

tips

- ▶ Smaller portions of the main would make a great side with barbecued spring lamb.
- ▶ Reduce the water in the gazpacho by half to make a thicker Spanish almond dip for raw baby vegetables or to include on a mezze platter.
- ▶ The custard slice would pair well with summer berries or seasonal stone fruit.



acts as the store front. They have introduced a labelling machine and a cherry stoner, but their innovative jams, sauces, chutneys and vinegars are still batch-made by hand from local fruit, including quinces, which mostly come from trees in private backyards around Cromwell. Try Pinot Noir jelly, roasted cherry chutney, greengage and cinnamon jam, raspberry vinegar and more. Freeway Orchard, SH8B, Cromwell, ph: 03-445 4048, provisions.co.nz

CLYDE

base_ically

Clyde's new pizza-pasta house combines Italian food with a "found theatre space", featuring plays directed by the owner, Dean Valster. Pasta is made on the premises daily with Italian flour, while the pizzas are baked in a wood-fired oven, using hard wood from old Otago fruit trees. The dining room has a railways theme, with rail carriage banquettes, a piece of rail track above the bar, roof gable spines from railway tracks and railway station lamps.

Cnr Fache & Naylor Sts, Clyde, ph: 03-449 2088, base-ically.com

ALEXANDRA

Speargrass Inn

Established in the 19th century as The Speargrass Hotel, and renovated from ruins in 1986, this stone building has been rebranded and upgraded by new owners Jackie van der Voort and James Russell, who offer lunch and evening dining, including their signature mushroom and Windsor blue tart, and San Francisco sourdough sandwich, prepared by American chef Joel Cowley. Three accommodation units, set in the hotel gardens, offer mountain and rural views.

1300 Fruitlands Roxburgh Rd, SH8, Alexandra, ph: 03-449 2192, speargrassinn.co.nz

■ Also see our restaurants section for in-depth reviews of Les Alpes (Queenstown) and The Landing (Wanaka).

MATAKAURI LODGE

The dominating faces of Cecil and Walter Peaks launch from the waters of Lake Wakatipu, dwarfing the TSS Earnslaw as it regularly chugs past. This is the striking, uninterrupted view at Matakauri Lodge - from the dining room, the outdoor spa, your bed, your bathtub... even the treadmill.

The Robertson family has extended its lodge portfolio beyond Kauri Cliffs and The Farm at Cape Kidnappers to another height-of-luxury hideaway, minutes from central Queenstown.

Built in 2000, the main lodge, with its three suites, and the eight lakeside cottages have had a full makeover by interior designer Virginia Fisher, whose signature is stamped on other top properties, such as Kauri Cliffs and Huka Lodge. The result is highly tactile - plush fabrics, comforting throws, ottomans, oodles of cushions and a mix of vibrant orange and gold hues with more muted natural tones. Soaring ceilings allow all spaces to harness the natural light.

You can retreat to your cottage, mosey across for a spa treatment, laze in the infinity pool or hit the gym. Dining, however, may occupy much of your time. Dale Gartland, group executive chef, has cooked for the company since 2003 so knows all about the challenges of lodge cooking, with a daily changing menu, dietary requirements and no set dining times.

Gartland embraces all the south has to offer, including merino lamb, venison, salmon, crayfish and stone fruit. A kitchen garden is under way.

His cooking reflects a pared-back sophistication: a delicate tortellini of Milford Sound crayfish, scallops, zucchini and Central Otago saffron bisque; or tender rose veal with roast shallots, potato purée, purple asparagus and balsamic jus. The wine list showcases New Zealand's finest.

Where to dine? Choose from alfresco, fire-front, the stylish dining room or the intimate upstairs library. And yes, they all have that view. 569 Glenorchy Rd, Queenstown, ph: 03-441 1008, matakauri.co.nz

✶ SARAH NICHOLSON



The stylish lounge area at Matakauri Lodge



Group executive chef Dale Gartland

Dine alfresco at the lodge



Auckland

KITCHEN

★★★★

Upstairs, Hotel DeBrett,
3b O'Connell St (or 2 High St),
ph: 09-969 1545,
hoteldebrett.com/kitchen
7 days from 6.30pm
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There were days in the early 1980s when Hotel DeBrett was Auckland's most popular inner-city hangout. Grant Chilcott crooned, Champagne flowed as freely as the chat about which account was leaving which agency. Food was seldom a priority.

After less glamorous times as a backpackers, this watering hole has been transformed into a boutique hotel. Kitchen, the reincarnated restaurant, has stayed under the radar. A recent visit suggests it deserves more attention, especially with ex-Blanket Bay Lodge chef Mark Sycamore now at the helm.

Unplanned events meant we were running very late, but the phone call ahead was handled pleasantly and with empathy. The welcome was without censure and, with a very reasonably priced glass of Moët helping to wind back the Friday stress, we were exploring the nicely crafted menu.

The fresh Clevedon buffalo ricotta appealed, but I went with nori-wrapped tuna loin with chilli jam, cucumber and radish as a starter. Fresh rolls of tuna tightly coiled in nori coated with the barest tempura batter were beautifully enhanced by the piquant Asian flavours. My partner's seafood risotto was equally well executed – a simple concept given flavour complexity with the judicious addition of fennel, smoked tomato and a smattering of dill oil.

The roasted grass-fed eye fillet came medium rare as ordered. Delicate and juicy, it was perfectly complemented by the garlic bread sauce and jus gras. My deceptively simple dish of steamed John Dory showed a touch of culinary class – the beautifully fresh fish was presented artfully and with coconut broth, tatsoi, carrot purée and pickled chilli salad working together to create a harmony of taste and texture.

This clever but unpretentious food from the hands of chef Sycamore was impressive and I feared the desserts, as often happens, would be anti-climactic. I had no cause for concern. There was nothing extravagant – just stylish, contemporary renditions of classics, mine a steamed rhubarb pudding presented as an unfussy deconstructed crumble; my partner's a flavour-filled Valrhona fondant with mandarin ice-cream, brandy-soaked prunes and anise crumb. Okay, so the ice-cream was a little lumpy, but the overall effect was delicious and wonderful.

The food at Kitchen really is very good and delivered by mature, capable



waitstaff. The dining room is compact, but tables are spaced far enough apart, often spilling into the airy atrium bar area. The retro feel and the pastel colours appealed and the lack of hubbub gave it a quietly sophisticated ambience that I imagine an upmarket 1950s eatery might have delivered.

The open kitchen is unobtrusive and an efficient extraction system meant no overpowering cooking aromas.

The wine list was adequate. Like the menu it was comfortably small and, while it could be improved with more by-the-glass options, it was well priced and the portions generous.

Kitchen has got it right: a balanced menu with just enough choice to keep things interesting, skilful staff, a mature and stylish ambience and a class act running the kitchen. 🍷 **KERRY TYACK**

BUENOS AIRES

★★★★

234 Jervois Rd, Herne Bay,
ph: 09-360 0678,
buenosairesrestaurant.co.nz
7 days from 5pm
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Committed carnivores can't go past the simplicity of meat cooked over fire. A primal thing, perhaps. Buenos Aires, formerly at Clarks Beach and now in the heart of Herne Bay, brings the traditional Argentinian version to town.

The woodfire grill, or *parrilla*, stands just inside with slabs of meat sizzling over flickering flames of manuka. And the enticing aroma of chargrilled meat is tempting red-blooded appetites.

The grill is manned by co-owner Victor Salina, from Buenos Aires, along with other South American chefs, and wife Maria is busy in the kitchen. Their son Nehuen works front of house and co-owner, Tomas Tonnelier, is the host and a sommelier expert in Argentinian wines.

Three of the entrées come from the grill. Choripan, the name a portmanteau of chorizo and *pan*, or bread, is a must at an Argentinian asado (like a barbecue gathering). Spicy sausage wrapped in bread comes with a generous bowl of chimichurri, the deliciously piquant Argentinian sauce made with oregano, garlic, olive oil and crushed chilli. Or you can have chorizo and black pudding with or without kidney. The sausages are made on site, except the black pudding, which is made elsewhere to the owners' specifications.

Other entrées include little light empañadas, crescents of pastry filled with beef, roasted chicken or spinach; chicken livers, met with much approval, come in a mushroom and Malbec sauce.

Among the grill-striped meat mains are four choices of steak: 300g eye fillet wrapped in prosciutto, 400g Scotch fillet wrapped in bacon, 600g T-bone and flank, ranging from \$28 to \$33 (\$39 for the stonking T-bone). The eye fillet was beautifully cooked, and pork cutlets marinated in bourbon were tender and succulent with a hint of fruity sweetness – all infused with savoury smokiness.