

Chantal Wholefood Café

By **Philippa Jamieson**

Napier's only vegetarian café is the latest venture of Chantal Organics, one of New Zealand's stalwart organic businesses whose origins go back more than 35 years. Chantal Wholefood Café opened in 2010 within Chantal's organic shop, and is part of the wider business of Chantal Organics, most of which is focused on the wholesale business.

In 1978 a group of Hawkes Bay families with dreams of healthier food formed a food co-operative to buy organic and natural whole foods. At that time one of the families had a daughter named Chantal and the group decided to name their co-op after her, and so Chantal Organics was born. The name is a lasting reminder that organic and whole foods are part of ensuring the health of our environment for future generations.

In 1983 the first food shop started, run by Peter and Maureen Alexander and another couple for the first three and a half years. Peter and Maureen have built up the business since then, with four major moves, increasing in capacity each time. Four years ago they extended the shop and put in a café.

"It seemed to be a good idea to have a café," says Peter Alexander. "We've kept it vegetarian, with an emphasis on organic, but it's not exclusively so."



Above: Maureen and Peter Alexander about to tuck into the vegan 'meatballs' at Chantal Wholefood Café.

Vegan meatballs

Serves 4–6

1 T	extra virgin olive oil
½ cup	chopped yellow onion
3–4 cloves	garlic, finely chopped
½ cup	button mushrooms, roughly chopped
½ cup (packed)	spinach or silverbeet
½ cup	sunflower seeds
2 cups	cooked or canned black beans
½ cup	white rice, cooked
230 g	spaghetti (we had udon noodles on the weekend)
400 g	pasta sauce
2 t dried	basil
2 t dried	oregano

1. Preheat oven to 180°C.
2. In a large skillet, heat oil over medium heat.
3. Add onion and garlic and cook until tender, about 5 minutes.
4. Stir in mushrooms and spinach. Cover and cook until mushrooms are tender, about 5 minutes.
5. Meanwhile, in the food processor, pulse sunflower seeds until coarsely chopped.
6. Add cooked vegetable mixture, half the beans, basil and oregano. Pulse until mixture is just coming together.
7. In a large bowl, combine puréed mixture, remaining beans and rice. Stir until combined.
8. Form mixture into 4 cm balls and transfer to a lightly oiled baking sheet.
9. Bake meatballs 30 minutes or until heated through and crisp on the outside.
10. Meanwhile, cook spaghetti according to package directions. Drain well and return to pot.
11. Add pasta sauce and toss until combined and heated through.
12. Add meatballs and toss very gently to combine, taking care not to break up meatballs. Serve.



“Back in the 70s and 80s there was less of an emphasis on organics and it was more about whole foods, although we’ve always been organic home gardeners,” says Peter. “We grow a lot of our own veges and sell them in the shop as well as using them in the café.” The couple grows vegetables on a 20-acre property.

The shop is not totally organic, but almost all the fruit and vegetables are, and Chantal’s distribution business is about 95% organic.

Chantal Wholefood Café serves breakfast, lunch and snacks, with salads, cabinet food, either vegan or vegetarian, some gluten-free, tea, coffee, fresh juices and smoothies. Everything is prepared on site, and the aim is to have as much food as possible organic, with a focus on good quality food.

At the wholesale site they have a food manufacturing business making things like peanut butter and tahini, and repackaging bulk products into household sizes. They deal with 100 tonnes of organic product a week.

In their businesses they use their own green cleaners from the Chantal Clean range. The café has 100% compostable takeaway coffee cups made of bamboo with a potato starch lid (from Flight Coffee, as is the coffee itself). All food scraps go to the 50 chooks at home. Nothing is wasted, and cardboard, paper, tins and glass is all recycled. They are always asking how they can be cleaner, greener

and more sustainable.

Maureen and Peter Alexander employ around 50 staff in total: about 30 at Chantal’s wholesale business, five on the farm gardens, and the rest in the shop and café.

“We hadn’t worked in hospitality before the café,” says Peter. “We were pretty green. The biggest challenges are to get the staffing right, and to get the staff to take on our values and concepts. We have to bring them along as part of the team.”

Chantal Organics plans to reorganise the shop again and extend the café out into an adjacent alleyway. Their biggest plans are to develop a lot more products in their wholesale business.

About the original little girl Chantal, Peter says: “She’d be about 35 or 36 now but I’ve never met her. I’d like to meet her one day.” 🍀

Chantal Shop & Café
45 Hastings Street, Napier
Phone 06 835 8036

**Opening hours: 8 am to 6 pm Monday to Friday,
8 am to 5 pm Saturday and Sunday.**
chantalorganics.co.nz