

Defining New Zealand Cuisine

At Huka Lodge, Chef Paul Froggatt shines a light on New Zealand cuisine for well-traveled foodies.



Huka Lodge garden, vegan, petit vegetables malt crumble



AMBER GIBSON - Chicago-based journalist Amber Gibson specializes in travel, food, wine and wellness. She spends 350 nights a year on the road and has a column with Forbes. Her work also appears in Saveur, Departures, Robb Report, Conde Nast Traveler, NPR and National Geographic Traveler. Gelato, dark chocolate and champagne are her biggest weaknesses.

Contact us

When [Chef Paul Froggatt](#) first arrived at Huka Lodge in 2013, the food was quite rustic: typical lodge fare with a hearty protein and a few predictable sides. Today, five-course tasting menus are served each evening, tweaked to accommodate any allergies or dietary preferences.

British-born Froggatt has brought a touch of finesse to the menu, cuisine that was recognized in 2016 by Huka Lodge's inclusion in Les Grandes Tables du Monde. Considering his pedigree - earned by working in fine-dining kitchens around the world, like the Amber Restaurant in Hong Kong, the Gidleigh Park Hotel, or Bernard Loiseau in Burgundy -, the accolades are not surprising.



Canapés - mushroom parmesan crusted quail egg, seaweed custard tart with horseradish cream and dried scallop powder, parmesan beignet with quince purée



Fresh baked bread, sunflower seed butter, olive oil

Dinner is a leisurely affair, beginning beside the fireplace with a drink in hand. A selection of canapés is delivered bite by bite, delightful morsels arousing your palate for the meal to come.



Yellowtail kingfish, cured with whipped bonito crème fraîche, seaweed lemon dressing

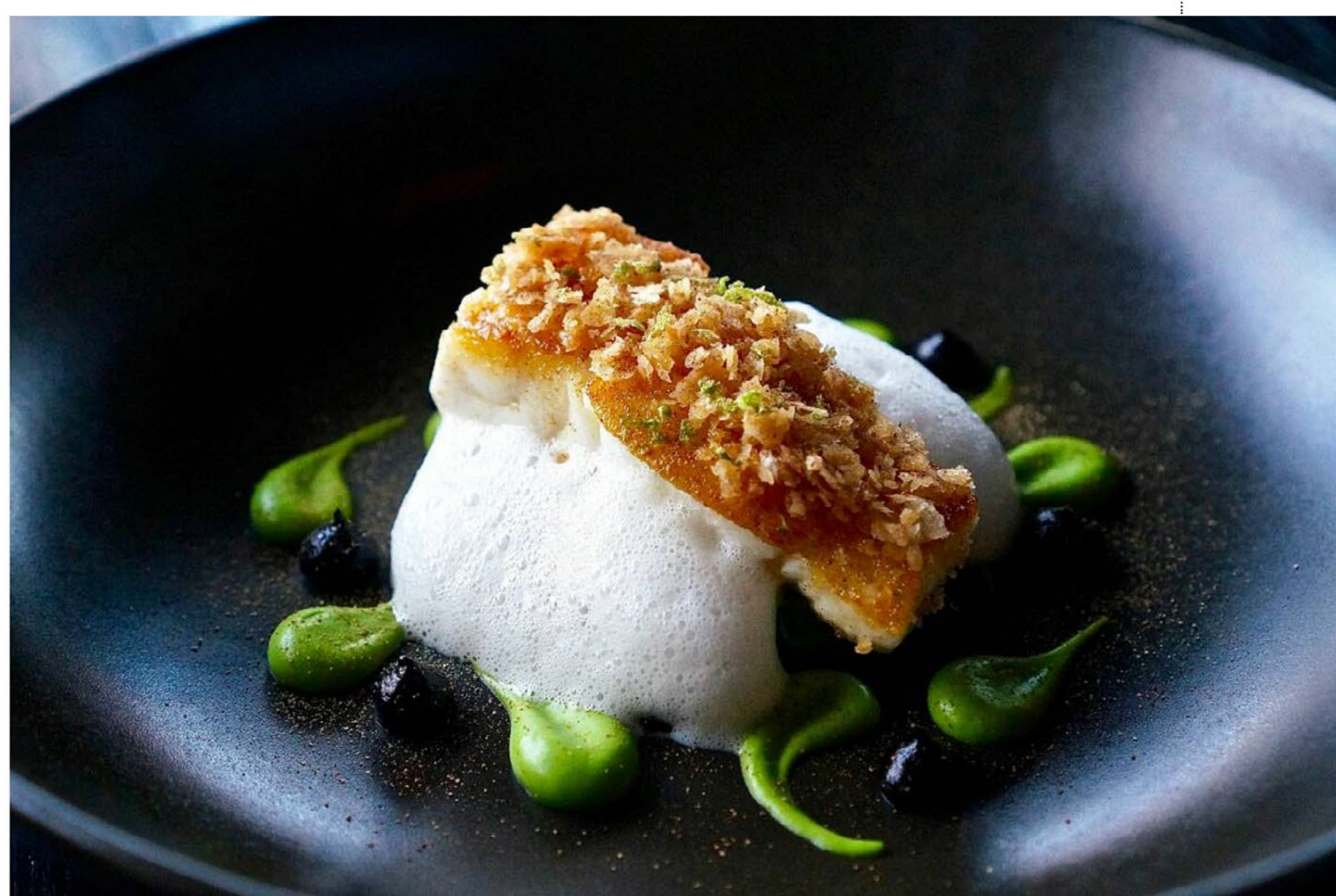


New Zealand scallops, semi-fried strawberries, farro risotto, black sesame sauce

There's lightly cured yellowtail kingfish with delicate seaweed lemon dressing followed by local scallops paired with sweet, semi-dried strawberries and black sesame. Paul Froggatt's cuisine highlights local fish and vegetables. A main course of smoked venison follows, or a robust artist's palette of petite vegetables, a vegan masterpiece sprinkled with malt crumble (see main picture on top of the article). Dessert might be yakitori roast pineapple with rum raisin ice cream and the most buttery of brioches, followed by a selection of New Zealand cheeses and petit fours in the lodge room.



Fregola sarda, prepared as a risotto 'carbonara' style, Parmigiano Reggiano, sweet peas, herbs

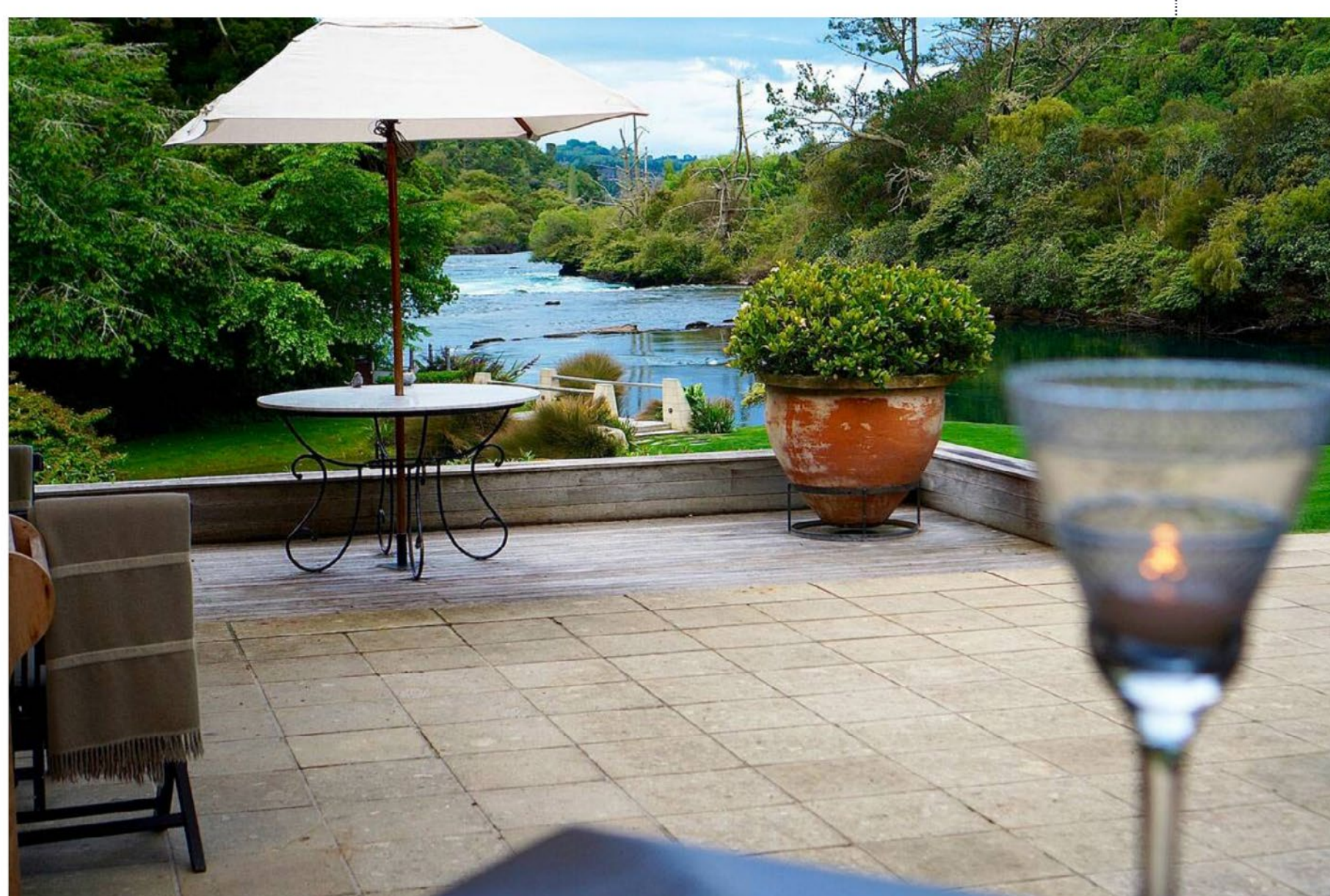


Leigh snapper, pan-fried, crusted with chicken skin, broccoli purée, roasted garlic emulsion, fermented black



Smoked eel, crème fraîche, beetroot rhubarb gelée, radish granita

There are more than twenty intimate dining locations dotting the property, from the wine cellar to the jetty. Although Froggatt's thoughtful cuisine reveals a careful eye for detail, the spry chef is quick to crack a joke and doesn't take himself too seriously. The top qualities Froggatt looks for when hiring a new team member? Humility, a good attitude, and the ability to work well with others. These can be hard characteristics to discern over Skype, but he relies on recommendations from friends to build his kitchen staff of 14 cooks hailing from a half-dozen countries from France to the Philippines.



Dinner with a view on Waikato river

Froggatt sends guests off with a hearty breakfast each morning, too. My soft-boiled eggs, smoked salmon, and tomatoes are served in a cast-iron skillet with four slices of toast and what amounts to an entire avocado. Perhaps I ate a little too much before whipping around in circles on the Waikato River in a jetboat – an exhilarating way to see Huka Falls.



Cottage at Huka Lodge



Huka Lodge's swimming pool overlooking a wild scenery

Huka Lodge began as a simple fishing lodge in 1924, and fishing is still a popular activity. You can cast your line right from the lodge grounds, although it's only catch-and-release on the property. If you venture to the Tongariro River or Lake Taupo, you may keep the rainbow and brown trout you catch and Froggatt and his team will happily prepare trout sashimi for any lucky fisherman or woman.

Adventurous epicureans can also spend a day with local Māori bushman Tom Loughlin. He'll take guests foraging in the wilderness on remote tribal lands before teaching them to cook by hāngi, a traditional method relying on hot rocks in a pit oven.



Huka Lodge's terrace

Back at Huka Lodge, Froggatt will prepare a special dinner using your foraged treasures, too. He may not be Māori, but Froggatt shares the same reverence for the earth and its bounty.