

Joe's Garage revs up for first punters

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Having passed its warrant of fitness, Joe's Garage opens for business in the newly renovated State Hotel this morning.

After more than six months of makeover work, the cafe and bar franchise on the corner of Gover St and Devon St East opens its doors today.

Garageworks co-owner Karyn Grant and cafe manager Debbie Seddon showed the *Taranaki Daily News* around the site yesterday as finishing touches were being carried out.

Over the weekend a couple of "soft openings" were held to test the menu and iron out any operating creases, Ms Grant said.

"We did two warrant of fitness tests," she said.

"It gives us an opportunity to see that everything's working properly."

From today, Joe's Garage New Plymouth is open seven days a week from 7am to late.

The restaurant, which employs 16



Tea for two: Following a major refurbishment, the old State Hotel reopens today as restaurant franchise Joe's Garage. Director Karyn Grant, left, and cafe manager Debbie Seddon enjoy a drink during final preparations.

Photo: ROBERT CHARLES/FAIRFAX NZ

staff, is owned by Ozone Coffee owner Craig Macfarlane, Garageworks Taranaki Ltd partners Kevin Gibson and Karyn Grant and Sue and Jim Hickey.

The establishment was all about providing good food and drink in a relaxed and comfortable environment, Ms Grant said.

"Joe's is really unpretentious."

The existing Joe's Garage sites in Queenstown, Christchurch and Wellington were all doing well, she said.

"It's a new franchise. It's only just finding its feet really."

While the restaurants were a chain, each one had unique traits, she said. "It's important that

it's perceived as its own cafe."

Joe's New Plymouth had two main points of difference: its pizza stone oven and its tap red and white wine made by Marlborough winery Wither Hills.

"Each one has its own little flavour based on where it is," Ms Grant said.

Renovating the 147-year-old building had been a big job.

"It was in need of some serious restoration and help.

"We have tried to make it quite industrial looking and exposed some of the elements."

Past owners and patrons had donated old memorabilia and thanked the team for restoring the building, she said.

"It's really lovely seeing this building coming back to life and rejuvenated because it really is a landmark.

"I think it means a lot to a lot of people."

Joe's Garage had a long-term lease with building owners the Ekdahl family, who had been a pleasure to work with, she said.

"We're grateful for them giving us the opportunity to be here."