



PIP'S PLACE

Words **Kim Newth** Photo **John McCombe**

Rangiora chef Philippa Douglas knew she was on to a winner when, at the local farmers' market, her first batch of gourmet dressings sold out in an hour and a half. That was in 2006. A year later, the enterprising chef was sure enough of her market to give up her job working for Seagars at Oxford.

These days, she has a busy little home-based business, Pips Kitchen. The hub of her enterprise is a tidy commercial kitchen, tucked in next to the garage behind the home she shares with her husband, Carl, and their two children, aged 8 and 10 years. You will find her there most days of the week, with piles of fresh red chillies or bright yellow lemons lined up ready for action.

Pip, who was born in Dunedin, started working as a chef in her teens, after graduating from Otago Polytechnic. She has many years of hands-on experience at establishments such as popular Dunedin café, restaurant and bar Ombrellos, north Dunedin's Thyme Out Restaurant, and Wanaka holidaymakers' haunt Relishes Café.

Then came the move north to Canterbury. She worked at several Rangiora cafés before spending three and a half years as a food and beverage tutor at the North Canterbury Community College. Seagars was her last gig as a chef.

Her decision to go it alone was made over many months and evolved out of a desire to create a line of superb locally made condiments.

Pip likes to dabble with unusual combinations, such as mint and pistachios in a pesto. "I do like to do things that are different, but, at the same time, I love those traditional tastes like lemon curd – only I add lime to my lemon curd."

Flavour is king in her kitchen, meaning fresh, natural ingredients are to the fore.

"I try to source my ingredients locally. Everything I use is homemade or local, and I try to really bring out the best of the natural flavour that is already there. I use whole-food ingredients, so you don't have to search for flavour amongst a host of artificial things."

The peppers in her capsicum jelly come from Waikuku; the chilli peppers lending that eye-popping edge to her fiery capsicum relish are from growers on Tram Road; her minty lime vinaigrette contains mint from Lincoln and honey from Rangiora.

No surprise, then, that her favourite cookbook (and gardening guide) is Jamie Oliver's *Jamie At Home*. "My big dream is to have a house in the country with a section full of fruit trees, vegetable gardens and herbs, where I could take a basket out and fill it up every day and cook from what I'd harvested. That would be my ideal."

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Opening the commercial kitchen this year has been a big investment for Pip and her family. The major bonus is that she can now build up the catering side of her business, as well as hire the kitchen out to other enterprising souls.

Those making use of the facility include a woman starting her own wholesale business making food using fair trade ingredients; another making tomato relish and sauce; and a local man using it to make artisan bread.

"It's how I started, too. I used to rent out a kitchen in Eyreton before building this one. It's a way of feeling out the market. You see what the demand is like before you think about scaling up to something bigger," Pip says.

Ever resourceful, her latest venture involves making meals for discerning elderly folk and delivering them to their homes. It's a fast-growing market and, again, the focus is on fresh local ingredients. Pips Kitchen options include salmon fillet, roast chicken, and fillet steak, all served with vegetables or salad and followed by dessert.

"I talk to my clients and find out what they want to eat. Some like plain food, some like pasta, some want to try new things ... This is a real niche market and I'm very excited about its potential."

Menu ideas often arise from Pip's ongoing involvement with the Oxford Farmers' Market, where seasonal produce is readily available.

Another arm of the business involves making boxed lunches for a coach tour company. Pip is also considering starting up cooking classes, based in her kitchen.

Carl, recently made redundant from his job as a boat builder, is becoming increasingly involved in the business. In these difficult times, thinking outside the square can make all the difference between success and failure. Fortunately, these two always seem to have plenty of fresh ideas. A