

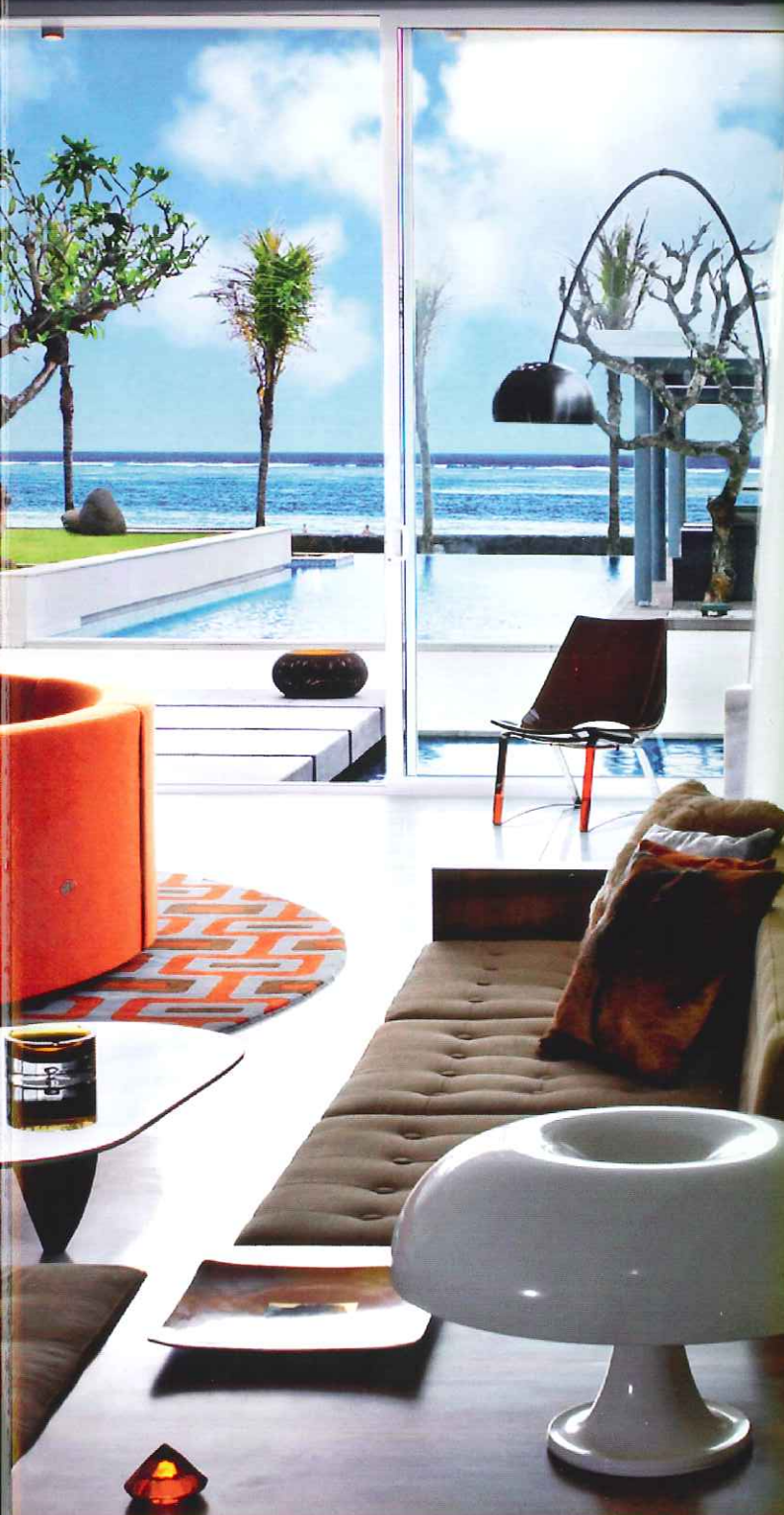
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Issue 10 Summer 2008/09

LUXURY

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24 Hours in: Queenstown

The snow may be gone but there's still plenty to do in our alpine capital. Philip Tetley-Jones checks out Queenstown.

9.20am We've only just touched down but already the holiday has begun. Flying over the Southern Alps on a sunny morning is a recipe for feeling good about life. The South Island landscape looks as stunning as ever and Queenstown Airport is sleek and efficient.

9.45am Check into The Spire, our 5-star boutique hotel in a picture perfect setting. I've heard great things about this stylish alternative to the usual country lodge or chain hotel options. The entrance is discreetly chic and with only 10 spacious guest suites, it definitely has that boutique feel. Contemporary New Zealand art and designer furnishings complete the package.

10.35am It may be my second trip to Queenstown but my companion is a first timer. So let's start by giving her the overview – literally. We head to the gondola and sweep up the mountainside for awesome views of the town, lake and mountains. We're mingling with a typical group of Queenstown holidaymakers, including a pair of Japanese honeymooners, some Brit backpackers and a bunch of friendly Aussies. Cameras and videos are working overtime.

Midday We haven't eaten since breakfast on the plane, so now might be a good time to check out a Queenstown institution – The Cow. It's been going strong since 1976 and the menu hasn't changed in all that time. I guess you can't go wrong with classic handmade pizzas, fresh pasta, hot soup and homemade bread. Great fare for hungry skiers but also ideal if you're here for a summertime break.

1.24pm Duck into Kapa Gallery on Rees Street for an artistic epiphany. What is it about resort towns and galleries? Being on holiday must put people in the mind to buy arty knick-knacks. We don't succumb but my companion is sorely tempted by the Tapa Flower Brooch by Hannah Mae Clayton. It's sterling silver and seriously classy.

1.50pm Decision time! Do we hire a car and head for the vineyards to taste some of the world's best Pinot Noirs? Or try some of the adventurous activities that have made Queenstown famous? I vote for the wine trail but am persuaded by my companion to be a bit more daring. I ducked the Kawarau bridge bungy jump challenge last time. Will this visit see the end of my bungy virginity?

2.30pm We have compromised. No wine and no bungy, but instead we're taking a Segway tour of the town and surrounds. It's the eco-friendly way to scoot around the town, and it's amazing fun as well. You simply stand on your self-balancing two-wheeler and whiz around the sights. We cruise through the beautiful gardens and along the lakefront with a chirpy guide to point out the sights and keep us out of trouble. On the way back we ramp up the speed and have a good play on our Segways.

7.10pm Back at The Spire, the vexed question arises: where to go for dinner? The hotel staff are full of ideas and we decide to try Saffron in nearby Arrowtown. This turns out to be an excellent fine dining restaurant that revels in the local produce. Highlights include grilled Stewart Island scampi and a char-grilled fillet of venison with pickled Otago cherries and Jerusalem artichoke puree. A couple of glasses of Peregrine Pinot Noir provide the perfect accompaniment. Perhaps we'll check out the vineyard tomorrow. And then, I promise, I'll take that long-delayed bungy leap into the void. ★

