

FOOD STUFF

BY RACHAEL OAKES-ASH

Kiwi Fruits

With more restaurants per head than New York, New Zealand's capital is also the country's top food destination. Here are some of Wellington's best bets for a memorable meal

WELLINGTON HAS FEW CHARACTERISTICS OF A NATIONAL capital. Civil servants dressed in shades of gray are outnumbered by creative types, and political haunts play second fiddle to hip, hole-in-the-wall hangouts. Set on a beautiful harbor surrounded by rolling hills, Wellington claims to have more cafés, bars, and restaurants per capita than New York City. When parliament clocks out, the city comes alive as gourmands make their way to kitchens overseen by the country's top chefs.

Wellington Harbour is a drop-off point for tons of fresh seafood,

MORE THAN JUST BEEF Wellington's top dishes include this duet of salmon and pork belly at Citron, above. Opposite: Inside Logan-Brown.

including *paua*, a species of abalone. The city also skirts the fertile Martinborough wine region and is home to world-famous gourmet stores such as Schoc Chocolates, a favorite among visiting celebrities. It serves as well as the base for leading chefs such as Martin Bosley, Rex Morgan, and Steve Logan—household names across the country for their innovative

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cuisine, constantly applauded by the likes of New Zealand's food bible, *Cuisine Magazine*. With so much to offer, it is no surprise that Wellington leads the country in the epicurean stakes.

LOGAN-BROWN RESTAURANT & BAR

At a glance, you wouldn't guess that Steve Logan was a TV star. Taking to the floor of the restaurant he co-owns, Logan-Brown, he works the lunchtime crowd like a pro. The self-importance often associated with those who start behind the stove and end up in front of the camera is absent; instead, Logan is all smiles—genuinely interested in those around him. The former chef understands that his talents lie with people, which is why his business partner, Al Brown, helms the kitchen. The 12-year partnership runs as smooth as a new blender, and as a result, Logan-Brown consistently snags the country's most coveted culinary awards.

Logan and Brown's *Hunger for the Wild* television series depicts the pair as affable, outdoor-loving Kiwi blokes. That same accessibility translates into their perpetually bustling restaurant. "The food is about taking the very best quality ingredients and cooking them to perfection ... We don't over-handle the food, so presentation is simple rather than architectural," Logan says.

Set in a 1920s banking building on the corner of Vivien and Cuba streets—the latter renowned for its ample dining and nightlife offerings—Logan-Brown's interior is luxurious, with

chandeliers, plush leather upholstery, and Corinthian columns ranged around the octagonal main room. The posh surrounds are a magnet for the city's power brokers, but the ambience is anything but stuffy.

The menu nods toward New Zealand's South Island, with a focus on gamey meats to complement Wellington's traditional penchant for lighter seafood. The fine, simple fare is served with a twist: rich hare meat is sweetened with delightful candied walnuts; venison is served alongside parsnip *crema frita*; and a decadent feta terrine accompanies tender lamb. As is the case in any good restaurant, dishes are seasonal. Locals know that the best time to visit is in winter, when the sinful cinnamon-apple beignet with caramelized quince and sherry-infused *crème anglaise* is on the menu. 192 Cuba St.; 64-4/801-5114; loganbrown.co.nz.

MARTIN BOSLEY'S YACHT CLUB RESTAURANT

It may look unremarkable from the street, but inside, this bright harborside eatery commands stunning views of the water and the Clyde Quay marina. The menu, strong on seafood, also sparkles—



signature dishes include a delightfully light carpaccio of Pacific big-eye tuna with frozen cucumber foam, preserved lemon, and farmed French caviar. Such creations sit well alongside heavier comfort cuisine, like Bosley's lamb-tongue rilette and a melting foie gras mousse served with salsa verde. Don't be intimidated by lengthy descriptions: Bosley's menu reminds diners that "should you prefer your fish or steak simply grilled with a salad



TABLE FOR TWO Clockwise from above: Seats are hard to come by at Rex Morgan's intimate Citron; harbor views from Martin Bosley's; a dish of duck at Arbitrageur.

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or vegetables and mashed potatoes, please do not be afraid to ask.”

It's all part of Bosley's philosophy that dining should be a social event, not just a culinary one. You may also think it is part theater when your meal arrives at your table: Bosley is a maestro of food presentation, and his architectural creations are almost worthy of a gallery exhibit. A well-stocked wine cellar includes notable vintages from around the world, but is perhaps best known for its local focus, allowing diners to pair their meal with a drop from Hawkes Bay, Marlborough, Martinborough, and beyond. *Royal Port Nicholson Yacht Club, 103 Oriental Parade; 64-4/920-8302; martin-bosley.com.*

CITRON

Rex Morgan likes to keep things intimate. His restaurant, Citron, seats only 30 diners, and because Wellingtonians generally consider Morgan to be a culinary genius, those seats are hard to come by.

Which is not to say that Citron is aiming for exclusivity. One of the city's most talked-about eateries since it opened in 2003, it occupies a small, lemon-hued settler's cottage that dates back to the late 1800s. The place is charming, though hardly opulent. And its owner, a classically trained Maori chef with a big heart and a stomach to match, is as affable a host as you're likely to meet. Indeed, it's hard to believe that this gentle giant is good friends with Gordon Ramsay, the hot-tempered bad boy of British cuisine.

Citron has a simple, no-fuss menu: you either have the nightly degustation or a set meal; à la carte is not an option. Morgan loves tinkering with his food, and the menu changes monthly to keep up with his latest obsession, whether that be freeze-dried herbs, foams, or fresh crustaceans. Whatever the flavor of the moment, you can be sure that it's locally sourced and crafted with precision. *270 Willis St.; 64-4/ 801-6263; dinner Tuesday–Saturday only.*

ARBITRAGEUR WINE ROOM AND RESTAURANT

Stepping into Arbitrageur's denlike setting in Wellington's business district is like being transported to a fine-dining establishment in Europe. It has the starched white linen, polished service, and lofty ceilings of an old-world dining room. More than that, it has the crowds: this

Raising the Bar

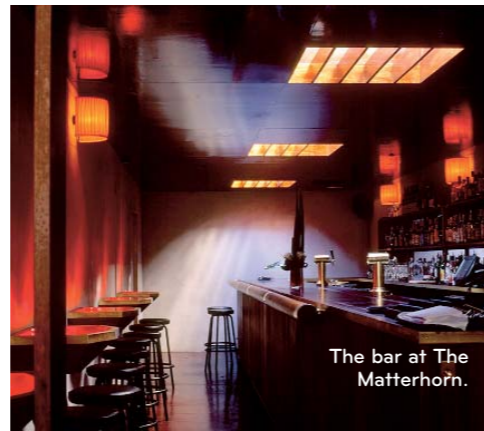
Wellington's hottest spots for a cool beverage

THE MATTERHORN Modeled on a classic European café, the Matterhorn has one of the most extensive cocktail lists in the city. The underground establishment features a fine selection of top-shelf spirits and wines, made all the more enjoyable by soulful grooves spun by late-night DJs. *106 Cuba St.; 64-4/384-3359; matterhorn.co.nz.*

MIGHTY MIGHTY Delightfully kitsch interiors make this bar hard to take too seriously. Drink lists are printed on vinyl record covers from the '80s, and cocktails are all about word play: the MC Hammered is one of the more popular tipples. *104 Cuba St.; 64-4/385-2890; mightymighty.co.nz.*

GOOD LUCK BAR This sultry basement space is one of Cuba Street's gems. It's decked out like an opium den with delicate oriental lanterns and privacy screens; hungry hipsters can snack on Cambodian food between turns on the dance floor. *126 Cuba St.; 64-4/801-9950.*

THE MALTHOUSE Located upstairs in an Edwardian building, this haven for ale aficionados has an extensive selection of naturally fermented beers on tap, as well as a bistro serving such hearty pub grub as venison pie. *48 Courtenay Place; 64-4/802-5484; themalthouse.co.nz.*



The bar at The Matterhorn.



SURF'S UP The laid-back Maranui Cafe overlooks Lyall Bay Beach.

Featherston Street address is hot property, and tables here are in demand.

Owner Clay Toomer is a familiar face around Wellington's hospitality scene. A co-founder of the popular Q Bar in Courtney Place, Toomer was keen to create a slice of Europe in the city. He freely admits to drawing inspiration from traditional peasant foods found in the wine-growing regions of the Continent: his menu is peppered with the likes of garlicky *skordalia*, rich *mozzarella di bufala*, prosciutto, risotto, pannatone, and chocolate ganache.

The restaurant is also known for its wine collection, with more than 600 local and international labels displayed in impressive, five-meter-high cabinets visible from every table in the room. Despite the show, Toomer is keen to “take the wank out of wine.” And he's done just that. To simplify the wine-selection process, the wine list and the food menu are color-coded, with each hue representing a different body of wine, whether it be rich and explosive, intense and fruity, tender and luscious, or fresh and addictive. It's good fun in a stylish setting. *125 Featherston St.; 64-4/400-5530; arbitrageur.co.nz.*

MARANUI CAFE

In a city overflowing with bars (see above), breakfast is typically a late and leisurely affair. Locals in the know head to the café at the Maranui Surf Life Saving Club. This retro-inspired, Formica-obsessed haunt is difficult to define: it's not quite a restaurant, but it's certainly a lot bolder than your average coffee shop. The fare is simple and hearty, with local favorites including mixed berry smoothies, breakfast fry-ups with all the trimmings, and home-baked cakes. Be sure to nab a table by the windows—the views of Lyall Bay Beach below are captivating. *Lyall Parade, Lyall Bay; 64-4/387-2237; maranui.co.nz.* ©