

regarded French Cafe for nine years – before Cibo, where she remains after 11 years.

Her mum often eats at the restaurant and loves it, especially the desserts! “She’s not shy to tell me if she doesn’t like something either,” says Kate. “I still ring her for advice too. At one point we put a tongue dish on the menu and I called Mum to work out the cooking technique. I really value those old-school methods.”

This year Kate’s taking Bev to Bali. “She’s going to love it, seeing and tasting things she’s never tried before.”

### Aunty Mona’s famous sponge drops

This was handed down to Kate’s mum Bev from her Aunty Mona. Kate thinks Bev’s are just as good but hers are still a ‘work in progress’.



- 85g caster sugar
- 85g flour
- ½ tsp baking powder

Beat egg whites with the salt for a few minutes until stiff. Add caster sugar and beat well. Whisk in yolks then fold in flour and baking powder (Aunty Mona insisted you must fold in with a knife). Put teaspoon-sized dollops on a tray lined with baking paper and sprinkle with caster sugar. Bake for 5-7 minutes at 200°C then remove from the tray immediately and cool. Sandwich together with cream before eating.



### Sonia Bejjani

Owner of Sami’s Kitchen (Lebanese spice blend company), Christchurch Sonia Bejjani grew up in Beirut, enveloped in a typical Middle Eastern attitude towards food – enormous servings shared with friends and family. Sonia’s mother Malakeh never worked and



spent her life cooking and caring for everyone around her.

“I can still smell her kibbeh [a blend of ground meat and bulgur wheat mixed with ground onion, mint, basil, pine nuts, onions and seasoning] and falafel frying,” Sonia says. “I remember sitting around the table with her and my aunties stuffing courgettes with rice, mince and spices. It was a fiddly job so all the women in the house would do it together and chat and gossip.”

Sonia and her husband Sami emigrated to New Zealand in 1989 to escape warfare. They couldn’t find work in their chosen fields but being resourceful types and excellent cooks, they set up a Lebanese takeaway.

Her business concept arose from Sonia joking with her son, Hayssam, that she would grind up spices and sell them when she was retired to avoid boredom. Sami’s Kitchen was born, specialising in spice blends for falafel, shawarma (a meat wrap), shish tawook (marinated chicken), and za’atar (a spice mix used in lots of Middle Eastern dishes). She’s doing a roaring trade.

Malakeh died 13 years ago but her legacy lives on.

### Loubieh w riz (green beans & rice)

This hearty dish is a family favourite.

- 3 Tbsp cooking oil
- 2 diced onions
- 6 cloves garlic, chopped
- 500g meat cubes (preferably lamb shanks or shin beef)
- Salt and all spice (pimento) to taste
- 1kg green beans,
- fresh or frozen
- 1 can tomato purée
- 1 Tbsp tomato paste
- 750ml water



Put oil in a saucepan and cook onion and garlic until lightly coloured. Add meat cubes and brown. Season with salt and all spice. Add beans, mix well with meat and cook for about 15 minutes, stirring occasionally. Add tomato purée and paste and cover well with water. Bring to the boil, reduce the heat and leave to simmer until meat is tender. Serve with rice. ■