

The Award-winning Table at the Nice Hotel

A decade after converting a lovely old two-storey doctor's house and surgery into one of the country's finest boutique hotels and restaurants, and Terry Parkes is obviously humbled by taking out the title of New Plymouth's best restaurant for the third year running.

And it's not just the Outstanding Restaurant Award that Table at the Nice Hotel won in the 2009 Halamoana Hospitality Awards but also its chef Mark Watkins, who has been with Table for four years, was named Outstanding Chef, and Alice Maindonald won the Outstanding Waitress award. And because Nice won the award three years in a row it also received the coveted Excellence Award.

"It's wonderful winning the awards but it certainly puts the pressure on," adds Terry. "We don't go out to win awards; they are just the result of doing what we do best. We were already extremely busy before the awards, so this has taken it to a new level. It's wonderful because it recognizes the passion we all put into Table."

Both Table and the Nice Hotel are stunning, the hotel's luxury suites having hosted Prime Ministers, movie stars and the rich and famous over the years. Original artworks, including Taranaki's Don Driver, decorate the walls, chandeliers add a touch of glamour, and everything is done with an amazing sense of style. Outside there's a lovely deck area seating around 15, with a raised fireplace and tropical garden, while inside there are two dining areas plus a private dining room.

Having previously owned the award-winning Espresso café when it was in the Govett-Brewster Art Gallery, Terry has been able to put his personal stamp on Table on a much grander scale.

"I still like to prepare something a little special for guests, a sort of amuse bouche," he says. "I just love what I'm doing and I've never had one day when I've thought that I didn't want to go to work. What has been important for me is not to work at nights, but I always make sure that I come in most nights. Everybody knows I've arrived because out of habit I always turn down the lights a little and perhaps change the music."

Nice's menus have always been extremely interesting, changing by season although some dishes, including the Lamb sweetbreads sautéed with pancetta, served in a red wine jus and finished with a goat's cheese crouton has long been a signature dish. Also mainstays are the platters to start, one cold and one hot, the latter with Smoked salmon balls, bread, aioli, chorizo, pamesan rosti, tempura prawns, onion relish and marinated pork.

Terry's passion for wine is definitely showcased in Table's winelist. One highlight for us was tasting the Archangel 2008 Pinot Noir from Central Otago, and at the same time meeting one of the vineyard owners whose mother came to New Zealand as a refugee from Arkhangel'sk in Siberia.

"I love it when there's an interesting story behind wines such as this," says Terry. "Not only is it a glorious wine, but there's an incredible story behind it."

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