



Author's guide: Don Clementson fly fishing on the Motueka River.

Best of both worlds

Luxury while maintaining a green ethos has been achieved by the owners of a Motueka River lodge. SCOTT KENNEDY drifts in to test the hospitality and the fishing.

The phrase “eco-lodge” gets tossed around a fair bit these days. In fact, it gets over-used with all the frivolity and lack of relevance of a fleeting catch-phrase. It’s become the desirable status du jour and the well-intentioned clamber over each other to out-eco each other.

It’s easy to be a cynic and say that all it takes is a few recycling bins to be riding the green bandwagon, but that’s not fair. There are some who set the bar. And as technology, consumer demand and the genuine desire to not just talk the talk evolves, the cream really does rise.

You’d be hard-pressed to lump Stonefly Lodge in with the pretenders.

Where a great many are going through the motions, these guys broke the mould. Off the grid, self-sustainable food sources, most of which are grown on the property, zero emissions, carbon neutral; even the lodge was made from timber felled on the property. The real question is: does it actually stack up?

Winding down a near-deserted back road one hour south of Nelson, I pass hulking, rusting farm machinery. The neighbour’s

yard junk looks typical of any backblock New Zealand farm. Rounding the corner the junk disappears, and I see the outline of Stonefly Lodge.

The two-storey lodge is all crisp timber lines and river stone at the top of a small hill.

The log building overlooks the Motueka River like a guard tower.

Pulling up out front, I wonder if I’m ready for this. I’m going to spend a few days at the lodge, getting a feel for what they have on offer, and going fishing. Expectations swirl around inside my head – I know the earthy rep of the lodge and half-wonder if I’ll be eating bean sprouts for dinner before retiring to the lounge for a non-optional drum circle.

I push open the heavy timber door and take a step in. I’m met by the owners, transplanted Australians John and Kate Kerr. Kate is the mistress of the kitchen, preparing breakfasts and packed lunches before letting the chef take over for dinner. John, with his steampunk moustache and easy laugh, is the chief raconteur – manning the bar and keeping spirits high.

They spotted the location for the lodge four years ago, and they had a dream – a place of luxury

while maintaining the green ethos they value.

It’s taken nearly all of those four years to get Stonefly to this stage, and the evolution continues. Every improvement is tempered with the intention of upping their enviro-game.

Climbing the curving wooden steps, I start to think that my preconceived notions of what an eco-lodge is like are being eroded with every step. No dreadlocks, no drum circles. I’m discovering that it is possible to have the best of both worlds.

The room is the epitome of five-star luxury. A raw-timber king-sized bed across from french doors out to a private balcony. With plenty of light in the sky, I throw open the doors and walk outside. There is only the faint whisper of moving water far below to break the silence. The Motueka River curves around a big bend below the lodge. Pine trees blanket the hills around and you’d be forgiven for thinking you had been transported to British Columbia.

My fellow guests are an eclectic mix – a retired investment banker from New York City, another American couple on a trip of a lifetime and two Aussie doctors

who’ve fished all around the globe. Pressed, button-down shirts, belts that match shoes, platinum credit cards.

Although the eco-chic rep of the lodge is what has thrust it onto the world stage, it matters little to these guys. Well, maybe it matters a bit, but it’s the outstanding fishing that has brought them from the other side of the world. Trout fishing is big business – keen anglers will drop top dollar to hook the big one. The sniff of brown trout on the line is what has carried these guys to Stonefly.

John and Kate are quick to point out that it isn’t just fishing that’s on the menu. The lodge is wedged between three national parks (Abel Tasman, Nelson Lakes and Kahurangi) and the outdoor opportunities abound. Hiking, biking and horseback riding are all within striking distance. A fishing-mad husband can hit the river while his equine-inclined wife can saddle up for the day. Or how about finishing the Heaphy Track and choppers straight to the front door?



Stonefly Lodge: Made from timber felled on the property.

Photos: SCOTT KENNEDY



Spacious: Inside the lodge.



Water beckons: Stonefly Lodge interior with view towards the Motueka River

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Decisions: Choosing the right fly for the job.

Dinner arrives and any allusions of hippydom are finally put to bed. Roast duck, herbs from the garden and a nice glass of pinot noir from Central Otago. Perfect.

I wake early and dine on poached eggs from the hens out back and get ready for my day on the river. I've always told people that I know how to fish, but not how to catch fish. This distinction is as vast as the ocean in the world of fly fishing. But I'm in luck - I have a private guide for the day.

Guide Don Clementson arrives and we load up into his truck. While other guests wing off to their day's destination in a chopper, we're keeping it local. The Motueka River has some of the best fishing in New Zealand, which has some of the best fishing anywhere, so why go any further? After a few minutes down a

dusty track we arrive at the spot. I pull on my waders, grab my rod and follow Don to the river's edge. The water ripples in a blur of reflected colours. Millions of orb-like rocks line the shore and shine chalky white to the heavens. We sneak to the edge of the water and Don peers across the surface,

scanning the river for signs of trout.

His eyes dart about, seeing the unseen, interpreting the shadows and silently finding where the fish will be.

Lake fishing has all the sport of going to the supermarket. You bait a hook, drop a line overboard and wait. Fly fishing, on the other hand, is more akin to hunting mammoth with a sharpened stick.

Don spots a trout swimming against the current behind a rock 20 metres upstream.

Standing up to my calves in the water, I unfurl the line.

In a steady motion, the line floats above my head. The weightless fly dances above me, bound to the line that hurtles through the air in a figure eight. The line rolls out and the fly drops into the river close to the fish.

The fly floats past the trout and the fish doesn't move an inch.

I cast again, and again the fish isn't interested.

One last time I cast to the fish to see the fly float past and the fish disappear into the watery distance. It's not buying what we're selling.

It becomes the theme of the day. Don spots fish after fish and I

FAST FACTS

Stonefly Lodge: 3256 Motueka Valley Highway, RD2, Wakefield, 35km south of Motueka. See website stoneflylodge.co.nz, phone 03 522 4479.

Rates: \$525 per person per night, double occupancy, (\$290 low season), including meals and accommodation; two nights minimum; guided fishing, \$745 per day.

Fishing: The fishing season is from October 1 till April 30; the lodge remains open during the winter but only for groups and specific functions, so it's best to book well ahead if you are looking to arrive in the low season.

do a fine job of scaring them away or offering them a meal they don't like the taste of.

It matters little; if fly fishing is actually about catching fish, I'd have given up years ago.

Fly fishing and the eco-lodge are comfortable bedfellows. It takes more than going through the motions to catch the big ones. It takes a lifetime of work, zealot-like dedication and a willingness to work with what the river gives you, and not against it.

Stonefly Lodge is casting into fruitful waters and they know exactly where the fish are.

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