

Fortune favours the fresh

By NAOMI MITCHELL - The Nelson Mail | Tuesday, 10 April 2007



MARTIN DE RUYTER/Nelson Mail

PRIME MUNCHER: Chris Fortune shares a berry dish with Prime Minister Helen Clark.

In 2003, Chris Fortune out-cooked 600 other chefs to become the winner of the television series Hell's Kitchen.

Things haven't slowed down much for him since.

Now the Marlborough-based chef works on the super yacht Pacific Eagle in winter, raises his two young children, does contract work for the food industry and promotes New Zealand's farmers' markets.

Born in Nelson, and raised in Motueka, Fortune did his chef training at the then Nelson Polytechnic.

He still has family here and his wife is a Nelsonian.

Fortune is an advocate of "local, honest, fresh cuisine" and is on the executive committee of the organisation which governs and promotes farmers' markets in New Zealand.

"We tend to over-complicate things - our lives, our business, our families, our work, so for me it is about understanding the basics. If you understand the basics it make the rest a lot easier."

Fortune has been associated with Nelson-based Sujon Berryfruits for four years, and prepared the berry-inspired food for the recent opening of the company's new multimillion-dollar berry freezing plant in Tahunanui.

He uses Sujon's frozen berries frequently in cooking, and says they can be used year round.

"The trick is to defrost them in the fridge very slowly overnight. That's the key."

Fortune says any frozen food "whether it is chicken, fish or whatever" will loose moisture if it is defrosted rapidly.

He particularly likes creating savoury dishes with berries because "it is a little bit different to what you normally expect".

"It is about understanding ingredients so you get good flavours."

The menu he devised for the crowd at the recent plant opening, included tasters of Sujon berry, zucchini and cottage cheese filo tarts, corn-fed chicken and blackcurrant marmalade spring rolls, and salmon served with a blackcurrant and lemongrass sauce.

"To me we aren't just showcasing berries, we are showcasing Nelson and the top of the South Island. To me, that's what it is about - whether it is mussels or oysters or sauvignon blanc - it doesn't matter."

The opening was attended by Prime Minister Helen Clark, who sampled the dishes and declared them "absolutely beautiful".

"I thought it was special to have completely local and natural food," she told the Nelson Mail during her visit.

"He could cater for me any day."

Sujon blueberry and zucchini filo

1 c of blueberries defrosted

1/2 c of cottage cheese

1/4 c fresh bread crumbs

1/2 c of grated zucchini

24 small filo cases or puff pastry cases

Defrost blueberries in the fridge overnight and mix with remaining ingredients. Season with freshly ground black pepper and sea salt.

There is no need to cook the zucchini if it is fresh. Spoon into filo cases and serve.

Sujon berryfruit fool with bee pollen

A little bit will go a long way. The richness of the creme fraiche is counteracted by the berries and no sugar is needed with the addition of crispy sponge fingers. Serve in large clear glasses, pour the remaining fruit juices over the top and sprinkle with tart floral bee pollen.

2 cups berryfruits defrosted

1/4 cup creme fraiche

6 sponge fingers (savoardi)

2 tsp of bee pollen

Defrost berries in the fridge overnight and put aside the excess juices, then gently fold in cream fraiche.

Cut sponge fingers into bite sized pieces and fold into berries. Serve in a large clear glass, pouring over remaining berry juices and garnish with a small dollop of creme fraiche and then sprinkle with bee pollen.