

Fiona finds her niche

TO paraphrase *Little Britain*, Fiona Thomas is something of “a laaaady”.

She’s a lady who loves playing ladies so much that she’s turned it into a business called Antiquitea, catering for swish afternoon tea parties with the finest collection of bone china and linen.

And Perth fans of cha and featherlight scones are voting so avidly with their pinkies that Fiona has bookings for her beautiful vintage tea sets, white tablecloths, floral arrangements and antique silverware right through to December.

They are finding that parlour talk is at its juiciest when shared over smoked salmon with chive cream cheese finger sandwiches, caramelised onion and feta cheese tarts and melting moments.

It all started when Fiona was living in London and went to

the Ritz Hotel for its famous high tea.

“I was blown away and the experience just set something off inside of me,” says Fiona.

When she returned to Perth she began collecting fine bone china – her first purchase being a pastel Tuscan trio from the Station St markets in Subiaco.

When her collection outgrew her china cabinet she decided to hold an afternoon tea for her girlfriends one Melbourne Cup day and she discovered that lurking underneath the veneer of every modern woman is a passionate yearning to revisit the past.

“The event began with handwritten invitations where I asked the girls to come to a high tea and I tried to re-create the recipe from *The Ritz*,” she says. “They all dressed in beautiful frocks and wore hats and I put flowers everywhere and we played party games.”

The guests loved it so much they sent handwritten thank-

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you notes and suggested she launch a business catering for such events.

That sealed her hunch that there was a niche in the market and she now finds herself the only caterer in Perth planning such events, down to the place cards, party games, choice of venue and the menus.

Just one year on from tentatively launching her website, she has now catered for corporate events, baby showers, hens’ afternoons and all sorts of birthday parties for up to 80 guests. And here’s the best bit: she even does the washing up.

★ Check it out at www.antiquitea.com.au

SCARY BUSINESS
DRIVERS heading towards Freo should not be alarmed if they drive by Harvest restaurant to see one of their favourite chefs in a red T-shirt, black pants and a butcher’s apron with a stick up his back.

It’s just the latest addition to the staff warding off the ravens and seagulls from the restaurant’s seedlings.

The North Fremantle eatery has always been known for its fresh, seasonal produce.

But it has added kudos with chef-owner Clint Nolan gearing up to harvest his own heirloom vegies from the vacant lot next door.

The restaurant’s quirky front garden has long been a traffic-stopper. Where it was once home to a statue of a naked man under the shower, the chef scarecrow now attracts a steady stream of comments from passers-by.

Nolan has also involved staff by getting them to compost

organic kitchen waste. “It has been a great team effort for the past six months,” he says.

“We were sick of looking over at the sandy rubble. “So we decided to approach the owner to see if we could plant a vegetable garden there.”

Planting of beetroot, radishes, rocket, chervil, chamomile and carrots will start soon. The first crop of micro herbs is expected on the menu within weeks.

OOH LA LA
POH Ling Yeow, the host of the ABC’s *Poh’s Kitchen*, has revealed she has a thing for Frenchmen. Well, those based in Perth.

The latest Gallic chef to charm her is Alain Fabregues – the 61-year-old owner chef of the award winning Loose Box – who has just released his first cookbook, *Degustation*.

The Malaysian-born *MasterChef* 2009 runner-up was so taken by Alain when she cooked with him at the recent Mundaring Truffle Festival that she asked him to appear on her popular television show next month. “He showed me how to cook his intricate signature dish, the truffle egg,” says Poh, who recently toured Paris with another Perth chef, *Poh’s Kitchen* regular Emmanuel Mollois.

“I am becoming really fond of French cooking, having grown up with the louder end of the spectrum with Malaysian food,” says Poh.

“And I love the accent, of course.”

MATT’S CALLING CARD
MASTERCHEF star Matt Preston left a bit more than a lasting impression at new South Fremantle burger bar Missy Moos when he dropped in recently.

Matt knuckled down with the felt-tip pens and paper – meant to entertain kiddies – and drew a picture which he bequeathed to the establishment.

Owner Lee Mansbridge is suitably chuffed to be the beneficiary of the artwork, which features Matt and his dining pals, Nathan, Nat and Shaun McManus from Nova radio station. “We’ll treasure that,” she says.



Time for tea: Fiona Thomas runs her business called Antiquitea, where her skills with scones are legendary. Picture: Karin Calvert

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