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JUNE 2013



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TAYLOR SCHILLING

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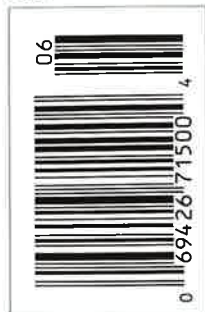
OUR EDITORS' GUIDE TO A STYLISH & SANE WEDDING
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TIME WARP

Experience another era in New Zealand.

BY CHRISTINA REYNOLDS



Not long after I arrived in Napier, New Zealand, for the city's annual Art Deco Weekend, I traded in my modern rental car for a chauffeured retro ride: a shiny black 1939 Packard with a roomy spring-loaded back seat. My driver, local Teri Morales Probert, dressed all gangster cool in a black button-down, suspenders, striped slacks, wingtips and a fedora, gave me my first spin around town—and back in time. “Napier was the first place in New Zealand to get neon lights,” she explained as we drove past pastel-coloured theatres, buildings and houses decorated with iconic art deco and art nouveau ziggurat, sunburst and Egyptian column designs. The motifs here often incorporate delicate swirling Maori symbols—something you won't see in Miami's Art Deco District.



The Napier beach and town site (top); snapshots from Art Deco Weekend

Most of the seaside town, which is tucked in Hawke's Bay on the eastern shore of the country's North Island, was rebuilt in the aftermath of a 1931 earthquake and subsequent fire that decimated the area. Almost all the reconstruction happened during the height of art deco's popularity, and many of the buildings have been preserved and restored, making this one of the

world's most authentic 1930s-era destinations. This is why, for one summer weekend each February, the area's population swells by 40,000 as visitors from around the world come—with suitcases packed full of vintage fashions and picnic gear—to immerse themselves in the past.

By Friday night, retro-clad revellers of all ages have overtaken the usually sleepy town, all set to enjoy themed picnics, dinners and dances and take in a vintage-car parade and an air show. While the predominant era of dress seen on the streets is from the '20s and '30s, the beauty of the weekend is that pretty much anything retro goes. I spotted men and women wearing everything from 1890s golf attire, complete with knickerbockers (and carrying vintage clubs), to immaculately styled '50s dresses and updos. Some people go full out, while others, like me, sport just enough accessories (a straw cloche by day and a feathered headband and pearls by night) to feel part of the action.

All the dressing up fosters a unique camaraderie and makes for an easy entry point to talk to almost anyone. One evening, as I was hanging out at the Masonic Hotel bar—its restored art-deco details and location along the seaside boardwalk make it the unofficial centre of the festivities—I struck up a conversation with John



Hawkins, who came from Canterbury, on the South Island, with a group of family and friends. He invited me across the street to check out the giant antique Burrell “showman’s” steam engine that he had shipped here for the event (along with one tonne of coal needed to run it for the weekend). In its day, the engine propelled carnival rides and was decorated accordingly, with brightly painted insets and raised details. It was just one of several vintage engines on display—along with more than 400 antique automobiles parked around town (an event record). Only pre-1946 vehicles deemed appropriate by the local Art Deco Trust receive permission to enter the downtown zone during the weekend. But the restrictions add to the atmosphere; there are no hybrid-electric vehicles in sight as people spontaneously begin to dance the Charleston in the streets. “The more work you put into this weekend, the more fun you get out of it,” explained Hawkins as the engine belched steam. “This is a feather in my cap.”

The weekend’s height of planning and personal effort has to be the Gatsby picnic. The most ambitious picnickers set up movie-set-worthy displays (complete with period costumes)—and they don’t touch their tea sandwiches and Lamington cakes until the judging is complete. The set-ups at the top sites are extravagant and eclectic—from a full Titanic theme with a decked-out ship’s captain drinking from a silver tea service to a First World War Red Cross tent where uniformed nurses and doctors “diagnose” onlookers and offer candy “prescriptions.” The most fashionable display I spotted had to be one called “1002nd Night.” It was an homage to a 1911 Persian-inspired party hosted by Paul Poiret—who, according to the handwritten signage, was “a fabulous fashion designer from the early 1900s [who] launched his own ranges with outrageous parties.” A male picnicker here was dressed as Poiret as the shah of Persia, while the women wore Poiret-inspired dresses, and everyone sat at a table staged with hookahs and tea sets.

Not having arrived with my very own anchor and all the other makings of a Titanic-themed picnic spread, my own “aha” moment of personal commitment to the weekend was subtler. At dinner one night, where everyone was dressed up in their flapper finest, I started chatting with Nerida Cortese, a dancer who’d been on New

FOUR MORE WAYS TO TAKE A TRIP BACK IN TIME IN NEW ZEALAND

1. Volcanoes in Auckland Join a kayak adventure to the volcanic island of Rangitoto—it’s just one of more than 50 dormant volcanoes in the Auckland area—for a prime 360-degree view, and then hike through the lava tubes that formed as the island began to emerge from the sea 600 years ago.



2. Movie nostalgia in Hobbiton Get inspired by the loveliest, most authentic movie set in Middle-earth (and beyond!) and then rewatch *The Lord of the Rings* during your Air New Zealand flight home. (Make sure to tune in to the hilarious LOTR-themed safety message.)



3. High tea in Hamilton Stop in for lunch at the Zealong Tea Estate and take part in an ancient tea ceremony that showcases the rich flavours of the plantation’s hand-picked organic oolong, black and green tea leaves, which are harvested using traditional Taiwanese methods.



4. Bird’s-eye views in Hawke’s Bay Go on a safari to see an important gannet colony up-close—and learn the curious story of how the stunning rocky outcropping known as Cape Kidnappers got its name in 1769.

Zealand’s *Dancing With the Stars*, who would be leading a Charleston dance-off the following day. She explained how she mixed the soundtrack (original Charleston tunes paired with will.i.am’s “Bang Bang” from *The Great Gatsby* movie) and set the music to loop with increasing speed to match the (theoretically) improving skill levels of the crowd. “Let me show you,” she said, as she turned the music on and encouraged everyone at the table to get up and join her. I was a bit hesitant at first, but as she taught us the series of stop kicks, foot lifts, jazz hands and knee crosses (my favourite move)—and as the routine got faster and faster and we all laughed harder and harder—I completely lost myself in the moment. With a few quickstep moves, I discovered my own retro rhythm. □