

Tea is the New Black

By Margo Berryman



Michelle Casson is Queenstown's undisputed "queen of tea".

Her company Stir Tea, now in its ninth year, specialises in premium loose leaf tea sourced from the world's best tea growing regions.

Known for her passion and enthusiasm Michelle personally selects the entire Stir Tea range ensuring only the highest quality teas make the cut.

"You could say we are the little tea company that dreams big – we are very aspirational and have been since day one. Offering high quality, fresh tea is a cornerstone of our business along with embracing the history, rituals and beauty that surrounds tea. It is also great fun."

"I am at the Remarkables Market every Saturday during summer listening to what our customers like and hearing their tea stories."

"Everything about tea is humble and we have a lot of respect for what the Camellia sinensis tea leaf gives us. Tea is about gentleness and a slow release and I liken it to a marathon, unlike coffee which is more of a sprint," says Michelle.

Throughout Central Otago and further afield Stir Tea is served at a selection of well-known cafés and available for purchase at Raeward Fresh and the weekly Remarkables Market in Queenstown.

"I am at the Remarkables Market every Saturday during summer listening to what our customers like and hearing their tea stories. People love to share which is a wonderful way to determine what they are seeking and then be responsive to that," she says.

This season a "fill your own container" option has been introduced at the market which is proving popular with regulars as a means of minimising packaging.

"This was a way for us to give customers what they wanted. You can re-use your empty Stir bags or bring your own tin or paper lined glass jar to be filled one week and return the following week to collect it."

Michelle says one of the results from market research was a demand for caffeine free options and Stir Tea has responded with herbal and fruit blends which are now some of the most popular in the range.

Michelle recently visited key tea growing areas in Japan and this summer the company is promoting Matcha which is a pure Japanese Green Tea.

"I wanted to introduce Matcha for its health benefits and delicious flavour – it's a whole bunch of goodness in a bowl. We have sourced a lovely traditional drinking Matcha, known as Usucha, which is very simple to prepare. We also offer a culinary grade best suited in the kitchen for cooking, lattes, smoothies and juices."

The Stir Tea range can be purchased from the company's recently upgraded website which presents the beauty of loose leaf tea with appealing images as well as interesting tea articles, recipes and tea brewing guides.

"Brewing your own delicious Iced Tea is another way to enjoy our blends and makes a refreshing and thirst quenching drink on a hot Central Otago day."

There is always something new and exotic to discover at Stir Tea including the recent arrival of Spring Harvest Tea's silver needle and Yunnan gold varieties.

Michelle often talks about a tea lifestyle – celebrating the little and big moments in life with a great cup of tea. She certainly embraces this philosophy.

Time to put the kettle on and reach for the bag of tea featuring the distinctive the umbrella!



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