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# Life & Leisure

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THE AUSTRALIAN FINANCIAL REVIEW

## Unspoilt spoiling

Unique luxury  
weekends away



### Mollies, New Zealand

The Auckland village of Ponsonby was once a forgotten bohemia. These days, it's the city's centre of cultural cool – the spot where upper-crust restaurants such as the intimate Vinnies shoulder up to edgy boutiques such as Zambesi and Wallace Rose, while in between there is a tidy trade of good coffee, books and art.

Wander a little further beyond, towards St Mary's Bay, and you'll find Mollies. Tagged one of the small luxury hotels of the world, Mollies is for music lovers, especially those with an operatic bent. It's run by open-hearted couple Frances Wilson and

Stephen Fitzgerald. The pair swapped New York for Mollies four years ago, taking up the former motel from Wilson's 91-year-old mum and bravely reshaping it into a ritzy music salon of 14 suites with theatrical touches. Five rooms have grand pianos, with a Steinway in the main living area for the occasional after-dinner gathering. You don't have to be gifted to stay, although many guests are – including Covent Garden principal Simon O'Neill. "He was here for Christmas Day and he sang all the death scenes at midnight of four great operas," says Wilson. Herself a notable

pianist who has played for Vera Rozsa and Virginia Zeani, Wilson puts idle pianos to use with music lessons. It may feel a world away, but Mollies is minutes from Auckland city and the harbour, where it's possible to take a spin on an America's Cup yacht or ferry out to winery-laden Waiheke Island and eyeball New Zealand's most expensive real estate. History buffs should also detour to the Auckland Museum and its Polynesian collection. Rates start from \$NZ545 (\$484) a night for couples and climb to \$NZ870 a night for an apartment-sized suite. [www.mollies.co.nz](http://www.mollies.co.nz)

Mollies is for music lovers, especially fans of opera.  
Photo Leonardo

