

Food writer Julie Le Clerc gives Keith Sharp a taste of things to come in her new TV3 series **Cafe Secrets**.

Cafe Society

It must be an interesting moment for any cafe owner to see food writer and cafe expert Julie Le Clerc walk through their doors. And that could become even more interesting when Julie's new series **Cafe Secrets** goes to air this week.

But they needn't worry too much, though, if the raven-haired food writer and former cafe owner does enter their kingdom as Julie is no food or cafe critic.

Rather, she is on a mission to spread cafe culture throughout the New Zealand landscape.

Julie is touring the country in her new eight-part series to see what is around New Zealand and to spread the secrets of a fine cafe experience. "I really have that strong belief that cafes are very much the hub of the community," she told *TV Guide* over a cup of coffee. "I travelled the

world and then came back to the place I grew up in and started my cafe there because I knew there was a need for a local eatery."

After setting up that successful business, Byzantium in Auckland's Ponsonby Road, Julie branched out into boutique catering, writing, cooking demonstrations and now TV. The idea for this series has been on the back burner for some time.

Julie is not the first in her family to take her culinary skills to TV. Forty years ago, her mother won a live televised baking competition held in the Auckland Town Hall.

Having inherited her mum's love of baking, Julie made cafe food her speciality, and set out to learn what makes some cafes so special.

"Most people that have a favourite cafe, there's some reason they go there – something they can't live

without," she says. "In my own cafe I knew that there were some things that if I took them off the menu there would be a riot."

"So you've got to get that fine balance between the familiar and the things that people come for and they love, and trying to do something new for the people that like change."

"Every cafe has a different personality, a different flavour, and it all comes through in the food, so every episode (of this series) is completely different."

So what is the first thing she looks for when she walks through the doors of a new cafe?

"I guess initially, it has to be the ambience," says Julie. "You walk in and think, 'Well, it's a little bit bland' or 'Wow, there's really something about this place'. It's got an X-factor. So that invites you in."

"And then, of course, for me it's about the food and the coffee or the tea. I don't look for necessarily a big, long menu. I quite like a short menu in many ways. There's less decision-making involved."

Location is also a major factor in this series – such as the first cafe featured, the Boatshed Cafe in Rarawe in the Far North.

Here, kayakers can stop off for a meal and fishermen can bring their fish right up to the door, making the produce as fresh as it can be.

That brings Julie to another feature that can work in favour of rural cafes: fresh, locally grown produce – a major point of difference for the

small-town operator. "That's definitely starting to happen which I think is brilliant," she says. "People are really proud of their local produce."

"For example, at Colenso Cafe, in the Coromandel, they try really hard to use local macadamias in their baking and in other recipes. And they're having a feijoa festival and people are really proud that they're noting it on their menu: local-grown whatever."

A good cafe also has to have that other essential ingredient – the personal touch of the owner.

"Choosing the cafes for the show, they had to be owner-operated and set up by the owner. So it's their whole story about why they set it up, why they chose the menu," she says. "People sometimes have this dream: 'Oh, wouldn't it be wonderful to own a cafe?' and

it looks fabulous, but the reality is it's long hours and hard work.

"I think the most successful ones are owner-operated. When the owners aren't there, it's never the same. The personality isn't there."

★WIN★WIN

TV Guide has five copies of Julie Le Clerc's book *Simple Cafe Food* to give away, courtesy of Penguin Group (NZ).



To be in the draw to win, put your name, address and postcode on the back of an envelope, and send it to: Simple Cafe food, TV Guide, PO Box 5317, Wellesley St, Auckland 1141 by July 27 or go to www.tv-guide.co.nz/competitions, codeword Cafe.

Cafe Secrets
TV3 Sunday

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