

# STEADY AS SHE GOES



Celia Hay's apartment in the Cranmer Court complex was red-stickered after the February earthquake. The heritage-listed building is now being demolished.



Foundation student Shaye Malaetele.



Students are put through their paces at the school's Sommelier Lunch.

NOT EVEN AN EARTHQUAKE COULD SHAKE THE DETERMINATION OF ONE OF OUR HOSPITALITY STALWARTS WHO PICKED HERSELF UP AND STARTED ALL OVER AGAIN

WORDS ANNA TAIT-JAMIESON PHOTOGRAPHS MELANIE JENKINS, JANE USSHER & GUY FREDERICK



Alexa Wiersma practises her mixology skills.



Chef tutor Stefan Loetscher.



The large photograph in the dining-room at the NZSFW shows the Christchurch Town Hall which was opened in 1972 by Celia's father; honey bavarois with rhubarb compôte and an almond tuile; students Olivia Burt, Melissa Ousey and Samantha Willis.



EVERYTHING YOU WOULD ever want to know about running a restaurant or café is in Celia Hay's book *How to Grow your Hospitality Business*. She is nothing if not thorough; it's all there, from menus to marketing to managing cash flow. It is the acknowledged go-to guide written by someone who has been there. But there is one chapter missing: *What to do when Disaster Strikes*.

Celia could never have imagined the seismic event that would take out her own two businesses, Hay's Restaurant and the New Zealand School of Food & Wine (NZSFW), and destroy her family home in just a few minutes on 22 February 2011. You can't foresee an event like that, you can't prevent it and you can never be fully prepared. You can only react.

And, if you're Celia Hay, you don't panic. The soft pink cashmere and elegant pearls mark her out as "old Christchurch" but you can see the determination in the line of her jaw. She is a straight shooter, a pragmatist, a smart businesswoman and committed educationalist. But she's also a mother, a daughter and a sister and when her eyes mist over you know she's been through a lot.

The earthquake itself will be forever etched in her mind, not least because of the indignity of her situation. "I was having a massage at the time," she says with a laugh. "I was lying on this massage bed and the centrifugal force was so strong I couldn't get underneath it. I couldn't roll off. Eventually I did. Then when the quake stopped I got up, dressed and left."

There was dust in the air, the roads were cracked and power lines were down but she managed to drive to Victoria Street where she found her staff and students all safe on the footpath outside her building. "We didn't know what to do: stay at the Hay's building or join the exodus from the city?" She remembers handing out food and bottled water from the restaurant to a group of Australians who couldn't reach their hotel rooms.

She rescued her laptop from the top floor of her building and then walked to her Cranmer Court apartment and pulled bedding and backpacks out of the rubble. And throughout it all she stayed calm. "You have to. It's adrenalin. You're thinking survival; what's the most sensible thing to do here? You can't have histrionics over it." ▶



## A CAREER IN HOSPITALITY

▶ Celia describes herself as "a history graduate who fell into food" but her path into hospitality was signposted much earlier. "It was part of what we learned at home. We baked and we had to participate in the cooking, but I think the thing that got me really excited was when my father was mayor of Christchurch and my parents entertained a lot. I helped out; I loved the theatre of entertaining and I still do. That's probably been my gift to my students over the years – the appreciation of the art of entertaining."

▶ She opened her first food business, The Preservatory Delicatessen, with her artist sister Gill in 1985. Ten years later she completed an MBA and opened Hay's Restaurant and the New Zealand School of Food & Wine. Since then she has qualified as a chef, gained a diploma of wine (from the UK) and added a masters in education to her resumé.

▶ "I see education as a transformational device to help people change their lives; that whole thing about getting people to understand their own talents. Going forward I see my skill as trying to uplift hospitality as a career. People don't rate it, but what they don't understand is that there are many, many jobs out there, whether working as a sales rep for a wine company or as a product developer or brand manager, or running your own café or food business. People need to see someone like me who has a number of university degrees and has built an interesting career in

hospitality. That's where I become an important role model for the students. It's not just about becoming a waitress."

▶ Celia's advice to people wanting to break into hospitality: "Start simple. Do a short course or programme and then work in a good place where you are going to learn. And then do another course. A mixture of work and training is the perfect thing."

▶ The New Zealand School of Food & Wine is a private provider. "We are NZQA accredited but we are a small organization with a focus on short courses – that's our point of difference. We've come to Auckland with a new offering and people are really excited about it. The Foundation Programme is a good-quality, short-term course for students who don't necessarily want to do a two or three-year degree. It's a 28-week course aimed at school leavers and it focuses on product knowledge as well as practical skills. Hospitality businesses are always complaining about applicants who know nothing about food. I'm trying to broaden our students' product knowledge so they can understand the core taste qualities of wine and food. If we're going to put parmigiano in the pasta they need to know what it is and what it tastes like; the same with balsamico or thyme. It's building a foundation so they have the confidence to take it to the next level. We get them started and focus on finding them work, then they can come back and do the advanced food and wine courses and maybe the management programme in the weekends."



Sons Oliver and Daniel and daughter Alice with Celia outside Highwic House in Newmarket, the historical home of their great-grandmother Kate Buckland, and shopping at the Parnell market.

**THE GOOD BITS**  
**On the Peninsula**

"It was an outstanding experience at Duvauchelle. We made some beautiful food and because everyone was living close by we were part of each other's lives. We had two big fund-raising dinners to raise money for the children's charity." (The money paid for groups of children from the badly affected eastern suburbs to enjoy a cooking class and a day out on the Peninsula.)

**The gourmet gift basket**

"It came with a thank-you note from the team at Pfizer Oncology in Australia. 'We remember the kindness of your actions in providing us with food and water outside your restaurant immediately after the earthquake.'"

**Family time in a new city**

"We really had to support each other in this new environment and one of the key tools was eating together. I had friends here in Auckland but my children had none so our family dinner was the focus of our night."

**Learning what's important**

"I'm not so bothered about buying stuff. Possessions – they're not important although it was nice to get the books out, and the paintings."



Celia selects wines from importer Maison Vauron.



Later that day she managed to collect her sons Daniel and Oliver from Christ's College, her daughter Alice from cousins in Merivale and her mother from Bishopspark rest-home. With her home destroyed and her work premises locked down within the CBD cordon, the most sensible thing to do that day was move her family to Banks Peninsula where she owns a farm with her husband (from whom she is separated) and the store and café at Duvauchelle. She was joined by three restaurant staff, two tutors and 15 of her students who, over the following few weeks, completed their NZQA food and wine syllabus at the Duvauchelle Store.

And then they all left and went home, leaving Celia to consider her options. "No home, no business, no income. When the quake struck we were told we'd be able to get back into the building in a few weeks but then there were all the aftershocks and the reality was that, even if we could get in, what would we do?" Very quickly she realized she would have to leave Christchurch. It was a decision she never thought she'd make. Her family is Christchurch. Sir Hamish Hay, her father, was mayor for 15 years; her grandfather, Sir James Hay, was a well-known philanthropist who founded Hay's department store and left his mark on the city.

But she couldn't let the past distract her from what was ultimately a business decision. She decided, very quickly, to open a campus in Auckland. It seemed the obvious place to go. During the previous year she had run a wine programme in the city and she'd had offers of help from AUT University. As her son Daniel puts it: "It was a 'why not?' sort of time". Hard as it was, the children were right behind her decision and they joined her on covert raids to rescue what they could from their red-stickered apartment.

"Look at the shambles," Celia says as she clicks through the images on her laptop. The photos show a collapsed stone frontage, missing roof tiles, rubble and dried silt from liquefaction. Inside, you can see how the whole building has sunk into the ground, buckling and bowing the now-sodden carpeted floors. "It was a lovely old building. All this stonework, the old fireplace, the windows... and this antique sideboard. It's still there, rotting."

The Victoria Street building looked solid in comparison but it was shaken up inside and the smell was terrible. The earthquake had struck during class time. "The students had been cooking lamb navarin and the pots were still there. We'd just had 200 kilos of lamb delivered to the chiller... the blowflies were outrageous."

Within eight weeks of the earthquake the family had said goodbye to all that. Celia leased an apartment in Remuera and they drove to Auckland with their possessions packed into 10 banana boxes. A year on and the family is settled. The children have made friends, they've adjusted to their new schools and all three help out backstage at the New Zealand School of Food & Wine. The business is operating out of smart new premises at the Viaduct Basin with a curriculum that's been broadened to suit its new market. Celia has added cocktails to the mix and a new Foundation Programme that's a precursor to the

existing advanced cooking and sommelier courses. She's also established networks with Auckland restaurants and chefs who can offer her students the valuable work experience she used to provide at Hay's.

"Moving here has opened up a whole raft of new opportunities for me. It's a bigger city, there are more jobs and we're offering more. But we're trying to build the business out of cash flow. It's back to start-up." She is an expert on start-ups but this one has been made so much harder by "the terrible mess" that has followed the earthquakes.

By mess, Celia means insurance. Eighteen months on, the status of her Victoria Street building is still unresolved. Engineering reports have so far cost her claim \$80,000 but she won't receive a pay-out until her insurers decide whether or not the building is worth saving. There are ongoing issues with the calculation of her business-interruption insurance and the money for Cranmer Court has been held up by disputes within the body corporate. This means that for the last 18 months Celia has been servicing a mortgage for an apartment that's unsafe to enter.

In the meantime she has devoted a small corner of her new school to Christchurch. Hay's restaurant awards hang on the walls along with paintings rescued from the apartment. There are framed family pictures, an old print of the original Hay's department store and several civic photographs. One commemorates the opening of the new town hall in 1972. "Look, you can see us all sitting there in the front. The theatre was named after my grandfather."

She's glad her father isn't around to see the demolition of Christchurch. But, as she has said so often, when disaster strikes there's no use crying about it. "You have to be resilient. There are points where you just have to step back, call it what it is and make some hard decisions. People can get stuck; I didn't want that to happen. I'm determined to keep looking to the future."



UNIQUE TO  
SANTAFÉ  
• Exciting NEW  
Colour Range  
• NEW Woodlore  
Plus Shutter



Effective  
insulation for  
your windows

Maximise  
your view  
and control  
privacy levels



Filter harsh  
UV but let  
the light, view  
and breeze in

The ultimate  
in style and  
versatility

Call us today on 0508 274 888 for a free  
In-home consultation  
santafeshutters.co.nz  
Shutters, Rollers, Blinds and Curtains