



WATCH AND WONDER: The Boathouse at Opuia is a former warehouse that has been converted into high-class apartments offering luxury and style in a lush setting.



Lazy days at the boathouse

Opuia's new waterfront apartments provide elegance and style amid startling natural beauty, writes Barbara Harris.

STANDING on the car ferry and looking over to Opuia, we often remarked how gorgeous its little bay looked. Houses built snugly into the bush-clad hills, a handful of brightly coloured rowboats heaved high on the shore, and three-masted sailing ships sharing the waterway with runabouts, fishing boats and yachts from around the world.

For some 400 international boats a year, Opuia and its marina is their first port of call. For us, though, it had simply been the place to join holidaymakers making the shuttle across to Okiaio and then the 9km drive to Russell.

Until now. Instead of being a brief stop and chance to stretch our legs, Opuia, a town of fewer than 1000 residents, was our destination. What was once an old warehouse next to where the ferry departs has been converted into two luxury apartments over the waterfront, called the Boathouse.

At first glance it's a bit disconcerting to see that public loos back on to the apartments and we begin to wonder if we are at the right place.

But, yes, there's someone waiting to greet us. Property manager Tania Townsend gives us a tour of the downstairs Landing and upstairs, of course, the Bridge where we are to stay.

What is immediately apparent is the high standard of workmanship throughout. From the minute you walk through the impressively solid wooden doors there is a sense that someone has taken time, effort and money to get things just right. And indeed the owners, who want to remain anonymous, spent two years working with designers and craftspeople to create these elegantly self-contained apartments which opened on Christmas Eve

last year.

As you would expect, there is a strong nautical theme, which begins at the entranceway with what looks like a large transparent porthole set into the floor with sand and shells beneath. Dusky, gunmetal blue is the dominant colour against custom-made fittings of beech and macrocarpa, chrome and glass. Italian tiles, the colour of marbled blue paper, are underfoot in the bathroom and on the walls a single strip of paua runs through the middle of white tiles. Everywhere is easy on the eye and there is also a wonderful feeling of space.

For boys who might be missing their high-tech toys there are lots of gadgets, among them a complete home entertainment system and a fridge which dispenses filtered water and

crushed ice at the press of a button.

Out front everything is more low-key, yachts swing idly on their moorings and the ferry continually chugs back and forth.

Before we drift off, though, there's work to be done — supplies need to be found. Fortunately, a stone's throw away is the Opuia Store, which stocks everything from croissants to fishhooks, wine and beer, and in no time at all we're back on the Bridge with little to do but watch the world go by.

■ **Barbara Harris was a guest of the Boathouse.**

■ **ON THE WEB**
www.theboathouseopuia.com



➔ Case Notes

Where to find it

The Boathouse, Beechy St, Opuia, Bay of Islands
Ph (09) 402 6800, freephone 0800 683 722
Email: info@theboathouseopuia.com

Accommodation

Each self-contained apartment costs \$500 a night from October 1 to March 31 and \$350 a night from April 1 to September 30. A 10 per cent discount applies if you book both apartments.

The Bridge has a king-size double bed with ensuite dressing room and bathroom, and also one small office bedroom with fold-down queen-size sofa bed. Bit of a squeeze to get four in but if needs must.

The Landing accommodates four. One bedroom has king-size double bed and the second bedroom has two singles or a king double.

Additional features

Security alarms, air conditioning, double glazing, fax machine, complete laundry facilities and a gas barbecue.

Getting there

Opuia is 3½ hours' drive north of Auckland on State Highway 1. At Kawakawa follow the signs for the Bay of Islands and the Opuia car ferry.

What to do

Swim, dive, sail, fish and watch dolphins. All watersports are catered for here.

For landlubbers there are tours to Cape Reinga, the Waitangi Golf Course, and coastal and rainforest walking tracks.

Paihia's a 10-minute drive away and Russell (including the car ferry) takes about 15 minutes. The car ferry costs \$8 for a car and driver plus \$1 for each passenger. Kerikeri is about a 30-minute drive.

For more information, contact the Bay of Islands Information Centre, Paihia Wharf, Marsden Rd, Paihia. Ph (09) 402 7345, freephone 0800 363 463, fax (09) 402 7314.

Access

Wheelchair access for the Landing but no special fittings in the bathroom.

Food

The Boathouse is a self-catering establishment, but a chef can be hired, by prior arrangement, if needed (extra charges would apply).