

Australasian **baker**

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Baking Industry Association Queensland

■ **BUSINESS #101**

Packaging

■ **AT THE BENCH**

Vollkornbrot

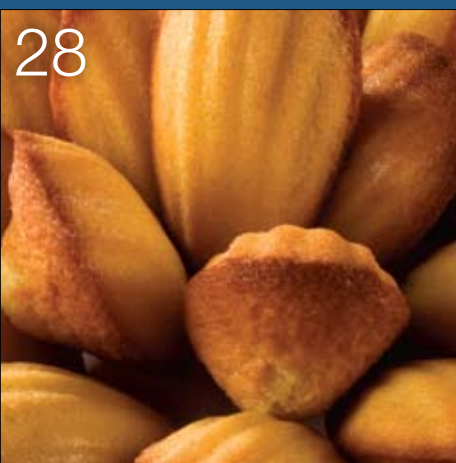
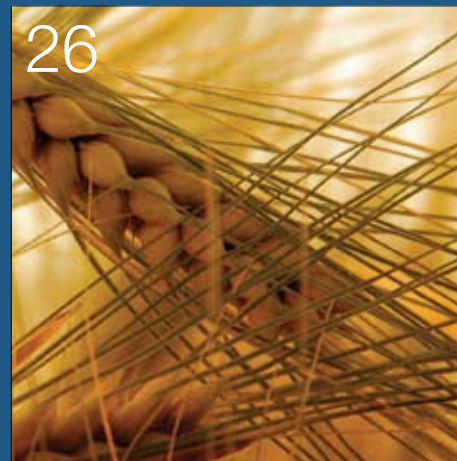
■ **BACK TO SCHOOL**

■ **FRESH PRODUCE**
Artisan Baker



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ONE
WORLD

baking in...

Christchurch,
New Zealand



BY AMANDA CROPP

Christchurch's tiny Church Corner Mall seems an unlikely place for an up-market patisserie, but owner Eri Yahagi had a hunch the surrounding Asian businesses would attract customers keen to buy her Japanese-style cakes and desserts.



She was right and one look in the Patisserie Yahagi display cabinet shows why the business has quickly attracted a loyal following for delicacies like its green tea gateaux, layers of sponge cake and cream delicately coloured and flavoured with green tea powder.

The beautifully decorated chocolate mousse cakes on a lower shelf are top sellers, and a feast for the eyes as well as the palate, however Yahagi is not about to give away the trick to achieving the high shine on the Belgian chocolate coating. "That's my secret."

Yahagi holidayed in New Zealand with her husband and daughter, and they were so impressed with the lifestyle, they immigrated four years ago.

Yahagi had trained as a patissier in Tokyo, a city with a large number of patisseries selling traditional French pastries made with a Japanese twist.

In New Zealand she found the range of baked goods on sale limited to the likes of slices, carrot cakes, muffins and scones, and the sugar content was too high for her liking.

"The taste is good but they are a bit sweet for us, and they all look the same. In Japan pastry chefs use lots of fresh fruit and cream, not icing."

Keen to learn about the New Zealand baking scene, Yahagi enrolled in a year-long pastry chef course at the Christchurch Polytechnic Institute of Technology where she topped her

class and picked up a silver medal for her fruit tart in CPIT's annual Salon Culinare competition.

After graduating Yahagi opened her own shop because she could not find a bakery making the kinds of products she liked.

Her CPIT training was invaluable because basic ingredients like flour and butter proved very different to those she used back home, and she has had to adjust her recipes to suit.

Japanese butter is much whiter and softer and in Japan chefs can order cream with three different fat levels. Yahagi is a fan of 32 per cent fat cream which is lighter and healthier, and has a slightly different flavour, so she compromises by adding milk to achieve a similar product.

She also refuses to use pre-mixes and says that is why her cakes are lighter and softer than those generally available in New Zealand.

Food colouring and food additives are another no, no. "I don't like strong colours; I like natural fruit and soft colours."

In Japan berry fruit is imported year round. "In New Zealand I have to wait for summer." So over winter instead of garnishing her chocolate mousses with single raspberries, Yahagi substitutes green grapes painstakingly cut into water lilies.

Her spectacular Mont Blanc cakes, which are named after the mountain in France, are very popular in Japan, but New Zealanders are nonplussed by the unusual squiggly brown topping made by passing chestnut paste through a sieve. "They ask if it's noodles."

Yahagi mostly uses chestnut paste imported from France, but when fresh edible chestnuts are in season here, she cooks up her own version. "I boiled the chestnuts in water, peeled every single one and made a paste myself."

Yahagi's product range includes traditional French favourites such as madeleines, a shell-shaped sponge cake, and sable, a shortbread-style biscuit.

She makes the latter with green tea powder which turns the dough distinctive green and adds a subtle flavour. "It's a little bit bitter."

Although green tea powder is available in New Zealand, one Japanese ingredient that is unobtainable is Yuzu rind which comes from a Japanese citrus fruit that is a little like a cross between a grapefruit and a mandarin.

But that has not hindered Yahagi achieving her goal of making "guilt free" Japanese-style cakes and desserts which are "sweet but not too sweet," and a growing number of non-Asian customers are making the journey to Church Corner to sample the products at Patisserie Yahagi.

