

# FINE *Romance*

Aucklanders Jacqui and Phil Dixon set great store by quality, as their fine foods business Sabato shows. So too does their kitchen, a cleverly designed space perfect for entertaining

Words MARIA HOYLE / Photography VANESSA AND MICHAEL LEWIS



Jacqui and Phil Dixon in the kitchen of their Freemans Bay home.

J & P



**Y**ou might say Jacqui and Phil Dixon have the most enviable pantry in Auckland. As owners of fine food store Sabato, they have access to the best imported ingredients. From quality balsamic vinegar and rich olive oil mayonnaise to succulent olives from Verona and buttery Spanish beans, the food-loving pair have a world of flavour at their fingertips.

Since 1993 the couple have been sourcing fine foods from Europe – mostly from small businesses who use traditional methods to create products of outstanding quality – which they import, distribute, and sell online and through their retail store in Mount Eden, Auckland. The pair pop overseas regularly to seek out suppliers, and have introduced Kiwi palates to a range of exciting new flavours and products such as La Chinata smoked paprika, El Navarrico piquillo pimientos and Valrhona chocolate.

A ‘pantry’ of that calibre requires a kitchen/dining area to match, and theirs doesn’t disappoint. Sleek, modern and streamlined, the elegant neutral tones are punctuated with pops of colour from crockery, tableware and art

– not to mention the spectacular Tom Dixon metallic pendant lights over the dining table.

Apart from the oven and dishwasher, which the couple have upgraded, the kitchen is much as it was when they moved into the one-and-a-half-storey weatherboard villa in Auckland’s Freemans Bay. The house dates from around 1890 and “has a lovely flow”, says Jacqui. It had already been renovated by Jones Architects when they moved in five years ago. “It has been renovated to meet the needs of contemporary living, while retaining many of the best classic architectural features of its original form.”

Jacqui especially loves the kitchen. “Everything is within easy reach and the surfaces are practical as well as attractive. The butler’s pantry with a second sink is useful.”

They’ve added some “extremely comfortable barstools” from ECC on the dining side of the island-style bench so guests can linger with a wine while they chat to their busy hosts. “The seats can also be lowered to provide extra seating around the table and look as good as the day they were purchased about five years ago.”

Wherever they live, the kitchen is the heart of Jacqui and Phil’s home. “We like the way [this kitchen] is integrated into our dining and living spaces so it can be part of a much larger convivial space.”

They both love to cook; “don’t ask who’s best though!” No-fuss is their trademark style. “Sabato Duck Confit with finely sliced potatoes cooked beside it in the duck fat and a green salad dressed with Colonna Lemon-infused Extra Virgin Olive Oil and Forum Chardonnay Vinegar or Giusti Balsamic Vinegar is a simple gourmet dinner, and takes about 30 minutes.”

Their entertaining style is fun and relaxed, but there’s no dancing on the tables into the



The butler’s pantry has plenty of shelving and a handy second sink.

## WHAT FIVE THINGS ARE ALWAYS IN YOUR *fridge?*

- 1 PEDRAZZOLI SMALL GOODS** “Particularly the coppa, pancetta and prosciutto.”
- 2 CHEESES** “We always have Montanari and Gruzza Parmigiano-Reggiano and a selection of farmhouse NZ cheese on hand.”
- 3 SABATO MAYONNAISES** “They’re brilliant as a sauce or dressing.”
- 4 GREEN VEGES** “We love a rocket salad with shavings of Parmigiano, extra virgin olive oil and Giusti balsamic vinegar.”
- 5 AKAROA SALMON** “Particularly their hot smoked version as it’s rich and delicious.”





wee small hours. “We love to start early and finish early, as do a few of our friends. We are not often late night owls.”

As for the food itself, it’s all about quality. Risotto and paella are regulars on the dinner party menu, as are braises. “A leg of lamb plugged with garlic, drizzled with extra virgin olive oil, dusted with the La Chinata smoked paprika and/or Sabato Porcini Powder then anointed with Romulo capers and/or Salvagno pitted olives roasted slowly is well received.”

On weeknights they enjoy tuna in a green salad using the olive oil from around the fish, sharpened with a splash of chardonnay vinegar as a dressing. The tuna is also delicious dressed this way with a jar of white farmhouse beans or chickpeas and slices of piquillo pimientos.

On the weekend, they can do something that takes a little longer. “I’ve made the boned chestnut-stuffed turkey recipe in our latest catalogue a few times. It’s also great cold sliced very thinly and served with our tarragon, yuzu or aioli mayonnaise.”

Holiday cooking at their 1890s Russell cottage has a flavour all of its own. “We still have some great pots etc but the oven is an Atlas upright with electric hobs and its own personality!” □



CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE LEFT: Jacqui loves the kitchen surfaces, which are “practical as well as attractive”. Dinner parties are all about relaxed sophistication around their Studio Italia table. Place settings of Christian Lacroix porcelain crockery, Roberts and Belk cutlery, Riedel glassware and French jacquard table linen set the scene.

## FAVOURITE *kitchen items*

**1 KNIVES** “We love our knives – in particular the Peter Lorimer handcrafted ones, which are a pleasure to use as they are beautiful as well as functional.”

**2 SUNBEAM ELECTRIC KNIFE** “We treasure the ancient Sunbeam electric knife on semi-permanent loan from Julie Le Clerc (chef and food writer). This is put to good use making the occasional tray of chicken, yuzu mayo and pine nut club sandwiches for staff occasions at Sabato (an egg, spring onion and aioli version is also popular).”

**3 FISHER AND PAYKEL OVEN** “We didn’t want to redo the whole kitchen in order to replace it, so we needed one that fitted the space. Fisher and Paykel ruled the day! It suits our needs well.”

**4 MIELE DISHWASHER** “We appreciate our Miele dishwasher with its top-mounted cutlery tray for unpacking. And it copes well with fine crockery and wine glasses.”

**5 MAUVIEL COPPER POTS AND PANS** “They hold and spread heat so evenly.”

