

Developer seeks hotel sites

PHILIP CHANDLER

AN Auckland developer who's building his second Queenstown hotel has no intention of stopping there.

Robert Neil's Safari Group last winter opened the 59-room Ramada Hotel at Remarkables Park.

It was the resort's first new hotel in five years, and first to be built near the airport.

Work's now underway on Wyndham Garden, south of Ramada Hotel.

Comprising 75 hotel apartments and 55 residential units, it's due to open about next April.

"There's going to be a third and a fourth," Neil says.

"It's just a matter of finding the right opportunity.

"We're looking at Frankton and Queenstown itself, and we'll hopefully secure a bit of land in the near future.

"Queenstown is certainly one of the top three [New Zealand] spots that I want to develop in."

He's sure done well so far.

With Ramada Hotel, he sold all the units and on-sold the management rights to Mike Osborne's Marsden Asset Management Group, while the hotel's enjoying good occupancy.

Neil sold all the Wyndham Garden hotel apartments — ranging from \$199,855 to \$273,542, GST excluded — in only three to four weeks.

He's also sold about 70 per cent of the residential apartments, which range from \$435,000 for one-bedroom units to \$627,000 for two-bedders — all GST inclusive.

Neil says the fact Remarkables Park land is cheaper than in the Queenstown CBD, where most hotel development sites are, is a factor.

But it's also about location, he believes: "Remarkables Park is the next hotel precinct in Queenstown, there's no doubt about it."

Having Hawthorne Drive — the

On the horizon: An artist's impression of Queenstown's Wyndham Garden hotel and residential apartment complex; (inset) developer Robert Neil in front of the foundations



eastern access road — pass the Ramada by the end of May will help, too.

"There's not many cars going past Ramada at the moment, and they're running close to 100 per cent [occupancy].

"But the reality is our [ground floor] retail won't take off until such time as that road's open."

Neil has developed more than a dozen hotel-based properties around NZ, but says they now all comprise both visitor and residential accommodation, as well as a retail or office component.

Queenstown's Ramada was his last hotel-only development.

His other philosophy is to only develop small hotels.

"I won't build a big hotel — 250 to 300 rooms — and it's purely because a big hotel works only when the market is strong.

"What happens when the market tapers off?

"Those hotels go bust."

Neil's also a builder as well as a developer, bringing in many of his construction crew to build Wyndham Garden.

He says he's not dependent on Remarkables Park's developers, the

Porter brothers, building their planned conference centre and gondola to The Remarkables skifield.

"But if they go in, and I'm sure that they will, they will only but complement what we're doing."

Ray White Queenstown agent John Leith, whose firm has Neil's master agency locally, says: "It's a pleasure to be involved with a privately-owned company that is committed to providing the local market with solutions in the areas of hotel, investment, residential and retail developments."

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