

Heaven with a hand-rail

Victoria Bartle tries five-star sailing aboard Yonder Star

WE'RE dedicated to making your dreams come true," promises the letter from the crew of Yonder Star in a flourish of stylish italics.

It's a big promise, but then Yonder Star isn't your standard hobby-yacht.

It's all sophistication and high-tech fittings; a head-turning, unashamedly luxurious piece of sea-going real estate that sails around Tasman Bay from its home port of Nelson, chartered by international tourists and New Zealanders, too.

Yonder Star is an impressive 87 foot-long ketch, designed by a renowned naval architect and launched almost 30 years ago. Completely rebuilt in 1999, it underwent a second makeover in 2003, and Nelson has been its home port ever since.

Sea-going chef Roger Wilde had conjured up a list of lunch ideas that had my mouth watering days before my sail.

"Please peruse the menu and advise us of any dietary requirements you may have," the letter said, listing fresh, tender treats like salmon and scallops, blue cheese and berries. Supplies are locally grown whenever possible and certified organic.



I'd popped a sea-sickness tablet that Monday morning, urged on by a relative who knows my tolerance for boating is limited.

But by the time we cruised out of Nelson's port and into more open waters, I was feeling a bit silly. Tasman Bay was not quite glass-smooth, but other than the sound of the bow slicing through the water, there was virtually no sensation of being at sea.

Still, if it did cut up rough, Yonder Star's as rock-steady as possible on the water, Captain Grant Mitchell assured us.

When a Nelson business couple, bought the ketch in Florida in 2002, they employed Mitchell to take the helm and bring it home. Over eight weeks and with a crew of three, he sailed it Downunder via the Panama Canal, the islands and atolls of Galapagos, Marquesas and Tuamotus; on to Tahiti and down New Zealand's

east coast to Nelson.

With such a rugged history, it's with some wonder that I eye the elegant crystal and fine china as Roger serves us local wines and delicious nibbles. When the sun momentarily disappears and the breeze chills us, enormous, super-soft blankets miraculously appear. Come nightfall, I could quite happily sleep here if Yonder Star's four bedrooms weren't so inviting.

They may be called cabins when you're talking boating, but these are not the compact, utilitarian spaces I've seen on launches and smaller yachts. Each has its own en suite, and the master cabin is so capacious it doubles as a private sitting room-cum-lounge.

Up on deck, warm-toned teak and highly polished chrome stretch from port to starboard.

Weddings are held aboard Yonder Star, as well as business lunches, cocktail evenings, anniversary celebrations and romantic proposals. I suspect this beautiful yacht and its crew have successfully delivered more often than not on that dream promise.

For further information, see www.yonderstararters.co.nz or email yonderstar@yonderstararters.co.nz.



ON-BOARD BLISS: Luxury 87-foot ketch Yonder Star (left); chef Roger Wilde (above) with one of his delicious creations.