

DISHING UP FUN TIMES

A COUPLE'S SHARED PASSION FOR FOOD AND WINE, COMBINED WITH A SENSE OF ADVENTURE, HAS KEPT THE GARDEN OF EATING RESTAURANT GOING FOR 26 YEARS ... AND THEY'RE NOT STOPPING YET.

BETTINA WARBURTON

Keeping a restaurant open in Townsville for 26 years is no easy feat but it is one that Wayne Gilray and Adele Scott have done with passion and exuberance.

The couple say they are as passionate about delivering fine food to the community today as they were when they opened Garden of Eating in South Townsville in 1993.

The pair are owners of one of Townsville's longest-running and celebrated restaurants, and they say they get asked all the time how they fuse work and marriage so effectively.

Wayne says good communication and always being on the same wavelength is the key.

"The restaurant has been our baby for 26 years now, and the outlet for our creativity and fun," Adele says.

"With our passion for food and wine we have made countless friendships through the restaurant over these years and hope to make many more."

The pair hail from New Zealand and met in 1978 at the Christchurch Town Hall complex where Wayne was doing his chef training and Adele was waitressing.

They moved to Townsville in the early 1980s, and Wayne was head chef for several years at what is now the Grand Chancellor hotel, as well as at other leading restaurants in the city, before they decided to open their own.

Wayne and Adele had already bought a home in South Townsville when a premises a couple of streets away in Allen St became available.

"Around this time we were thinking about having our own small restaurant, and Adele already had the name Garden of Eating in her head," Wayne says.

"When we saw the advert in the paper for the business, we knew the place and its potential. We signed the deal and the concept started."

Previously a takeaway pizza shop, Adele and Wayne transformed the shop into a beautiful restaurant, and what was once brown grass at the back of the shop became a paved garden setting.

That was September 1993.

"It didn't even cross our minds that we would still be going a quarter of a century on, holding regular wedding anniversaries and birthdays," Adele says.

"Over the years, we have taken steps to be adventurous and never be afraid to try new combinations."

Garden of Eating has won many awards over the past 26 years, including the Restaurant and Catering Industry Association's best BYO in Queensland.

The couple acknowledge the restaurant industry is not for the faint-hearted, and that many a quality restaurant in Townsville has closed over the years.

They say one of the biggest challenges of operating a restaurant in Townsville over nearly three decades is not being able to increase prices at the rate of inflation and the many hidden costs.

The couple credit the restaurant's point of difference, as well as being consistent, as the key to their success.

"Our menu is creative and unique, great combination of flavours and great dish names," Adele says. "All of our menu can be ordered in small sizes. Almost all the dishes are gluten and dairy free, with a few vegan as well."

"Wayne also makes all his own dairy-free ice creams, and loves coming up with new flavours, such as his Black Tahini Ice Cream."

Kelli Attlee and Nigel Harper are two of Garden of Eating's many loyal followers.

Kelli and Nigel have been frequenting the restaurant for many years.

"When we're asked of a place to go with that feeling of a relaxed but elegant atmosphere we think of Wayne and Adele's Garden of Eating," Kelli says.

"It's enchanting sitting in the garden surrounded by beautiful plants, greenery and fairy lights."

"We have been dining there for over 20 years and always leave feeling like we want more."

"There's always a surprise in what you order because the combination of flavours they put together are what we would never think of but are absolutely divine. It takes forever to choose what to order because you know that by ordering one dish you are missing out on the exquisite flavours of another."

Kelli says Wayne and Adele's kind, bubbly and inviting nature has allowed them to enjoy romantic date nights, times with friends full of fun and laughter, and dining experiences they "absolutely cherish".

"We love how special you are made to feel and are so happy for Wayne and Adele, 26 years of success for so many different reasons, one of which is the love of looking after people and creating dining experiences for all to enjoy," she says.

Adele and Wayne say they enjoy owning their own restaurant.

"I love it because I have no restrictions on what I can create and put on the menu," Wayne says.

He says television food shows have opened up a new world of what can be done with food.



CONSISTENT CUISINE: Townsville restaurateurs Adele Scott and Wayne Gilray have been running Garden of Eating since it first opened in 1993. Picture: ALIX SWENEY

"Years ago it was more about fine dining with fewer cafes. Now it's up-market casual with an emphasis on good produce and diversity," Wayne says.

"Food reviews make expectation higher. Of course, 26 years ago there was no social media."

And being dedicated restaurateurs is not Wayne and Adele's only passion.

The pair's love of travel runs deep.

"We love to dine and sample the wines in the countries we visit," Adele says.

"Our most memorable experience was a long lunch with friends in a 15th century, walled garden courtyard in Bruges, Belgium."

"We both like getting to music concerts when we can and we are lovers of trips to Bali, and the amazing dining there. Many superb restaurants and bars with unbelievable fit-outs and decor."

"In nearby Lombok, we also visit often, as we have land on a hillside development there."

Wayne and Adele say exploring the world is an important part of their lives.

"As soon as we are on a plane, we shut-off and look forward to what we have planned," Adele says.

"Sometimes that includes exploring places like Egypt, where we have been inside Tutankhamen's tomb, seeing up close his mummified body."

"In Jordan, a camel trek, staying overnight in the Wadi Rum Desert. At Petra, a night-time walk through the candlelit Sig to the Treasury, built around 5th century BC, for a Bedouin performance, and floating on the Dead Sea."

"I've had a lifetime dream of seeing Pompeii, so last year we had a five-hour personal tour with an archaeologist."

Wayne says the love of travel often takes them to places they can fit in with a food and wine experience.

"Getting back to New Zealand is always a priority, usually in January for the Gibston Valley Winery Concert," he says.

"In the past I've arranged wine tours to Central Otago and Marlborough areas for friends, but not so much now as it's time consuming to organise."

Other travel highlights for Wayne and Adele include a full eclipse of the sun in France's Champagne area, Keukenhof Tulip Gardens in Amsterdam, and celebrating their 60th birthdays in Italy.



Adele Scott (left) and Wayne Gilray (right) are joined by regular diners Nigel Harper and Kelli Attlee at the Garden of Eating restaurant in South Townsville to celebrate their 26 years of operating the venue. Picture: MATT TAYLOR