

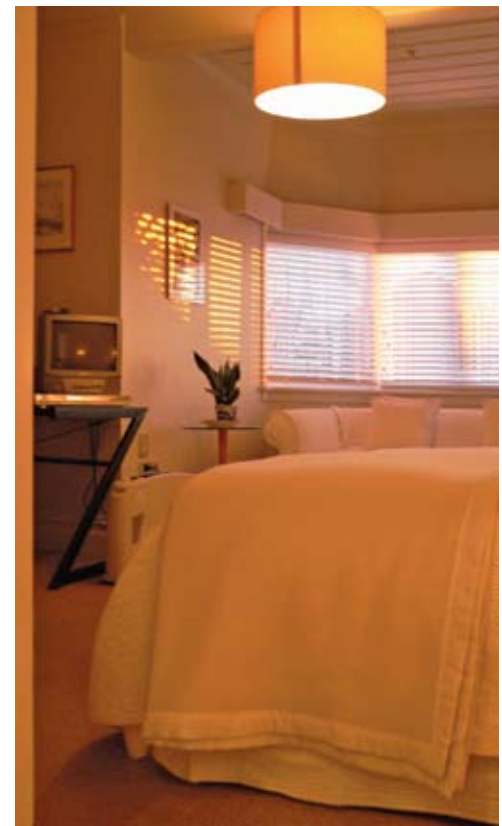
## Nice work

Pip Barrett is no stranger to the Nice, but recently the New Plymouth boutique hotel enjoyed a facelift – the perfect excuse for another visit. Photos by Saffron Jensen

From his penthouse apartment atop the Nice Hotel, Terry Parkes, bon vivant and owner of all things Nice, surveys the city sites and lights. "Isn't it just bloody gorgeous?" he exalts, arms framing the panoramic view from downtown to the iconic Len Lye wind wand on the waterfront. A burnished sunset highlights the vastness of the Tasman Sea beyond. To the south, behind the hotel, Mount Taranaki's splendid snowy cone looks good enough to eat, but we curb our appetites and book to dine instead at Table, the revamped restaurant at the Nice.

The hotel's layout allows guests to be as private or sociable as they wish. Several celebrities and showbiz greats have slipped in and slept between the Nice's crisp bedsheets over the years: Tom Cruise (several times before and during filming of *The Last Samurai*), Cliff Richard, Kiri Te Kanawa, Danny DeVito and Hollywood director Ed Zwick, to name a few.

Each bedroom has its own personality, some reflecting the history and traditions of this 140-year-old former Redcoats hospital, and some with a more contemporary look, like the Wind Wand room. Mine is the Halamoana room, with its fresh white decor offset by clear blue sky and a peep of the sea from the balcony, which overlooks a tropical garden below. A mountain of snowy white pillows on the bed is matched by a plump cushioned



couch and a shaggy wool rug to run one's toes through after a soothing soak.

Like the private dining and conference room, hallways and spaces throughout the hotel – even the alfresco deck – Table restaurant is festooned with contemporary New Zealand art. Some of our finest are represented, such as Rob Gardiner and Taranaki legends Don Driver and Tom Chrysler. At the end of the hall, up the stairs, is a cozy library with an array of magazines and books, encompassing Kiwi classics, thrillers, bonk-buster novels and literary award winners. “Hey, if you don't get to finish the book over the weekend, send it back when you do,” says Terry magnanimously.

“Be our guest, food is our pleasure” is the byline of Table, and several guests are indeed taking pleasure in their food this Friday evening. We start with a seafood platter presented on a long board, with tempting tidbits of smoked oyster pâté, salmon gravlax, tempura-battered prawns and shrimp noodle cakes. I can't go past the very tasty chicken liver, port and bacon pie topped with crispy leek, while my companion opts for the pumpkin, spinach and goat's cheesecakes, which he finds flavoursome. We enjoy a glass each of a very malleable CJ Pask Gimblett Road merlot malbec.

For mains, we order the braised venison osso

bucco with potatoes and root vegetables bound in a cabernet sauvignon sauce, and a very tasty pan-roasted lamb loin sliced over pancetta and potato hash, finished with red wine jus and pea mousse ravioli. A Cornerstone cabernet merlot malbec makes a perfect match. Sharing a coffee and hazelnut cake served warm with vanilla bean ice-cream leaves us amply satisfied.

Dinner done, we set out to toast the evening's entertainment with a visit to the prestigious Puke Ariki Heritage Centre, then some mid-evening jazz at the Matinee bar in Devon Street, where “Rossanova” Ross Halliday and his band fill the bill ever so smoothly. A couple more cocktails at the Powderroom, very well shaken, not stirred, and some tasty counter nibbles, then a two-minute walk from the main street back to the Nice for a snifter in the bar before bed.

Waiting for me in my super-king bed is a hottie of the most warming kind, complete with woolly cover, ensuring a dreamless slumber under the voluminous feather duvet.

Waffing downstairs next morning at the late end of breakfast time, Terry greets me with a cheerful and cheeky, “You can have anything you fancy, Pip, including a little of what you like on the side.” He personally conjures up a parmesan cheese omelette with crisp gammon

bacon, toast and a full teapot. Just outside the window on the all-weather deck, Glengarry, Terry's West Highland terrier, gives that doggone, hopeful look. His access to Terry's apartment is through a discreet doggie door in the wall of the ladies' loo.

The Nice Hotel embodies personalised service. It promises an intimate, indulgent and exceptionally nice time. Whether yours is a laidback luxury break or a champagne cocktail and chandelier celebration, the Nice caters to your every need and whim in an appealing, artful atmosphere in the hub of New Plymouth.

**Nice Hotel & Table Restaurant**  
**71 Brougham Street, New Plymouth**  
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**[www.nicehotel.co.nz](http://www.nicehotel.co.nz)**

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