

LOCATION

Just outside central Auckland, near the restaurants, clubs, and shops of the city's fashionable Ponsonby district.

ACCOMMODATIONS

Six of the hotel's 16 suites have sitting rooms with grand pianos and views of the Auckland skyline and Waitemata Harbor.

FACILITIES

A new spa and traditional English gardens.

DINING

The hotel's restaurant offers contemporary New Zealand cuisine with an emphasis on seafood. Entrees include snapper baked in silk paper with oysters, a dish that pairs nicely with a Seresin Estate Sauvignon Blanc from the country's Marlborough region.

**CONCIERGE
RECOMMENDS**

A day aboard the *Lady Gay*, a meticulously restored, 47-foot gentleman's luxury launch built in 1935. The vessel crosses Hauraki Gulf to Waheke Island, where passengers tour a number of New Zealand's best wineries. The return trip includes dinner prepared by a Maori chef and enjoyed at sunset while anchored next to one of the region's extinct volcanoes.

RATES

Junior suites from \$300, premium villa suites from \$420.



Right on Kiwi

Auckland is a long way from Milan, but at Mollies, a 16-suite hotel near the New Zealand city's fashionable Ponsonby district, the operatic voices echoing off white Venetian plaster walls might lead some guests to believe they are in a rehearsal room at La Scala. The hotel is alive at all hours with the sounds of budding tenors and sopranos honing their skills under the tutelage of proprietor, pianist, and voice teacher Frances Wilson.

After years of working in the theater in Europe and the United States, Wilson and her husband, Stephen Fitzgerald, returned to their native New Zealand to run the hotel. Wilson's mother, Mollie, who had managed the property for decades, had one request for the couple: "Do something grand."

Wilson and her set-designer husband responded by restoring the Victorian mansion and filling it with a staggering array of antiques and objects they had collected during their travels. The result—an eclectic mix of Fitzgerald's decorating talents and Wilson's

artistic sensibilities (she recently produced Mozart's *Idomeneo* in Auckland)—does not lack for drama. Gilt Italian mirrors line the long marbled halls, and massive Chinese tapestries hung from the hotel's 16-foot-high walls. Guests sitting in Edwardian chairs posed comfortably on leopard skin rugs in the suites can view, through French doors, Mollies' traditional English gardens and Auckland's Harbor Bridge and Waitemata Harbor. Six of the hotel's 16 suites have expansive sitting rooms with grand pianos, two of which are accompanied by full-size, gilded harps.

Evenings at Mollies typically end with senior members of the staff, all of whom have professional-quality voices, singing arias accompanied by Wilson on the piano in the hotel's dining room. When they are in town, New Zealand's opera stars frequently drop by and sing for their suppers.

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