



Left: Eva and Maria Konecsny in their Gewürzhaus spice shop in Melbourne's Block Arcade. Above: Chilli salt by the scoop.

House of spice

MELBOURNE'S THREE GEWÜRZHAUS SPICE SHOPS ARE PROVING TO BE AN ALLURING MECCA FOR FIESTY FOODIES.

Words and photography **Jocelyn Pride**

Sisters Eva and Maria Konecsny might be the new kids on the Block Arcade in Melbourne, however they understand tradition. Time spent cooking in the kitchen of the family home in Germany with their mother, aunts, grandmother, and great grandmother opened their eyes to the world of food. Today, they own and manage the largest herb and spice emporium in Australia.

FREE SMELLS

Walking into (because it's impossible to walk past) any of the three Gewürzhaus shops (German for spice house) is a feast for the senses. Brightly coloured, hand blended herbs and spices sit in clear tubs waiting for customers to scoop them into small pretty bags. An alluring earthy aroma lingers in the air, conjuring up visions of Marrakesh, Delhi and Istanbul. Even the names of the 300+ blends read like an international restaurant – Thai Tom Tom, Venetian Gondola, Mayan Chilli Chocolate or my personal favourite, Goddess of Hunting. Local exclusive blends include Macadamia Nut Dukkah, Kangaroo spice, BBQ Bloke's spice and Native Lemon Pepper. This is the ultimate 'lolly shop' for grown-ups.

"We wanted to create a total sensory experience that evokes emotion and transports people to faraway places," says Eva. And that's exactly what these enterprising young ladies have achieved, despite the hurdles of limited retail experience and the GFC.

STARTING OUT

With a background in property investment, choosing the right location was paramount. In late 2009 they found the perfect position – an ice-cream shop in the foodie haven, Lygon Street, Carlton. To avoid requesting a pardon to transform gelato into spices in Little Italy during a Melbourne summer, the sisters instead chose to learn how to make ice-cream.

"For four months we made ice-cream from 7am to midday and then sold it until midnight. At the same time we were sourcing suppliers, organising the shop refit and experimenting with our own blends of herbs and spices."

Melbournians immediately embraced Gewürzhaus when it opened its Carlton doors in June 2010. Within a year a second shop was established in Toorak and in late 2012, the crowning glory – a Gewürzhaus in the magnificent Block Arcade.

COOKING SCHOOL

Responding to customer demand, the sisters also recently incorporated a cooking school into the Toorak shop. Perching on a stool in the cosy demonstration area is like sharing an afternoon in a passionate cook's kitchen. Interactive courses like *The Flavours of Morocco*, *From Persia with Love* and *Edible India* include generous tastings, recipes and holiday dreams.

Eva and Maria's attention to detail is their signature. Lovingly restored antique shop furnishings, unique blends of herbs and spices free of fillers and additives, elegant gifts for cooks, old-fashioned personal service and a brand name in the beautiful handwriting of their grandfather.

Managing the growth of Gewürzhaus is one of the greatest challenges facing this dynamic duo, but one thing is certain; if Oma was still alive today, she would be very proud of her granddaughters.

+ Info

+ Gewürzhaus

Shopping is also available online (minus the aroma) at gewurzhaus.com.au. The hand blended herbs and spices can be shipped anywhere within Australia and even internationally by arrangement. Spice appreciation and cooking classes are held on a regular basis. A full schedule of upcoming classes is posted online.