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from Martin Bosley's Restaurant. "Go see Martin," Kim directed us. "His food's exquisite. Be sure to say you're a vegetarian and don't like fish."

"Did Kim tell you to say that?"

Martin asks when we deliver the fake bad news about our eating habits. "Well, the answer to your next question—"What do you do for people like us?"—is, 'Drown you to put you out of your misery.'"

Martin has a goatee and a winking, genial gruffness. His restaurant occupies the glass-walled dining room of a 126-year-old yacht club. The room is tidy but unpreten-

tious, dominated by views of swaying sailboats and old sheds once used by the American navy. The focus, however, is on what's on the plate, which mostly comes out of the waters around New Zealand.

"So personal recommendations—just don't screw it up?" Martin says to clarify.

Amazing how pawning off decision-making responsibilities on someone else can reduce your stress. I switch from Antipodes water to a Seresin Sauvignon Blanc from Marlborough and look out at the clear sky.

"Okay, I'll go make some calls and see if we can get something happening. In the meantime, you guys need some oysters."

Bluff oysters are not like other oysters. Available only for a brief season and only from the wild, cold, violent waters around Bluff, at the very bottom of the South Island, they are gritless, pure-tasting, intensely briny. The shells look like ragged fossils, with orange and pink and gray deposits. There is, it seems, something alive on one of my shells. I poke it with my finger. The something bites back. "Hey, you've got clams living on your

oyster!" Martin says, walking by to observe the action.

It's hard to feel any stress in sunny wine country, but in Marlborough I manage it. This is where things fall apart a little and then come back together. Some of Martin's suggestions don't work out, places are booked on short notice, calls go unanswered. One of the reasons we wander is for the artificial highs and lows we feel along the way. Like Finns jumping from freezing pool to steaming sauna, we hop headlong into the good and bad, dull and delightful parts of a journey, and it makes our heart race.

From Wellington we take a ferry across to Picton, at the top of the South Island. Martin had directed us to a B&B run by a very friendly couple who give us wine when we arrive and a lovely home-cooked breakfast in the morning. There is nothing wrong with the place at all, but we have the sinking feeling we've landed in a kind of pretty nowhere, a scrubbed suburb near beautiful wine country.

Here is another lesson: Live by the recommendation, die by it, too.

GUIDE NEW ZEALAND



country is a road-tripper's dream. Highways are well marked, and getting from town to town is easy. There are short flights across the Cook Strait between the North and South Islands, and ferries operate regularly between Wellington and Picton. Keep in mind that you will have to switch rental cars when you cross the strait.

STAY
GREAT VALUE **Black Barn Vineyards** Black Barn Rd., Havelock North; 64-6/877-7985; blackbarn.com; cottages from \$250.

Clifftops Retreat 1452 State Hwy. 60, Ruby Bay; 64-3/540-2767; clifftops-retreat.co.nz; cottage from \$395, all-inclusive.

Eagles Nest Five modern villas—most with private pools. 60 Tapeka Rd., Russell; 64-9/403-8333; eaglesnest.co.nz; villas from \$1,650.

GREAT VALUE **Hotel d'Urville** A good base for wine-country explorations. 52 Queen St., Blenheim; 64-3/577-9945; durville.com; doubles from \$234.

GREAT VALUE **Maison de la Mer** 1 Rue Benoit, Akaroa; 64-3/304-8907; maisondelamer.co.nz; doubles from \$239, including breakfast.

Mollies A 13-suite hotel in a Victorian house not far from Ponsonby. 6 Tweed St., Auckland; 64-9/376-3489; mollies.co.nz; doubles from \$440.

Ohtel 66 Oriental Parade, Wellington; 64-4/803-0600; ohtel.com; doubles from \$356.

Otahuna Lodge 224 Rhodes Rd., Tai Tapu; 64-3/329-6333; otahuna.co.nz; doubles from \$1,105, all-inclusive, except lunch.

GREAT VALUE **Westin Auckland Lighter Quay** The hotel seems to float over the water like one of the supersleek yachts in the harbor. 21 Viaduct Harbour Ave., Auckland; 800/228-3000; westin.com; doubles from \$220.

EAT
Black Barn Bistro Black Barn Rd., Havelock North; 64-6/877-7985; lunch for two \$85.

Cable Bay Vineyards A modern restaurant with sweeping vistas across the gulf. 12 Nick Johnstone Dr., Waiheke Island; 64-9/372-5889; dinner for two \$100.

Elephant Hill Estate & Winery 86 Clifton Rd., Te Awanga; 64-6/873-0400; lunch for two \$75.

Herzog Estate 81 Jeffries Rd., Blenheim; 64-3/572-8770; lunch for two \$80; dinner for two \$140.

Martin Bosley's Restaurant 103 Oriental Parade, Wellington; 64-4/920-8302; dinner for two \$145.

Mudbrick Vineyard & Restaurant Vegetables grown on-site, and a great view of the Hauraki Gulf. 126 Church Bay Rd., Waiheke Island; 64-9/372-9050; dinner for two \$120.

Pegasus Bay Pinot Noir wine and locally sourced food in a garden setting. 263 Stockgrove Rd., Waipara; 64-3/314-6869; lunch for two \$100.

Terrôir Craggy Range Winery's restaurant has a wood-fired oven turning out great roasted meats. 253 Waimarama Rd., Havelock North; 64-6/873-0143; lunch for two \$80.

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