

## FOOD

# Fertile ground for seeds of a great idea

## What ingredients from your heritage garden are you cooking with now?

The beginning of autumn and the end of summer are a special time in the Otahuna gardens as we have the bounty of the summer plantings alongside the cooler evenings heralding the return of the mushroom season. We have seven to eight tomato varieties at their peak (see three-tomato gazpacho recipe, right) and hazelnuts are falling off the trees. We have had 4 kilograms of porcini mushrooms so far from under the oaks. The mulberry tree has nearly finished its season; we just have to beat the birds to the fruit. The chillies are just colouring up and we are still getting plenty of zucchini and squash blossoms – they're fantastic stuffed with a creamy chevre and coated in a crisp tempura batter with salsa vierge. Sweetcorn picked and eaten on the day makes a beautiful soup. Not to mention the potatoes, pumpkins, artichokes, gooseberries, quince, almonds, peaches, pears and apples and many many more.

## What suppliers are you using from the Canterbury region, which has a reputation for fine food and wine?

We are lucky enough to have free-range organic ducks from a local producer in Tai Tapu, our local village and a fantastic butcher who helps butcher our own lamb, pork and beef. He also dry-cures and smokes an amazing bacon. We make our own prosciutto and sausages. In the winter, we can buy white and black truffles. This will be my fourth year using local truffles and we open the lodge up to casual diners, which is a treat for locals and a great way for them to experience the Otahuna truffle dinners. The most amazing saffron comes from Central Otago, our southern neighbours.

## Why a cooking career?

My stepfather was a chef and I started annoying him and his chefs at the age of 11 years. I left school at 15 and went straight into the kitchen full time. I wasn't allowed to cook and had to wash dishes for two years.

## The best meal you ever cooked?

That is a hard one because I feel

One of the prize attributes of New Zealand's newest luxury lodge, Otahuna, is a century-old botanic garden that is a veritable Eden for chef Jimmy McIntyre. He has spent five years on the estate, recently overhauled at a cost of \$8 million by owners Hall Cannon and Miles Refo from Manhattan. Cannon and Refo holidayed at the lodge a few years ago and saw an opportunity to restore the Queen Anne mansion. They kept McIntyre and he has helped bring a Relais & Chateau gong to the enterprise. **Marguerite Winter** talks to the talented chef.



**I get to balance work and family because I don't need to work 100 hours a week**

**Chef Jimmy McIntyre**

that as the seasons evolve and more produce comes on, the combination just gets better and better. It would be silly to say every dish is amazing, as every day is different and not everything goes according to plan. However, I did this menu last week: Sweetcorn soup with avocado, lime and grilled tiger prawns; buffalo mozzarella with fresh nectarine, prosciutto and rocket; braised canterbury duck leg, porcini mushroom tart with glazed carrots, green beans and hazelnuts; Whitestone Windsor blue with pear cheese; chocolate parfait with strawberry and mulberry salad.

## Why is Otahuna a good place for you at this stage of your career?

I cook what I want using the freshest produce. One of our gardeners owns Tai Tapu heritage seeds and, as a result, we have many varieties of heirloom and heritage vegetables, some of which are very rare, not to mention tasty. I can open my kitchen windows and listen to the birds and watch as native wood pigeons feed only a few metres away. I have an amazing sous chef, Jeremy. But, most important, I get to balance work and family because I don't need to work 100 hours a week.

## Have you a favourite utensil?

My zester – the amount of flavour I get out of a little citrus zest is incredible.

## THREE-TOMATO GAZPACHO



Jimmy McIntyre uses Green Zebra, Gold Nugget (yellow) and Bloody Butcher (red) tomato varieties for this recipe. Allow one medium-sized tomato per person for each of the three soups. This will make enough soup for seconds. Core and quarter the three types of tomatoes and place them one type at a time in an electric mixer fitted with a paddle. Add a little salt and turn the mixer to low speed. Run until the tomatoes are thoroughly broken into a pulpy slush. (Do not use a blender or food processor as it will introduce air leaving a foamy meringue.)

Transfer the mixer's contents to a food mill fitted with the finest plate and mill tomatoes into a bowl. Load the mixer with the second batch of tomatoes, quartered and salted as before, and paddle as before. Set the first batch of milled tomatoes aside and transfer the second batch to the food mill over a clean bowl. Process the third colour of tomatoes the same way.

When all three varieties are pureed, check their consistency. They will have different textures and flavours.

To ensure the soups greet rather than invade each other, you may need to add a little cold water to achieve a liquid that is easily pourable without being too runny.

To start, season each soup with salt only. If you find the soups satisfying as they are, refrigerate

them until fully chilled – at least four hours. Or you could place the bowls over crushed ice.

## Corn Salsa

1 cup fresh whole kernel corn, blackened  
3 firm avocados diced  
1 fresh chilli seeded and chopped finely  
1 tsp salt  
2 tablespoons fresh coriander chopped  
2 red peppers finely diced  
Zest and juice of 1 lime  
Ground black pepper  
Mix together and correct the seasoning.

## Scallop Ceviche

4 scallops  
Zest and juice of 1 lime  
Allow one scallop per person: slice off the roe and discard, slice the scallop in half horizontally, add the lime zest, juice and salt and pepper to taste. Marinate in the refrigerator for an hour, gently turn once or twice.

## To serve

Place a tablespoon of corn salsa into the centre of each chilled soup bowl and lay two slices of scallop on top. Use two ladles and scoop up about 1/3 of a cup of two of the soups and pour them evenly into the far side of the bowl, allowing them to flow towards you. Ladle an equal amount of the third to the front of the bowl at the line where the first two meet.

Otahuna Lodge, near Christchurch, has a century-old botanic garden. Photo courtesy Otahuna Lodge

