

Andrew Harper's Hideaway Report®

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2017 GRAND AWARDS EDITION

PORONU



TAUPO, NORTH ISLAND

About 30 miles from Taupo, Poronui is set on a 16,000-acre private estate, through which flow the Taharua and Mohaka rivers. Although it is considered one of New Zealand's premier fly-fishing lodges, Poronui is also a wilderness retreat that is suitable for non-anglers. Its stables, which are part of a complex that includes a gym and spa facilities, offer a range of equestrian activities. Guided hikes, mountain biking, sporting clays and archery provide alternative pursuits. Poronui is just 15 minutes by helicopter from the renowned Hawke's Bay wine region.

The property comprises a main lodge with seven lavish cabins; Blake House (for exclusive use), with two spacious bedrooms and two bunk rooms with four single bunks in each; and the Safari Camp (set beside the Mohaka River), with two tented suites, each containing two queen-size beds.

Our so-called cabin provided a large living room with floor-to-ceiling windows, a gas-log fire, leather armchairs, a writing desk and a wet bar. The bedroom contained a queen and a twin bed, while the bright adjoining bath came with twin sinks and an effective walk-in shower. Best of all was the wooden deck, which was supported on the steep hillside by long stilts. The view of the rushing Taharua River, emerging from a gorge between forested hillsides, was so aesthetically satisfying that it seemed more like landscape art than scenery.

After a day's fishing with a charming and knowledgeable guide, we enjoyed a dinner of scallop carpaccio, followed by chateaubriand, both of which were utterly delicious and graciously served.

SPECIAL RECOGNITION



Hotel Manager of the Year: Eve Reilly I arrived at Poronui to be greeted at the front door by a tall, quietly spoken, gently humorous woman whose Irish accent had survived her many years of residence in New Zealand. "Celtic charm" may be a cliché, but Eve Reilly is living proof that it really does exist. Having shown me around my suite in person, she led me to the dining room, introduced me to the chef and, even though it was long past lunchtime, arranged a board of meats and cheeses, plus a bottle of excellent Pinot Noir. Effortlessly, Reilly gave the impression that absolutely nothing would ever be too much trouble. At dinner, she sat at the head of a long communal table and presided over a diverse group of fishermen and hunters, ensuring that everyone was included in the conversation and that each guest, in turn, was the object of her particular attention. Poronui is a superbly run property, and everything functions without a hitch. But what particularly impressed me was that all the members of the staff are clearly happy in their work and proud to be part of such a distinguished operation. This esprit de corps can only be attributed to the lodge's wholly exceptional manager.