

# The Dukes of Sandwich

By Mary Ralston

There's a relaxed atmosphere in Christchurch's The Commons at lunchtime. The site was once a big hotel and is now an inner-city community space for events. There's a nice post-earthquake urban unpretentiousness: construction workers in hi-vis vests, shoppers, office workers and suits from the nearby courthouse mill around the collection of food caravans selling everything from organic sandwiches to hot dogs.

The Dukes of Sandwich are busy. Not surprising – the organic gourmet sandwiches made by Laura Sisson and Rob Gilbert are the stand-out offering. And there's a sandwich for all tastes – vegan, organic beef, free-range pork, chicken, egg – and even little sliders (mini hamburgers) for children. Salads are also offered and are very popular – all the ingredients are organic, local and fresh. Even the chutneys and salad dressings are fresh and made from scratch by Laura and Rob.

Laura and Rob are trained chefs and passionate about organic food. They met in Melbourne and travelled and worked in the UK and Europe before returning home to New Zealand, keen to pursue organic growing as well as cooking. They discovered the organic horticulture course at Lincoln's Organic Training College and signed up for Year 1. Their goal was to grow organic vegetables that they could then use to produce their own gourmet food.

They loved the course (Laura also did Year 2) and the rest is history. They opened The Dukes of Sandwich custom-made food truck in Christchurch and haven't looked back. As well as their mid-week central city location at The Commons they also frequently cater at events and private parties.

"This summer has been really busy with events such as Wine and Food Festival, Buskers' Festival and the Christchurch TEDx talks," says Laura. "Our sliders are great for events – people love the small hamburgers."

The gourmet sandwich ingredients that they don't grow themselves – the meat and bread – are sourced from local organic suppliers. "We want to keep it as healthy and sustainable as possible: organic, local ingredients, composting the paper plates and leftovers, making our own pickles and sauces."

"We have both always been into organic food and sustainability," says Rob. "We don't push it that the food is organic – we want people to like it because it tastes great. Then they might realise one of the reasons it tastes great is because it is organic!"

"We find that if people aren't into organic, they don't see that on the menu – they might just like the sound of the combination of ingredients. But if people are into organic, they notice it and really love the idea of fresh, local and organic, as well as the quality of the finished product."

The most popular offering is the pork sandwich: free-farmed pork belly rubbed with gunpowder seasoning, and served with apple and fennel slaw and bourbon barbeque sauce on ciabatta.

The vegan sandwich is also popular. "People appreciate that you provide a vegan option, and ours is really good! It's a burger made with mushrooms, nuts and grains with a vegan aioli, slaw and our famous beetroot chutney," says Laura. "A few months ago we had new signs made that included 'vegan' and sales have doubled."


Changes are happening at The Dukes – Laura is expecting their



Photo: Wanderlustre

first child and they plan to move to Wellington in the spring to be closer to family. They won't have land to grow their own vegetables but they want to stick to their principles of fresh, local and organic and have already contacted local growers to source organic produce.

Christchurch's loss will be Wellington's gain. They are excited about the idea of being part of a different cuisine with lots of international influences and adventurous flavours.

"We have loved Christchurch and being part of the city's post-earthquake food scene. But with both our families in Wellington, it's a good time to take our business up there," says Laura. So come the spring, Wellingtonians can look out for the distinctive The Dukes of Sandwich food truck and taste a great organic sandwich. 

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## The Dukes beetroot chutney

The weights given for the beetroot, apples and onions are the prepared weights (the beetroot cooked and peeled, and the apples peeled and cored) but it won't matter if the weights aren't exact – chutney is very forgiving.

- 1 kg beetroots, cooked and peeled
- 500 g Granny Smith apples, peeled, cored and diced
- 500 ml vinegar (white, wine or cider)
- 500 g onions, peeled and thinly sliced
- 300 g raw sugar
- 2 t crushed garlic
- 2 t cinnamon
- 1 t cumin
- ½ t black pepper
- 1–2 star anise
- 1 t ground ginger
- 30 g cornflour in 50 ml vinegar (optional)
- 1 t salt (more or less)

1. Put the uncooked beetroots in a pot with plenty of cold water; cover and bring to the boil. Cook until you can push a knife easily through the largest beetroot, then drain and cool in cold water (this can take a while, so proceed with the next step).
2. Put the apples, onions, vinegar, sugar, garlic and spices into a large pot and simmer. Pre-ground spices can be used but a better flavour comes from ground whole spices.
3. Now the beetroots should be cool. Cube, grate, or julienne the beetroots on a mandolin, depending on what texture you like.
4. Add the beetroot to the other mixture and continue to simmer for approximately half an hour until it starts to gel, or mix some cornflour with a little extra vinegar and add to the pot to help it thicken. Keep stirring and it should thicken in a few minutes. Add salt to suit your taste.
5. Bottle in sterilised jars. It is delicious straight away but the flavour will get better over the next few weeks.



Above: Rob Gilbert and Laura Sissons. Photo: Mary Ralston

### The Dukes of Sandwich

**At: The Commons, corner of Kilmore and Durham Sts, Christchurch: Tues, Wed, Thurs. Also at events and available for private catering by arrangement.**

**Phone 027 588 1508, [dukesofsandwich@gmail.com](mailto:dukesofsandwich@gmail.com),**

**Facebook: see The-Dukes-of-Sandwich-Presented-to-you-by-Two-Sweet-Chefs**

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