

RETREAT & SURRENDER

A PEERLESS PRIVATE ESCAPE AND INDULGENT WELLNESS PAMPERING
AWAITS AT NEW ZEALAND'S LATEST LUXURY LODGES.

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BRILLIANT BLUE SKY FRAMES LUSH NATIVE BUSH tumbling over the granite cathedrals flanking our passage as we snake our way up the tidal river.

A crisp breeze carrying the fragrant, damp forest floor reveals the morning's secret while unfurling punga fronds lazily shed occasional reminders disturbing the river's glassy surface as it eddies craggy outcrops.

We're following an untamed route thousands of years in the making, yet, despite the regular visitors to New Zealand's Abel Tasman National Park at the top of the South Island, we could easily be on a voyage of discovery.

With a chorus of native bird calls spilling from the verdant forest it's easy to imagine Tasman himself being greeted by such a vision – had he made it this far.

Unfortunately for him, though, he didn't have our skipper Kelvin Goodman, his local knowledge or the

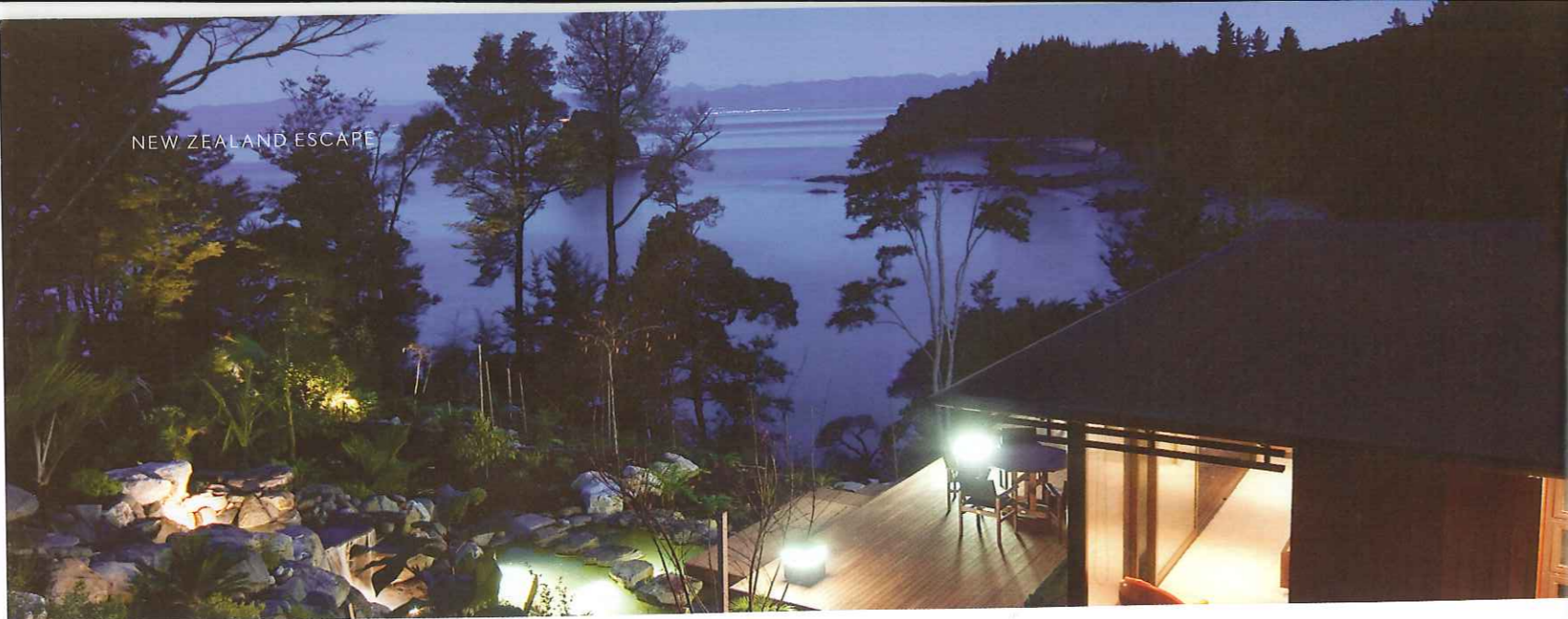
8.5 metre fast launch *Pearl Kaspar* Goodman designed specifically for such adventures.

Dropping anchor mid river in a lagoon-like stretch, we attract the attention of a pod of New Zealand Fur-seal pups, their sleek black heads peering over rocks and bobbing in the water upstream.

Simply Wild director and guide Rob Douglas informs us our river companions are recently-weaned teenagers as he unpacks calorific homemade chocolate brownies and prepares locally roasted coffee.

Joining us for morning tea, the seals vie for our attention with their playful displays, while the *Pearl Kaspar* languorously fishtails against its restraint.

It is an escape so complete it's hard to believe we're less than 30 minutes from our luxury accommodations and their iconic, Split Apple landmark namesake. ▷



well-equipped gym. Rounding out the holistic wellbeing package, the couple offers private consultations with Lee and functional cooking classes with Pen.

Rebalanced, relaxed and revitalised we move on to the sublime surrounds of the Split Apple Hideaway for a total escape. Just over the ridge, ensconced among a stand of mature native trees on a cliff edge, the secluded and exclusive-use Hideaway emerges at the end of the private road. The sprawling four-storey luxury California-inspired dwelling, featuring a king suite on each level, presides over rugged coastline, endless ocean and the golden sands, and home, of Split Apple Rock.

Owner, designer and local businessman Alan Trent greets us at a dwarfing wooden door with a warm smile. Behind him a wash of marble flooring gives way to cream shag-pile curved stairs leading down to the lounge and kitchen areas. If Split Apple Retreat represents the Yin of understated Japanese elegance and simplicity, then the Split Apple Hideaway embraces an excessive Yang rock-star attitude. With glass walls on all four levels offering 270-degree views, the Hideaway is resplendent with polished marble surfaces, larger-than-life modern art, sleek designer furniture and gleaming Italian chrome fixtures and appliances.

Like its sister lodge, it too was quick to rack up the architecture accolades, winning the 2009 New Zealand Master Builder Gold and Bathroom of the Year Awards. It comes fully stocked, to order, with local delicacies and the region's best wines for those seeking the ultimate, uninterrupted getaway. For a hassle-free assisted escape, the services of the Hideaway's wildly talented chef, Josiah Smits, and attentive waitstaff can be engaged.

We enjoy the best of both worlds, with Smits working his magic across a three-course feast of local produce starting with a delicate sashimi of yellowfin tuna and pawpaw salad. The main course teams a tender rack of local lamb with Kikorangi blue cheese gratinéed portobello mushroom, steamed asparagus, minted baby green pea puree and slow-dried cherry tomatoes

Opening spread: Split Apple Retreat and its enviable view at dusk.

Previous spread, clockwise, from top right: Split Apple Hideaway by night; The Hideaway's kitchen and dining area; Split Apple Retreat's lounge; One of the Retreat's Japanese bathrooms; and Pool with a view at the Retreat

This page: Hiding out in nature at the Split Apple Hideaway.

topped by panko-crumbed sweetbreads with a silky Waimea Bolitho SV Pinot Noir. Between bites, Trent, a former local of Laguna Beach, California, explains the Hideaway's design ethics of working with the pristine environment, as a hearty fire in the lounge area takes the chill out of the early spring evening. We end the night with a symphony of sticky date and vanilla bean crème brûlée topped with fresh local strawberries and a glass of covetous limoncello built from a tequila base and produced exclusively for Trent by a Mexican supplier.

Waking the next day from the cradling comfort of my super-soft king bed in the top-floor suite, I open up the sliding wall of glass doors to invite in the morning. Refreshed by an ice-coloured shower with forest and ocean views, I make a note to hit the pride-of-place bathtub after getting better acquainted with its panoramic stronghold.

With brittle scallop shells crunching underfoot, I wind my way through the dappled forest along a private path toward the muted lap of an outgoing tide. My only companions are the abundant native birds. Tui, Woodpigeon, Bellbirds and Fantails all announce my passage as they flit between the branches of the canopy above. From these honeyed sands, the Hideaway earns its name and blends into the cliff side, gingerly peeking through a curtain of darkened trees.

Back in my suite, with a full moon rising heavy over the ocean, I channel my inner rock star. Turning up the music I pull back the sliding doors and sink into a hot bath with a glass of chilled Seifried Gewürztraminer and watch the moonlight dance across the water.

I doubt anyone knows we're even here. ☺

SOURCE NOTES

Split Apple Retreat and Hideaway www.splitapple.co.nz

Simply Wild www.simplywild.co.nz

Wine, Art & Wilderness www.wineartandwilderness.co.nz

Tourism New Zealand www.newzealand.com

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TRADING SHOES FOR SLIPPERS WE LEAVE OUR BAGGAGE, BOTH PHYSICAL AND EMOTIONAL, AT THE DOOR IN THE ZEN-LIKE SURROUNDS.

Golden sun-kissed sands make way for flocks of spring-heeled lambs on lush roadside paddocks before we wind our way through secluded native forest.

While our destinations, the latest additions to New Zealand's growing stable of exclusive luxury lodges, Split Apple Retreat and Split Apple Hideaway, are the focus of this trip, the journey is a delightful distraction – reinforcing we are indeed en route to somewhere special.

Sitting on the fringes of Abel Tasman National Park and offering breath-catching ocean views, the exquisite sister lodges represent a unique concept created by two out-of-town neighbours. The Hideaway offers guests the ultimate contemporary beachfront luxury escape, while the Japanese-style Retreat provides a pampered, wellness-focused rejuvenation experience.

With two nights planned at each, we find Split Apple Retreat near the end of a winding private road nestled among thick native bush.

Passing through a 300-year-old temple entrance, carefully disassembled, relocated and reassembled, from Kobe, Japan, we're welcomed by charming husband and wife hosts and owners Lee and Pen Nelson.

Trading shoes for slippers, as is Japanese custom, we leave our baggage, both physical and emotional, at the door in the zen-like surrounds. Combining Japanese aesthetic with Western comfort, the three-storey Retreat is at once welcoming and calming. Glass walls make the most of expansive ocean views while sleek finishes harmonise with an extensive Japanese art collection.

The Nelsons spent 12 months scouring the country for the perfect location before discovering the hidden charms of the Split Apple region. The Retreat's exacting construction, utilising traditional Japanese techniques, taking a further four years. We're not alone in being impressed. The design by Auckland architect Ricky Do, briefed to work around the art, took out 2010's Nelson Marlborough Architecture Award, making it a finalist in the upcoming New Zealand Architecture Awards.

Offering a choice of three king suites (four if the entire Retreat is booked), I forgo the Japanese-style granite baths-with-views in the Fuji and Lotus Rooms for the split-level charms of the Rainbow Room. Its western bath and LED mood-lit showerhead offer colour cascades from 'fire' (red) to 'ice' (blue) and everything in between. The blue/green-hued ice settings are great for washing away morning grogginess, while the red/

orange colours at the fire end of the spectrum are perfect for unwinding and inducing sleep in the evening.

Joining the bathroom on the upper level is a downy, king-sized bed, while, below, the living area houses a perfectly-stuffed lounge opposite a 42-inch LCD television with more than 200 movies, Apple TV and a diverse music collection.

But it's the room's view that provides the real 'wow' factor. Beyond enormous sliding glass doors lies the stunning blue horizon of Tasman Bay, dotted with the galaxy of the Astrolabe Islands. Two split-level private balconies offer a chance to get closer, but for pure indulgence you can't beat stretching out in bed and letting in the morning sun via a thoughtfully-placed blind control on the headboard.

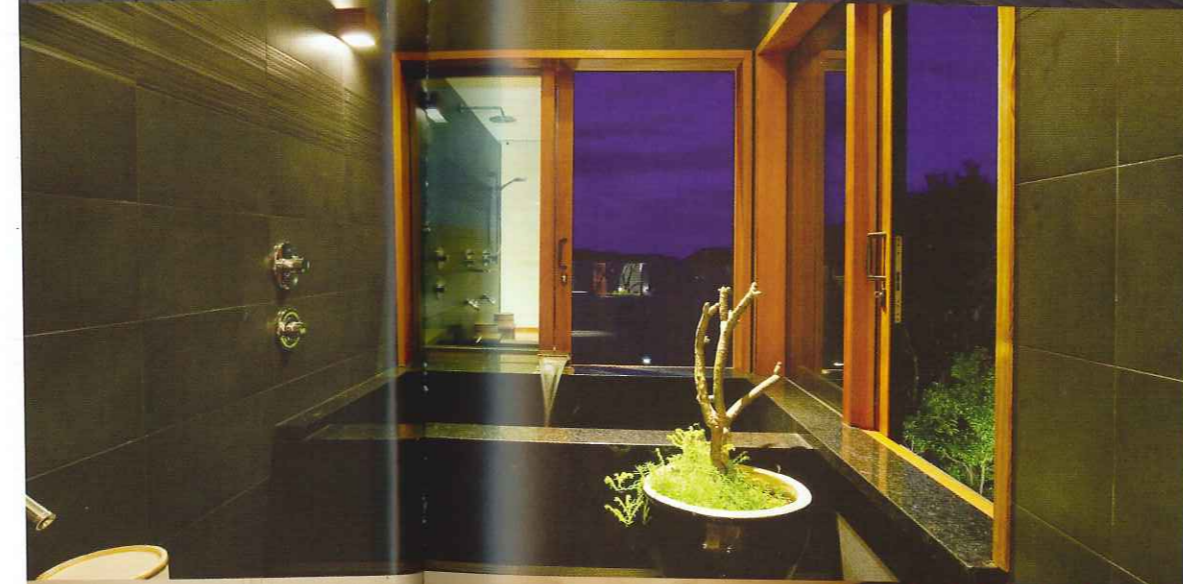
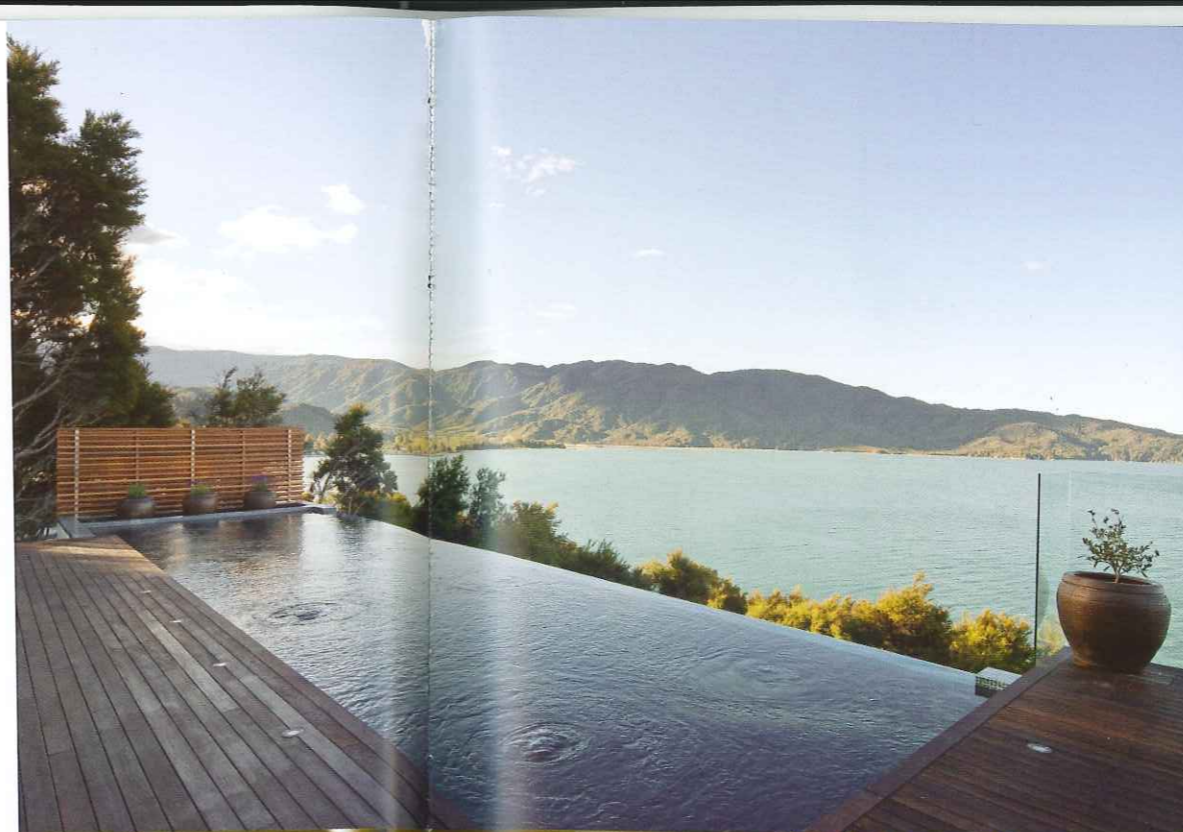
With wellbeing, 'functional food' and longevity at the Retreat's core, it's no surprise to learn that Lee is a retired US doctor and Pen a gourmet chef.

What is surprising, however, is learning Lee is also a high-stakes professional poker player (his winnings from the 2006 Aussie Millions Poker Championship helped fund the Retreat's construction), and a leading authority on prostate cancer. Having been diagnosed himself more than a decade ago, his bestselling book, *Prostate Cancer: Prevention and Cure*, is considered the leading publication on the subject.

Pen's five-star functional food is another surprise. As exquisite as it tastes, it's hard to believe it's also good for you. She also has an unwavering ability to turn the most decadent of dishes – even chocolate soufflé – into gourmet goodness through healthy ingredient substitution. Five-course gourmet banquets in the dining room fuse fresh organic fare from the onsite garden with local produce to create the likes of spinach, pine nut and avocado soup; tuna sashimi, grass-fed beef and a magnificent herb-filled spaghetti squash dish, all coupled with some of the region's finest reds.

Breakfast becomes a fast favourite as we enjoy antioxidant-packed fresh pomegranate juice, blueberry buckwheat pancakes and egg-white mushroom and spinach omelettes on the main balcony perched high above the glittering bay.

A number of spa treatment options complement a stunning saltwater infinity-edge swimming pool, eight-seat private cinema/meditation venue, outdoor spa, aromatic steam room, infra-red sauna and a >



WINE, ART & WILDERNESS
 Explore the greater Nelson region with the knowledgeable Noel Ke... and guide at Wine, Art & Wilderness.
 Meet local artist Brian Flintoff who is leading the revival of delicate taonga puoro (Māori wind instruments), before sampling the delights at the retro-fitted McCashins Brewery, where beers, ciders and spirits are brewed with its famous 'Palaeo' water that has been carbon dated to the Palaeolithic. Out back, resident artist Daniel Campion's studio is abuzz with his latest hundreds and thousands-based collection.
 Swing by jewellers Jens Hansen, ring designers for *The Lord of the Rings* including the 'precious' One Ring before enjoying a long lunch at Waikare Café in the Vineyard, where your meal is matched with the cellar's finest. End your day discovering why Golden Hills Estates is the region's upcoming boutique winery. Helmed by pioneering mussel farmers Jeff and Marr, the Marr family switched to contract growing for local wineries, releasing their own label in 2009 to a slew of awards.

