

## MAGAZINE



LUXURY LOOK: An upstairs hallway illustrates the hotel's sumptuous style.

He's a high school dropout, successful businessman and outrageous man-about-town. He has published three cook books and taught hundreds of people at his Entertaining With Ease cooking classes. **LISA McMULLAN** talks to Terry Parkes, the man who brought cafe culture to New Plymouth, as he prepares for his most ambitious project yet. Pictures: **ADRIAN MALLOCH**



NICE TEAM: Terry Parkes (right) and partner Chris Herlihy have created a boutique hotel in central New Plymouth that they believe opens new ground in the trade.

# To the manor born

**TERRY PARKES'** eyes crumple into a wicked smile and his whole body laughs as he touches the burgundy velvet drapes that cascade down his bedroom wall.

"Beautiful aren't they," he says. "They're from Spotswood College. They used to adorn the stage."

The irony is far from lost on the jumpy Parkes, who was thrown out of the New Plymouth school when he was 14.

"Mum and Dad got called up to the school again," he recalls with glee. "They were told by the headmaster that there was no hope for me. Our hair had to be short and because I wouldn't cut mine, they decided I was a hopeless case. I was not an easy pupil. I learned nothing at school."

If school taught Parkes nothing, business life has found him to be a much more receptive pupil. He has scored top marks in most of his ventures, and he will soon find out whether his instincts are right with his newest one, a luxury boutique hotel and bistro in central New Plymouth.

The school drapes are part of a major refurbishment happening at Parkes' inner-city manor. He hopes the renovations, under the watchful eye of New Plymouth designer Paul Goldsmith, will be complete by June 1



WORK IN PROGRESS: The hotel in Brougham St, New Plymouth.

when he and partner Chris Herlihy open their home to the discerning public as the trendily lower-cased "nichehotel and bistro".

Nice is hardly the word to describe a grand hotel, but the humour is intentional. Every detail has been carefully thought through. Rich goods,

greens, reds and blues are combined regally. Stripes and triangles complement each other and plush couches await, creating the atmosphere found in a fine gentleman's club. The hotel is deliberately exclusive, with just six double rooms.

The building is a wonderful backdrop

to Parkes' eclectic style. Designer touches are everywhere and contemporary art clings to the walls as if it has been there forever.

Today, tradespeople are all over the site. The phone rings incessantly. Uplifted matai floorboards stand passively in the corner, gathering dust. They are dwarfed by the graceful timber arch that has survived the chippy's saw.

Over the years, 71 Brougham St has been many things to many people. Some may

remember Dr George Walker, who had his practice there. Even though the doctor was a kindly man, to a child his needles were large, his hands cold and the smell of chloroform permeated. The chloroform has gone now and the subsequent accountant's office, too. For the last four years the building has been home to Parkes, his two sons and their companions.

The 45-year-old Parkes is confident the boutique hotel will be another of his commercial ideas that goes platinum. "I have this concept that I know will work," he says. "It's the total weekend wedding package".

The idea of booking the wedding party — and hangers-on — into a hotel for a weekend of pampering is new to New Plymouth. But Parkes credits his business success to his ability to spot good conceptual ideas before their time.

While visualising the absolutely fabulous formal weekend that Parkes has planned for wedding parties, it's hard to picture the Parkes who for years has often been the entertainment in his own establishments, and on one occasion "fell to particularly hysterically" at a wedding.

Laughter is always bubbling within him. He credits his grandmother, Vicki Soper, with teaching him the lighter side of life. "She taught me how to be strong, how to laugh at myself — and others".

In Parkes' world, any drama can be turned into comedy. All that is required are some keen players willing to take part, and there appear to be plenty of those.

Barbara Bell has known Parkes for more than 14 years and describes him as

a loyal and kind friend: "He is spontaneous and unpredictable. He always has an abundance of energy. When everybody else is dead on their feet, Terry will get a second wind and motivate us all."

It's not surprising that a man who declares he always pushes himself thinks nothing of prodding his friends and staff.

Signs of this were visible when he was eight. While his parents kept sloop at New Plymouth's paladium at Ngamotu Beach, young Terry would have his friends decorating the hall and performing concerts. He charged obliging adults an entry fee. At this early age he also showed a flair for arranging things with aesthetic appeal.

"He loved decorating the dinner table so that it looked just right," says Mrs Soper.

This skill was spotted by Parkes' first employer, Kingsway Outfitters, who soon had him decorating the shop window. Next he went to Herbert's Shoes, an exclusive shop that imported footwear from Italy, Brazil, England and Spain. Parkes was inspired by the stylish products and the sophisticated owners, and he loved the shop's exotic fabrics and furnishings.

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# Luxury hotel promises red carpet treatment

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Terry Parkes' first foray into business was in a partnership at Gentlemen's Quarters, a clothing shop for men. From there, he, his wife Lois and a couple of friends, Jane and Peter Tett, bought the Cornerstone coffee shop. They immediately turned it into New Plymouth's first Italian restaurant, Bellissimo.

Why Italian? "It was trendy at the time, and the town didn't have one," he says.

The business was successful, but the frenetic pace and late nights took their toll on the marriage. Bellissimo was sold and the Parkes separated, with the couple sharing custody of the children.

Parkes is famous for the dinner parties he threw around this time. With encouragement from friends he poured his hospitality skills and capital into Steps Restaurant. It was here that

he first cooked for the public.

His visions of being a proprietor who drank coffee and mingled with guests flew out the door the day all the cooks phoned in sick. He called his Nana and asked her how to make macaroni cheese. This speedy baptism launched his career in designer food. Interestingly, after years of creating sumptuous food like poached scallop and chardonnay soup served with crusty bread, he prefers to eat comfort food like mince on toast and cottage pie at home.

Parkes' stories can be risqué, but he is not impressed by filthy jokes. "Even though I'm outrageous — people might think I'm really loose — I'm not as loose as people might think. I'm quite a prude when it comes to smut and filth."

During his early teenage years Terry Parkes did a stint as a Sunday School teacher at Ngamotu Inter-denominational Church. He has since

explored the Baha'i faith and socialism, but these days is applying the karmic belief that you get out what you put in. He is interested in Chinese astrology and was born in the year of the horse.

Linda Goodman's book *Sun Signs* is leapt on by Parkes as he enters his library, it's dog-eared pages giving a hint of the book's status in his house.

**'I'm quite a prude when it comes to smut and filth'**

In March, Parkes left ESPresso Cafe and Wine Bar, which is attached to New Plymouth's Govett-Brewster Art Gallery. When Parkes opened shop there 10 years ago, he brought gourmet coffee culture to the town for the first time.

"To have a cappuccino or mochaccino

or latte or fluffy titty or whatever it was, was very trendy back then. I was having the beans roasted in Wellington and couriered here. Beautiful warm beans would arrive at the door."

Parkes thinks food is fashion and he enjoys making "mood-food". He is adamant that he cannot create food with flair if he is bound to a predictable menu. He seeks inspiration on his regular overseas journeys. France, America, Cuba and Ireland are just a few of the places he has been to.

"It's no good coming home with high-faluting ideas from overseas," he says. "You must adapt them to the local market."

So far the local market has adapted well to Parkes' offerings, and among New Plymouth's fashion set there is a dedicated audience waiting for the curtain to rise on the nicehotel and bistro. □



**LIGHT LINE:** Terry Parkes (right) shows friend Blair Prichard a row of lights inspired by artist Bill Culbert.