

restaurant and helping it win the Corbans Restaurant of the Year title for two years in a row.

FIJIAN FOODIE

Eventually, the need for a further challenge took Tony Bullivant north to Fiji where he was executive chef for the group operating the Gateway Hotel in Nadi, the Tradewinds in Suva, and Plantation Island Resort.

Home for two years was Plantation Island, commuting to Nadi and Suva as necessary. "It made up for all those summers I'd missed out on," he laughs now.

It also contributed further to his growing interest in national cuisine. At the restaurants under his command, he strengthened the emphasis on local produce, cooking methods and regional dishes.

Distinctive Fijian cuisine is fairly limited, but Bullivant expanded menus as much as he could and put a lot of work into presentation of meals — especially buffets — in a colourful Fijian idiom.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT CATERING LTD

But the desire to be his own boss, to set up a catering company revelling in New Zealand produce, grew slowly from an interest to a determination.

He saw a niche that was largely untapped, catering for clients at the upper end of the market. Presentation was a weak spot for many caterers, he felt. Food for Thought would do it a little differently, offering top quality at reasonable cost, based on a very personalised concern for the client's needs.

In three years, the company has grown substantially. At first, Bullivant leased restaurant and nightclub kitchens to work from, seeking out and handling catering assignments one by one.

He had several good contacts to start with, but the venture accelerated only after a number of jobs had been achieved successfully. Personal recommendations

are a key to this work, along with return business from satisfied clients who now number in the hundreds.

Bullivant has also grown his client base by gentle direct mail approaches to appropriate targets. There is no need for extravagant claims.

WAIMANU'S MAGIC TOUCH

Becoming closely associated with Waimanu has been a magic touch for Bullivant and Food For Thought Catering Ltd.

The link was forged largely because of his knowing Grahame Haggart, but also because his attitudes towards superb New Zealand cuisine coincided 100 per cent with the Waimanu concept.

Waimanu is a large mansion in luxuriant gardens, overlooking Waitemata Harbour. It was built by a property developer using as its core inspiration the Waikiki, Hawaii, resort called Halekulani. This resort was in turn created around a beachside mansion of distinctive Hawaiian colonial architecture.

Purchase by Scottish businessman David Murray, who has extensive retailing interests in this country as well as major holdings in Britain and elsewhere, made Waimanu available for much of the year as a functions venue and for the accommodation of visitors wanting the very best.

Murray has similar set-ups in both England and Scotland. His other interests include ownership of the Glasgow Rangers football team.

Herne Bay neighbours who had a perception of Waimanu as a noisy

reception centre, perhaps even with rugby teams whooping it up, helped delay a liquor licence for the property. But the objectors were won over and nobody has had cause for complaint.

Who would want to complain, anyway, when the guests in residence are Rod Stewart and Rachel Hunter, for instance. Bullivant discovered they were happy to do their own barbecue cooking some nights and were oriented to good but plainish food at other times.

Paul and Linda McCartney, along with three of their children, were a Waimanu highlight. Bullivant had never cooked organic food before their arrival and put considerable time into researching product availability and recipes.

Linda McCartney, well-known for her bestselling organic cookbook, was delighted with the Bullivant offerings and spent some time with him in the Waimanu kitchen. She took back with her, possibly for inclusion in a cookbook, recipes for several dishes such as bean curd in shiitake mushrooms wrapped in spinach.

COCO PAZZO CAFÉ

Tony Bullivant also uses several other premises for catering projects and does a lot of jobs at private residences, offices and even farms.

Base kitchen in Auckland is a warm and friendly café in the gentrifying Market Road shops on the edge of Remuera, One Tree Hill and Greenlane suburbs and only a few minutes from Newmarket.

Bullivant runs this in partnership with

**“Our produce is absolutely
superior. We’ve got to
capitalise on it”**
