



Above: Kate and Clare at Sola Café

Sola Café

More than twelve years since it began, Sola Café in Thames is still going strong. *Organic NZ* talks to **Kate Ewing**, who owns and operates the café with her partner **Clare Rodley**.

How did your café start up?

My partner Clare and I were living in Sydney and working in hospitality when in 2000 we came home because Clare's dad got terminally ill with cancer. After he died Clare wanted to do something really positive with her inheritance so we decided to set up a vegetarian café in Thames. We liked Thames due to its close proximity to Coromandel beaches whilst also servicing the wider Hauraki district through the off-peak winter period. With the help of my sister Amanda, who is an artist and did all the interior design work, the three of us set up Sola Café in 2001. We expected it to be a quiet little vegetarian eatery with yummy well-made boutique coffee but we underestimated the town's need for a good café, and it did not stay little or quiet for long!

Why did you choose the organic path, and what organic food and drinks do you specialise in?

Eating organic is better for your health and better for the planet as a whole. All our milk, soymilk and cream is organic. We buy the bulk of our grains and pulses from Ceres and Chantal Organics and get local organic veges whenever they are available. We use free-range eggs in all our cooking, not just for the breakfast orders.

What else do you do sustainably?

We recycle all our plastic, paper, tin and glass. We have a small herb garden out the back of the café, and a pig farmer comes and takes away any solid waste that our worm farm can't deal with. Our old newspapers and coffee grounds go to a professional gardener and honey producer. We buy many spices and dry goods loose from Bin Inn to reduce packaging waste. Our takeaway containers and



Moroccan chickpea salad

A delicious summer recipe. This salad serves approximately four people as a side.

Ingredients

- 2 cups dried organic chickpeas
- ½ red capsicum sliced thinly
- 1 carrot, peeled and diced
- 1 celery stick, diced
- ½ cup dried almond slices
- ½ cup chopped dates
- 1 T finely diced preserved lemon (or lemon zest)

Dressing

- 1 t zathar (a Lebanese spice blend; could be replaced with dukkah)
- ½ cup fresh mint
- ½ cup fresh parsley
- ½ cup fresh coriander
- 7 dried apricots
- 2 fresh tomatoes
- 1 garlic clove
- ¼ cup lemon juice
- ¼ cup plain yoghurt
- 2 t pomegranate molasses
- ½ cup olive oil
- 1 T tahini
- 1 t sumac (a sour Mediterranean berry; leave out if unavailable)
- 1 t ground cumin



Method

1. Soak chickpeas overnight. Boil until soft. When cool combine with all other salad ingredients.
2. Combine all the dressing ingredients in a food processor and pour half the mixture over the salad, stirring everything together well.
3. Add more dressing to the desired consistency. Add salt and pepper to taste. Garnish with yoghurt and fresh mint.

coffee cups are biodegradable and we use eco-friendly cleaning and laundry products. We are replacing all our lighting to LED low-power bulbs to reduce power usage. We even use cut-up old packing and delivery slips as our docket pads and prep lists!

What sets your business apart from others?

We were the first (and still sadly the only) café in Thames to have joined the Waikato-wide Conscious Consumers' initiative. Our café attracts a really wide cross-section of the community and is a meeting place for young and old alike. Being vegetarian we are unlike any café in the area. We have a whole separate menu for gluten- and dairy-free people and everything in our cabinet is well labelled so people don't have to ask lots of questions. We have monthly art exhibitions on the walls and have gained a reputation as a good outlet for local artists to sell their work.

Sola Café

Open 7 days a week, 8 am – 4 pm
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What have been the highlights and successes?

The highlights have been helping each other through adversity. Helping to create and contribute to a tangible expression of warmth and positivity in the community. Contributing to something which has a strong ethical and conscious direction. Expanding our business to accommodate more people and making space on the wall for more artwork. Providing healthy and interesting food inspired from flavours from around the world. ☑

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