

Wise Cicada Café

By Anissa Ljanta

Wise Cicada, in Newmarket, Auckland, is more than just a café. Since its opening in 2004, Wise Cicada has grown into a successful model of ethical retail and hospitality, firmly rooted in the local community.

Wise Cicada's owner, Babak Sarfarazi came to New Zealand as a refugee 20+ years ago. "When I first came to New Zealand, food didn't taste the same as it did at home," says Babak. "My father was a farmer in Iran. He grew things organically, the traditional way – in New Zealand I realised the food didn't taste the same, especially the fruit and vegetables. I investigated how they grew the food here – then I gradually slipped into eating only organics." This shift led to Wise Cicada specialising in organic, plant-based wholefoods.

The café menu changes daily with smoothies (they have their own custom blends), juices, salads, cooked mains and soups available. For a treat or for dessert, their raw vegan organic cakes and desserts

are all gluten-free and made without refined sugars. Wise Cicada café uses organic products wherever possible, and only organic coconut and olive oils. Café manager, Shelley Plowman, estimates their organics use at 95%. She states seasonality and supply issues as the only reason organic produce wouldn't be used.

"We are always working on improving accessibility of price and breadth of range of organics in the store. We hope that there is a future where everyone can choose organics first and always," says Shelley.

Some cafés fall down on the sustainability of their ventures with takeaway food and waste management processes, but not Wise Cicada. They recycle and compost all possible waste. All the packaging in the café is recycled and they use unbleached biodegradable wood or paper. Wise Cicada uses corn-based compostable cups and containers instead of plastic. Even the office recycles and reuses paper and minimises printing.



Above: Wise Cicada's owner, Babak Sarfarazi



Above: The vibrant, bustling interior of Wise Cicada. Photos: Wise Cicada

Wise Cicada has a well-stocked retail store in the same premises as their café. It is the place to go for natural health information and trusted practitioners in nutrition, homeo-botanical therapy, naturopathy, Bowen therapy, massage and intuitive healing. The online store caters for those living too far away to pop in for supplies. The café space is also used to run workshops and cooking classes.

I was curious about the origins of the name Wise Cicada. It comes from an Aesop's fable, the story of the cicada that spent all summer singing while the ant worked hard to build up supplies for the winter. When winter comes, the cicada dies from hunger, while the ant is fine as it has worked hard to prepare for the future. Perhaps a wise cicada would have the best of both worlds.

There is an aspect of giving back to the Wise Cicada venture. Babak started the Wise Cicada Charitable Trust in 2004 once it was clear the business was doing well. The Trust's Generosity without Borders project aims to create a much-needed orphanage



Above: Healthy and delicious wraps

Kale and apple salad

One of Wise Cicada café's most popular organic salads! Serves approximately 6 people.

Salad ingredients

350 g kale – remove stalks and shred
 1 large apple, shredded
 ¼ cup white sesame seeds
 ¼ cup raisins
 ¼ cup roasted almonds
 ¾ cup sprouted mung beans

Dressing

⅓ cup fresh orange juice
 ¼ cup untoasted sesame oil

1 T fresh ginger juice
 2 t tamari
 3 whole dates (soaked overnight)
 2 T tahini
 1 clove garlic (small)
 A pinch of chilli powder

Method

1. Blend together dressing ingredients.
2. Massage raw kale in dressing and add the remaining salad ingredients.
3. Enjoy!



in Babak's hometown of Darab in Iran. The café hosts fundraising party nights to help build momentum toward their \$300,000 goal.

When I asked Babak what sets Wise Cicada apart from other cafés, without any hesitation he replied, "People. Our family members, staff, the people that serve – we all want to be here and that makes a difference to our day and the customers experience as they walk in. Sometimes you need a hug more than anything else."

The Wise Cicada crew set out to create a good food destination that offers accessible organics and wholefoods to support community health and wellbeing. I think it is safe to say that mission has been accomplished. When I popped into Wise Cicada for Sunday lunch, four words came to my mind: fresh, colourful, wholesome

and vibrant. In Babak's words: "It's one big good energy food and relaxation space." 

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Wise Cicada

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Café hours: 8 am – 6 pm Monday to
 Friday

9 am – 6 pm Saturday and Sunday