

# Our Master Chefs

Christchurch has a pantry full of power chefs, who serve up culinary delights all over the city. We sat a few down between meals to find out what makes their timers tick and which ingredient they couldn't do without.

Words **Kim Newth** Photos **Dean Mackenzie**

## A ZEST FOR FOOD

The extensive garden at Tai Tapu's Otahuna Lodge is every chef's dream. It produces more than 95 different fruits, vegetables and nuts, and five varieties of mushrooms. Mulberries, strawberries, raspberries and currants are seasonal highlights and the extensive potager includes heirloom tomatoes and rare potatoes. Of all this bounty, though, the humble lemon is executive chef Jimmy McIntyre's pick of the bunch.

"People tend to take them for granted, but we use them all the time. They are simply magical and one of those things that everyone can use."

For sheer versatility and year-round availability, it's hard to think of a more useful fruit, he says.

"You can use them for sweet and savoury; put them in your gin and tonic; make lemon-curd tarts, lemon cakes, sorbets and ice cream. Lemons go with so many things – beef, veal, pork, chicken and all shellfish. Lemons bring food alive. I don't think we value them enough."

The lemon is also an ingredient in line with Jimmy's food philosophy,

which leans towards uncluttered flavours and fresh ingredients.

Jimmy's culinary career began in his teenage years, when he started making an impression at top restaurants in Auckland. He has been living in Christchurch for more than 20 years now, having cut his teeth at Vines, before working at Espresso 124, Tiffanys and Phloyds. He joined Otahuna Lodge as executive chef in 2003.

If Jimmy ever finds himself stuck for ideas, "all I need to do is walk around the garden to gain inspiration". Otahuna even has its own pigs – from which prosciutto, pancetta, bacon, sausages, lardo and salami are made – and hens for fresh eggs. Oaks, planted when the house was built for New Zealand parliamentarian Sir Heaton Rhodes in 1895, host porcini mushrooms.

September marks the start of new-season crops, such as asparagus and baby broad beans, but it's in the depths of winter when Jimmy most appreciates being able to make mouth-watering tarts using freshly picked lemons.

"I can guarantee that if you put a lemon tart in front of someone, it'll be their favourite dish."

