

The heart's preserve

Influenced by her grandparents' lifestyle, Angela Offord is keeping alive the tradition of preserving food. She talks to **Natasha Turfrey**.

ANGELA OFFORD stands at her black marble bench, putting the finishing touches to bottles of garlic sauce to be sold at the Wellington City market the next day.

Her home exudes a European quality. Shiny black tiles cover the kitchen floor and a white dinner table and chairs sit comfortably at the rear of the kitchen. Opposite the dining table, an authentic print of French wines, titled "French Le Arome Du Vin" from vineyard Bouchard Aine et Fils is mounted on the wall. Dean Martin serenades softly in the background.

A large, black "Bon Appetit" decorative ornament displayed on the kitchen wall above the sink depicts the true essence of France, and its influence on Angela's hospitality and cuisine.

Angela is expertly applying her personal AngieO labels to the filled jars.

Her passion for preserving began when she was growing up in Wanganui. She reminisces about her grandparent's big vegetable garden and the way they preserved everything. Going to their house every day after school was like an adventure as she was presented with her grandmother's latest concoction.

Her grandmother had a vitamiser machine and would make milkshakes out of anything from her garden, such as silver beet with honey and fresh cow's milk. "She made anything out of anything," she says.

For 50 years, Angela's grandmother would start her day with a cocktail of lecithin and cider vinegar. She attributed her longevity to it. She lived to 96 and had never suffered an illness before then.

Angela remembers her grandfather as a fit and healthy man too.

Her grandmother also firmly believed if you drank cider vinegar, ate a clove of garlic and drank molasses every day, you would live a long life.

It is a recipe for a healthy and longevity that Angela and her husband Wayne have inherited.

With this type of upbringing, it was inevitable that she would inherit the passion for the art of preserving. In her 20s, Angela continued the tradition of preserving "even when it was not trendy," she says.

In those days, books educated her about the conventional way of preserving. This included using a stool with a bowl underneath and a mutton cloth on top, with elastic bands on each leg to hold it together. She would place the fruit in the middle and the juice would drip through the cloth into the bowl. In later years, she bought an old-fashioned mouli which she says made her life easier.

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ANGELA OFFORD



Bottled beauties: Angela Offord at home putting the finishing touches to her gourmet products that were inspired by her grandparents.

Photos: CRAIG SIMCOX



Select wares: Some of Angela Offord's products, which include pickled garlic, liqueurs and garlic sauces.

Over the years, she has continued to make things and bottle them. "Wayne goes out to the garden and brings in things for me. Within half an hour I have it bottled."

Over the years she began to give her bottled produce to her friends as gifts. "They were kind of like my guinea pigs," she admits. As the demand grew, Wayne suggested that she sell them instead of giving them away.

During the week she works as a personal assistant. "The AngieO range started as a passionate hobby. I never intend for it to replace my day job."

In June 2009, the label was launched. The recipes and those she plans to add each have a story associated with them, from either her childhood or Angela and Wayne's continuing travels.

The first were garlic products, including garlic sauce and pickled garlic – products from her grandparents' 1950s cookbook that have been popular with her family and friends over the years. "I decided these should be the first products of my range, as they have wonderful memories to them."

Angela says New Zealand is so self-sufficient we can source things ourselves. "I get sick of people saying that they can't do it themselves, that is part of what started the company."

In November 2009, a friend suggested that she try selling her products at the Wellington City Market founded by Martin Bosley. Angela took her products into the administration department for the market. She animatedly recalls the encouraging words, "These are really good. I love it. When do you want to start?"

She attended her first market day two months later.

She anticipates her business will grow steadily in the next 18 months and has recently accepted a stall at Taste of Auckland in November.

Underlying Angela's fervour for preserving food are her travels and her enthusiasm for Italy.

Last year, she added limoncello to the AngieO range of Italian liqueurs, made from original recipes that were all about the fruit. Angela has adapted

the recipe to make a sweet version of a traditional limoncello from the family of her good friend Fabio, who grew up in Sant'Omero, in the Abruzzo region of Italy.

Angela and Wayne travel every year and love to experience the food and culture of other countries. In 1999, they hosted Fabio, a young engineer who came to New Zealand to work at the company where Angela works.

Every day, Fabio cooked a fresh pasta dish. She recalls how he prepared the dish by placing a tea towel on the bench and hanging pasta off the side of it. After Fabio returned to Italy, they kept in touch.

In 2004, Angela and Wayne travelled to Britain and Europe. The main part of their tour was travelling in a camper van with Fabio into the small villages in the heart of Tuscany that are untouched by tourists.

In these small towns she was able to truly experience the culture as she mixed with the locals and ate and drank their homemade products.

It was on this trip that Fabio presented her with the traditional limoncello recipe which she replicates today.

"The limoncello stems from my absolute enthusiasm for Italy and my Italian friends and has been tried and tasted and passed the 'Naples test'." She uses the hand gestures of Italians when she explains her deep zeal for Italian culture.

"They give you the shirt off their back. Their food and their wine is their gift to you with no strings attached."