

Zest of the best

An expert palate finds a lemon tart that rises above the crowd.

LYNN HUHTALA is a well-travelled woman. Born and raised in Canada and now living on Waiheke Island, she has seen much of what the world in between has to offer. Huhtala knows a lot about food too: she runs a company that offers day tours in the Auckland region and beyond for food fanatics such as herself.

So when an email comes my way from her that speaks of an address with great reverence, I know it's time to sit up straight and pay serious attention.

"I have discovered possibly the world's best lemon tart," writes Huhtala. She is talking about a place that is right under her nose: Island Thyme Deli in Surfdale, Waiheke Island. Huhtala is so excited about the place she even provides the phone number. This is what she has to say about her Gulf Island find. "The tart

lemon filling is 'just set' and the pastry crust is light and crispy. Even though it does not have a meringue topping, it is fantastic. Is there any chance they would share the recipe for this taste of heaven?"

The angelic Carl Phiskie, who owns Island Thyme, is a busy man but he is happy to share. When I finally pin Phiskie down, I learn that Island Thyme is but one part of the food equation that he and wife Delwyn – both chefs

– own. The deli/cafe bit by this name is downstairs and when the sun goes down in Surfdale, they head upstairs to their restaurant – Thymes Table. And service starts all over again.

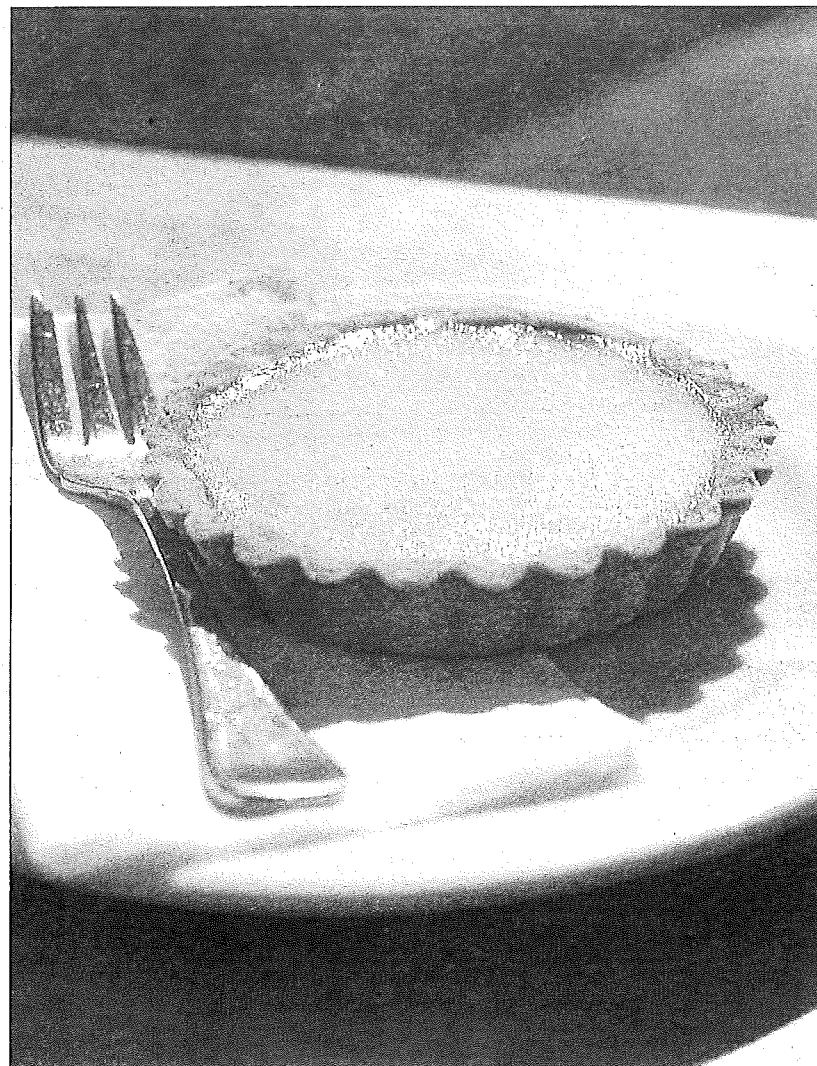
The Phiskies like to keep the two addresses separate: there are no menu repeats upstairs or down.

The business has burgeoned since its inception. Back in the beginning (in June 2005), the Phiskies had a small space in Surfdale that

was open only on a Friday and Saturday. They sold sandwiches and tarts – including the lemon – to take away and little more.

Then they expanded: space, hours and repertoire. "We didn't change what we did, we just did more of it," says Carl Phiskie.

And so things continued to grow. In March last year they opened Thymes Table – a plat du jour restaurant. That same night, their second son was born. They called him Cruz.



A heavenly impression half an hour away from downtown Auckland.

Photos: Neville Marriner

Island Thyme's lemon tart

250g shortcrust pastry
6 eggs
240g sugar
3 large lemons (juice and zest)
200ml cream

Line a loose-bottomed tart tin with the pastry and blind bake at 180°C for 20-25 minutes.

Combine eggs and sugar until well mixed then add juice and cream. Strain through a fine sieve before adding zest. Leave to sit for 10 minutes, then skim off bubbles. Pour into baked pastry case and cook at 160°C for 30-40 minutes until almost set. Cool in tart tin for 30 minutes before serving.

Huhtala had family in mind when she made her original request. She says her taste for lemon tarts goes back to her Canadian childhood when her mum made "the most delicious" lemon meringue pies. That's the benchmark the Phiskies faced – and met – when facing the Huhtala test. It is worth noting too that Huhtala's tour business is, appositely, called Finding Flavour.

■ **Island Thyme deli and Thymes Tables Restaurant, 8 Miami Ave, Surfdale, Waiheke Island. Ph (09) 3723306; shop: (09) 3725500. Hours: Deli, Tuesday to Friday, 8am to 6pm; Saturday 8am to 4pm; restaurant, Tuesday to Saturday from 5.30pm.**

If there's a recipe you'd like, email the name and location of the cafe or restaurant that served it to escape@star-times.co.nz with Recipe in the subject line and we'll do our best to share it with you.