Zealand.

The property, the masterpiece of former Wall Street whiz Julian Robertson, and one of three properties in his luxury New Zealand portfolio, boasts one of the world's best golf courses, designed by golf architect Tom Doak. As you might expect, the lodge and all its suites are styled with classic American flair.

Julian discovered New Zealand's charms on a break from trading in the late 70s. Apart from developing three properties – Matakauri, Kauri Cliffs and Cape Kidnappers – he recently donated a \$115 million art collection to the Auckland Art Gallery.

He's a man used to bringing the best to New Zealand – including world-class talent. Enter Thomas and Heston, working alongside the group's executive chef Dale Gartland. The pair are friends and have worked together on dinners before, including a charity event for the Starlight Children's Foundation in Sydney, en route to Hawke's Bay. "I've been friends with Heston for seven or eight years, but I first became aware of him as a chef about 12 years ago when he opened The Fat Duck and popped up on my radar," Thomas says.

Both are extremely busy and multi-taskers extraordinaire, but enjoy their down time – particularly golf and exploring new places to eat. Their favourite discovery while in Sydney was the Four in Hand in Paddington. "And the date tart at Rockpool," says Thomas. "A trip to Sydney is not complete without that."

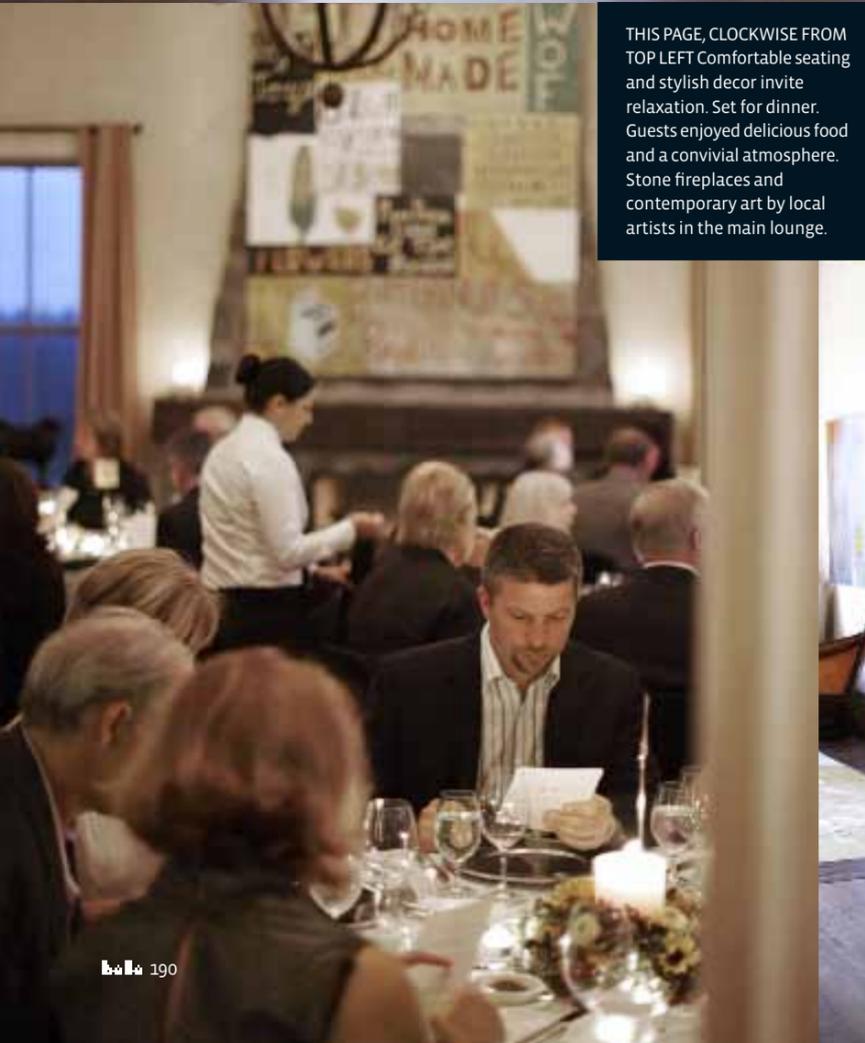
Heston adds, "I've never been able to just do nothing. My idea of the worst holiday would be lying around on a beach." Lately the unstoppable father of three has been busier than ever. His most recent project, the cooking series *Heston's Mission Impossible*, took a year to film and examines the dilemmas

PASSENGER

THIS PAGE Thomas Keller and Heston Blumenthal share a laugh. OPPOSITE PAGE The expansive lodge has many areas for dining and relaxing, including the al fresco space (bottom) which enjoys spectacular views over the Pacific Ocean.



BOTH [CHEFS] ARE MULTI-TASKERS EXTRAORDINAIRE, BUT ENJOY THEIR DOWN TIME – PARTICULARLY GOLF AND EXPLORING NEW PLACES TO EAT.



THIS PAGE, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT Comfortable seating and stylish decor invite relaxation. Set for dinner. Guests enjoyed delicious food and a convivial atmosphere. Stone fireplaces and contemporary art by local artists in the main lounge.



Sound of the Sea



THIS PAGE, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT Heston Blumenthal's signature dish Sound of the Sea. Heston Blumenthal, Dale Gartland, Thomas Keller and New Zealand Prime Minister John Key. Heston puts the finishing touches to a dish. Heston's Taffety Tart is a sublime mix of caramelised apple, fennel, rose and candied lemon.



of food quality and preparation in much-maligned situations, including a children's hospital, British Airways in-flight menu, a submarine, and cinema. He stresses that the show is not about campaigning, but finding workable solutions. "It's about seeing what actually happens in these scenarios," he says. "In the children's hospital there were eight chefs, but only two were making food for the children and the others were cooking for functions and staff. Chefs don't go to the ward. Kids don't need three courses: they need energy. "With airline food we took many factors into consideration – the condition of food when it gets to the plane, but also what goes on in our heads when we are on a plane and how that can affect how we taste food. When we're stressed or anxious our ability to perceive sweet and sour changes. That's why aggressive chefs aren't good tasters!" he says. By far his most exciting experience for *Mission Impossible* was the five nights he spent sleeping next to a Tomahawk missile on a submarine. "This submarine was an expensive piece of kit and it has nuclear power that can keep it going forever. But do you know why it has to surface? When the kitchen runs out of onions. There is no storage space. Every nook and cranny is taken up so we introduced vacuum sealing for the onions, and it takes up a lot less space. "The response to the show [screening on Australian TV] has been amazing. It has attracted the attention of the Admiral [of the Royal Navy] and Minister of Defence, meaning there will be a whole review of food in the British navy, army and air force." Thomas Keller may not be spending nights on board submarines, but he also has many projects on his plate. "Chefs have a strong underlying desire to nurture and feed people. We also have a sense of responsibility to give back," he says. His practice of giving back to society has just been recognised by the awarding of the French Legion of Honour. Only two other Americans have received it – Julia Child and Alice Waters – for their efforts in promoting French culture in the US.



Taffety Tart c.1660

PASSENGER



Lime-cured New Zealand abalone

THIS PAGE, FROM TOP LEFT Thomas Keller's lime-cured New Zealand abalone, honeydew melon, compressed cucumber, basil and avocado puree. Thomas rattles the pans. Thomas's Easterbrook duck breast, Swiss chard, glazed turnips pickled blueberries and hazelnut.



Easterbrook duck breast

Another of Thomas's passions is design. "Designing our restaurants, including the china, is something I have always enjoyed," he says. "The shape of the plate is really important to me and I have designed specific lines with All-Clad, Bertrand Raynaud and Christofle."

Further brand extension is not something on Thomas's to-do list. "You need an opportunity to arise in a specific location. We won't diminish the quality of our existing restaurants just to have more. It takes a one-and-a-half to three-year timeframe to train people up and it's expensive in terms of people and money. The people we choose are generationally the next leaders, like a world-class sports team."

And how does he keep this sports team in prime condition?

"I need to work out – I eat at 4.30pm with the staff and then work for a while then go the gym and back to the restaurant. You realise you can't stay up all night at a certain stage," he laughs.

The man whose favourite meal is roast chicken and zinfandel has prepared far more complex dishes for guests this evening – one being the lime-cured New Zealand abalone – a fabulous precursor to Heston's trademark Sound of the Sea, complete with an iPod in a conch shell. "The produce in New Zealand and Australia is fabulous. It's a lot like California where we are able to work with the very best ingredients."

Apart from golf what would bring these two back Down Under? "When you make discoveries like Cape Kidnappers you'll make the trip again." **15** Belle travelled courtesy of Air New Zealand and Tourism New Zealand.

PASSENGER



East Coast Angus beef



THIS PAGE, FROM TOP LEFT Dale Gartland's East Coast Angus beef, mushroom and leek tortellini with mushroom sauce. Heston Blumenthal and Dale Gartland. Dale's Cape Kidnappers beetroot with Over the Moon goats' curd, dukkah, cumin and shallot. Artwork by Martin Day in the library.



Cape Kidnappers beetroot with goats' curd