A life of LUXURY

Five amazing new hotels around the world

Inside

» **FREE TO ROME**
An affordable must-do in the Eternal City

» **FINLAND'S FINEST: OULU**
Europe's next hot spot

» **AUTUMN MINIBREAK**
Spend the weekend in Cambridge

Review »

ROOM CHECK

A new hotel in an old building makes Cambridge a destination, not a pit stop, writes **Stephanie Holmes**

I pass through Cambridge often on big drives to other destinations, but I've never spent more than the time it takes for a coffee break or a toilet stop. I imagine it's the same for many Aucklanders, but this autumn it's time for that to change. The town has a new hotel, restaurant and bar that makes it the perfect spot for a close-to-home weekend getaway.

The Clements was originally the Masonic Hotel. Founded and built in 1866 by Archibald Clements, it was the town's first commercial building.

When Gerry Westenberg and Jo Pannell bought the hotel in 2015, it was rundown and in need of some TLC. They had a dream to transform it into a boutique hotel and after years of planning, followed by three and a half years of renovations, it reopened in November.

Here's why you should pay a visit to Cambridge and stay longer than a loo break.

Location: In the heart of Cambridge's small but perfectly formed leafy avenue-lined CBD.

Perfect for: Breaking up a big journey across the motu, or a relaxing mini break this autumn or winter to indulge in great dining and hospitality.

First impressions: Restored to its former glory, The Clements is a gleaming white landmark in Cambridge's town centre.

Parking at the back of the hotel, we entered through the pretty walled courtyard garden which, on a sunny afternoon, looked incredibly appealing.

We received a warm welcome from Nicholas, the charming front office manager, and were given a welcome drink for our short wait — a regal purple Clements Royale (prosecco mixed with Chambord).

The room: There are 29 rooms in the hotel and we were in room 105, a Premium Superior Room on the first floor. One of the hotel's original Edwardian rooms, its high ceilings and tall windows give a sense of spaciousness, and the restored original fireplace — although purely ornamental — makes it feel very homely.

The super-king bed is super comfortable, and I loved the oversized racing green-coloured padded headboard. There's a decent amount of storage space, a desk, coffee table and spearmint-coloured armchairs, a full-length mirror with ring light, and an ironing board with steamer/iron.

Cambridge's former Masonic Hotel, which was built in 1866, has been restored and reopened as The Clements Hotel; 1866, right, is the hotel's basement speakeasy bar. Photos / Supplied

The provided bottle of Manuka Dreams manuka and lavender pillow and face mist was a nice touch, and the plush Clements-branded white towelling robes were lovely to snuggle into.

The only negative was that sound from another room travelled through the air vents — we could clearly hear the noise of a hairdryer and running water from one of our neighbours. If you're extra sensitive to noise, BYO earplugs.

Other room types include Deluxe rooms, attic rooms (which are in the hotel's newest floor built on top of the existing building), executive rooms (which include a freestanding bathtub as well as walk-in shower), and the Stables suites in the mews of the old hotel. They've been restored into three interlinking rooms and look like the cutest little cottages.

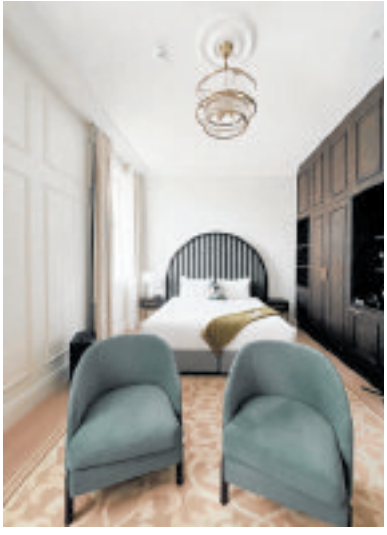
Bathroom: The spacious bathroom was stylish and fresh with its black and white harlequin-pattern marble floor tiles and white-tiled walls. The high ceilings mean the rainhead shower is placed high enough for even the tallest guests, and the large round wall mirror with ring light made for flattering lighting to apply makeup.

Toiletries are Lalique brand, and while they smell lovely, they're made in the Czech Republic. It would be great if the hotel, in line with its wider sustainability strategy, could find a local brand to showcase.

Facilities: Free parking at the back of the hotel, free Wi-Fi and a same-day laundry service. There's no gym or swimming pool on site.

A conference room has capacity for 50 people and a boardroom fits 10. Book an event on the lawn for up to 80 people.

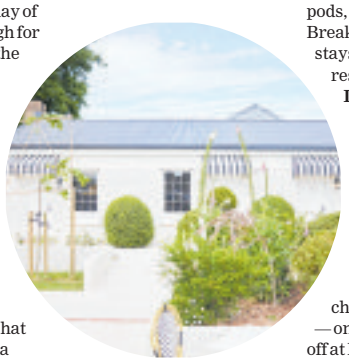
Food and drink: The hotel's Gallery restaurant and 1866 speakeasy bar are its star attractions.



Clockwise, from left, a Premium Superior Room at the hotel; the reception area, leading to the grad staircase; the courtyard garden; The Gallery restaurant; a Premium Superior Room at the hotel. Below, the Stables Suites. Photos / Stephanie Holmes, supplied

The Gallery is on the ground floor and extends into a large covered patio with an al fresco feel — ranchslider doors can be opened fully on warm days, or kept closed with patio heaters cranked up when the temperatures drop.

We were visiting on the last official day of summer and the sun was shining enough for us to dine on the terrace looking out to the lawn. The food was excellent — European bistro-style food from Czech chef David Janalik and his team, using the highest quality local ingredients. The menu is refined, with only six starters, seven mains and five desserts to choose from. Mains prices start from $41 for a vegetarian roasted cauliflower dish, up to $54 for the beef eye fillet. We tried the latter and it is well worth its cost — mouth-meltingly delicious.



In the hotel's basement, you'll find what must be the best bar in Waikato. 1866 is a prohibition-era-style speakeasy, complete with unmarked door, pressed tin ceilings, low light, lush curtains and a menu of classic cocktails, spirits and wines by the glass or bottle. My pre-dinner olive oil martini was perfect, and if we weren't so full after dinner we would definitely have gone back and parked up until the wee small hours.

Elsewhere, each room's minibar is free of charge for the first night, stocked with one beer and one pink G&T, both from Mount Maunganui's Mount Brewing Co, along with Ōtakiri waters, Zealong green tea, Raglan Dreamview Creamery milk, and Whittaker's Sante chocolate bars.

A Nespresso machine came with four coffee pods, and there was a range of teas (English Breakfast, Earl Grey, Chamomile). For longer stays, you can ask for the minibar to be restocked.

In the neighbourhood: Cambridge is a lovely place to while away an afternoon, wandering the shopping streets, browsing boutiques and antiques shops, popping into cafes and bars. We walked from the hotel to Te Koutu Lake (less than 10 minutes' walk), which is a gorgeous spot for a stroll, with its floating lily pads and common coots.

We made the most of our road trip and checked out some nearby tourist attractions — on the drive down from Auckland we stopped off at Hamilton Gardens (glorious) and after check-out we headed to Sanctuary Mountain Maungatautiri and were utterly charmed by the kākā, tīeke/saddlebacks and toutouwai/North Island robins.

Sustainability: The hotel has employed a number of sustainability initiatives, including LED technology lighting, monitored air-conditioning systems, organic waste collection and recycling of glass and cardboard. Local products and suppliers are used wherever possible, including Zealong Tea and Cambridge Gin Distillery, and there was no single-use plastic in our room.

Accessibility: There are three accessible rooms at the hotel — two Superior rooms on the ground floor and one of the Stables suites. They are larger than other rooms for easy wheelchair access. Toilets are fully modified with a lower toilet, handrails and no lid, and showers have handrails, a hand sprinkler and a wall-mounted bench.

All public areas are wheelchair accessible. There's an accessible parking spot at the back gate, and lift access to 1866 in the basement.

The best bit: The olive oil martini at 1866 and the three-course dinner at The Gallery in the last of the summer sun.

The worst bit: Everything was excellent but a suggestion for improvement would be to find a local supplier for the toiletries — it would be a nicer touch for international guests and in line with the hotel's sustainability commitments.

Price: From $349 per night for two people.

Contact: clements.co.nz