

CULINARY AMBASSADOR

What is important about Tony Bullivant's association with entertainment celebrities and international business leaders is that their enthusiastic response to Bullivant's food preparation has helped spread his message.

They head home influenced by the Bullivant brand of taste diplomacy, a fresh attitude to New Zealand firmly in place.

Fresh is correct: finest, freshest, innovative in preparation and presentation, colourful. Memorable.

Tony Bullivant doesn't brag about the celebrities he has met and cooked for. When a name is tossed into the conversation as an example observed in a star-spotting column, he recalls what the 'celeb' said about food and describes how he set about checking personal requirements.

He has been called 'chef to the stars', but Tony Bullivant doesn't make such claims. Suggest to him, however, that he is something of an ambassador for the amazing scope and flexibility of cuisine based on fresh New Zealand produce and you'll get a firm nod of agreement.

Kelvin King reports...

These requirements (sometimes exacting rather more than exact) noted, the Bullivant method is to translate them into optimum usage of the best New Zealand produce.

'Best' can lead to days of scouring market and supplier warehouses, buying direct from trusted producers and sussing out new sources, alerted by a fruitful grapevine.

The results, he says quietly, make it all very worthwhile.

MR OLGA AND THE SEAFOOD SPECIAL

Much of Bullivant's VIP feeding in recent years has been at Waimanu, a luxurious mansion in Herne Bay, Auckland. His company, Food for Thought Catering Ltd, handles most of the Waimanu catering, a contract won originally through Grahame Haggart who is responsible for running the complex.

This arrangement has been a perfect opportunity for Tony Bullivant. People who stay at Waimanu or use it for functions are seldom short of a dollar. On the other hand, they are keenly aware of true value.

Take Mr Olga, a top executive of Sony Corporation.

He flew to New Zealand for a few days on a company jet, accompanied by family and colleagues. Business, golf, a brief look at a country he had never previously visited.

Staff indicated in advance that the boss was keen to try local dishes. Tony Bullivant and his team responded by devising draft menus which were faxed for perusal in Japan.

One meal, for instance, featured loin of venison as the main course and a concoction of fresh New Zealand fruit



Yet another succulent creation from chefs Tony Bullivant (left) and Kevin Wilson.