



Cooking the book



Take former Hamilton students, add a splash of creativity, a spoonful of eco-awareness and some tasty food, and you have the new vegetarian cookbook taking Melbourne by storm.

KATE MONAHAN reports.

When young Kiwis head overseas on their OE, you don't expect their experiences to inspire a gourmet cook book.

Two former Wintec media arts students, Rosie Percival and Ruth Friedlander, were flitting together in Melbourne when they cooked up the idea of writing a vegetarian recipe book.

"We were living together, cooking together and trying each others recipes," says Percival, a 23-year-old software tester. "We both had extensive recipe collections and decided to put them together in a small cookbook, maybe just something for Christmas presents for our friends and family."

Despite having never been published before, the women found there was a gap in the market for their no-fuss, vegetarian cook book *Martha Goes Green*.

It began as just a small project in mid-2008 "but it just got bigger and bigger," says Percival, on the phone from Melbourne. "We started last July and it was six months of tweaking recipes, doing photo shoots and putting it all together."

They joined forces with other former Wintec graduates, Jessica Symonds, a photographer, and Jessica Honey, who created a series of whimsical pictures for the book. Wintec communication graduate Hazel Squair helped with some of the writing.

"It was a long process and it was a pretty steep learning curve as well," says Friedlander, a freelance multimedia designer, 24.

Living in the heart of a Brunswick, a bustling, ethnically-diverse suburb of Melbourne, has inspired some of the dishes. "There is Lebanese, Italian, Greek, Indian, a plethora of ethnic restaurants," says Friedlander. "It's where we get lots of inspiration."

A small proof run was printed, with friends and family giving feedback on recipes. This was followed by a first edition print run of 500 in April, which sold out quickly.

A second run of 1250 books hit the press in September, and more than half are already gone.

"I think why people are into it is because it is handmade and self published and 100 per cent recycled and, these days when you are buying something, for a lot of people a handcrafted gift is the perfect gift," says Friedlander.

Despite the number of vegetarian cookbooks on the market, *Martha Goes Green* is quite different.

Staying true to its environmental ethos, the book is made of 100 per cent recycled



Talented trio: Former Wintec students, from left, photographer Jessica Symonds and authors Rosie Percival and Ruth Friedlander, who collaborated on vegetarian cookbook *Martha Goes Green*. Photo: SUPPLIED

materials and printed using vegetable-based ink. The book is packaged in an organic cotton Lopees book bag manufactured in India under the Fair Trade system. Even the cover is not laminated, so it can be recycled.

Martha Goes Green feels quirky and authentic, full of personal touches. The authors scoured Melbourne op shops for old-fashioned plates and crockery used in the photo shoots, while some of the patterned retro "table clothes" in the background are vintage dresses from Friedlander's wardrobe.



One of the whimsical paintings from the book by Jessica Honey.

"I think the reason they are doing so well is (the books) look good and they are really practical recipes that people can identify with," says Percival, who used to work as a vegetarian chef at now-defunct Victoria St restaurant La Commune. "There are no scary things, it's just nachos, lasagne, carrot cake."

The book covers five chapters; snacks, salads, soups, mains and sweets. It includes vegetarian favourites (such as falafel, and bean nachos) and introduces a range of interesting ethnic dishes, many of which are vegan and gluten-free. There's vegetarian pho (Vietnamese rice noodle

soup), green Thai curry and a lentil and mushroom moussaka.

Dessert fans will not be disappointed, with recipes including sago pudding, chocolate tofu mousse and vegan raspberry and chocolate muffins.

The name is a reference to iconic US homemaker and cook Martha Stewart, and to the environmental movement. "It's a reference to Martha Stewart but also to a generic everyday person, 'Martha', going green," says Percival.

She has been a vegetarian since she was a 15-year-old student at Hamilton Girls' High School. "I grew up loving animals and then I realised I was eating them."

With a lot of friends into vegan food, she started eating meatless meals.

Friedlander, 24, "grew up eating meat and three vege" she says, but has been vegetarian on and off since she was 14. "When I was younger I was impacted by friends and it was a bit faddish. I didn't find it necessary to eat meat. I became concerned about the affects of the meat industry on the environment and factory farming and the slaughter of animals. Vegetarian cooking is so fabulous, I soon found I didn't need meat anyway."

She says many people are now more open to a vegetarian lifestyle.

Compared to 10 or 15 years ago, there are more options for vegetarians on menus in restaurants and cafes.

Percival agrees: "I think there has been

a big explosion on going green and vegetarianism."

They embrace the "green" lifestyle, and are into recycling and sustainable living. Percival rides her bicycle to work 22 kilometres every day.

The spicy vegan carrot cake is Percival's favourite recipe in the book. "It's got maple syrup and orange juice and is very moist," she says. "I also love the vegetarian pho (Vietnamese rice noodle soup)."

Friedlander loves the different curry recipes in the book, meals she returns to when she can't decide what to cook. "I might have the chana masala, it's cheap and easy."

For Christmas the two expat-Kiwis are planning to return to New Zealand. Friedlander has a family wedding in Wellington and Percival is going hiking in the South Island at Milford Sound.

And as for 2010, big plans are cooking.

They are planning to release a second collection of vegetarian recipes.

■ *Martha Goes Green*, \$29.95, is stocked in Browsers and Auter House in Hamilton, and available through marthagoesgreen.com.au

stocking a vegetarian kitchen

■ **Refrigerator:** "It's important to have fresh fruit and vegetables," says Rosie Percival, one of the authors of *Martha Goes Green*. "I like to be able to whip up a good salad."

■ Also, consider keeping any of the following in your fridge: a tub of tahini (for making homemade hummus), tofu, vegetable stock, soy milk and dried yeast (for making pizza dough).

■ Keep flaky puff pastry and filo pastry in the freezer.

■ **Pantry:** "Rice, plenty of herbs and spices, good stock, lots of dried or canned lentils and chickpeas," advises Percival. Add to that canned tomatoes (a great basic), kidney and cannellini beans, coconut cream, rice paper rolls, pearl barley, couscous, lasagne sheets, dry spaghetti, vermicelli and udon noodles.

■ Also, consider stocking up on different oils (extra virgin olive, grapeseed, avocado) and vinegars (rice wine, white, balsamic) and seeds (pumpkin, sunflower, sesame, pine nuts).

■ Apart from basic long-grained rice, arborio and basmati are two varieties which can also be useful.

■ **Seasoning:** Fresh herbs can make a huge difference to the flavour of dishes, and are the vegetarian's best friend. Keep parsley, basil, coriander, Vietnamese mint, dill, rosemary and other herbs in the garden.

■ Other flavour boosters include lemons, onions, garlic, parmesan, mustard, honey, soy sauce, chilli flakes and fresh ginger.