



Celebrating World Olive Day with Helen Melser

In honour of World Olive Day on November 26th, let me introduce you to Helen Melser, a true olive enthusiast. Below is her inspiring journey in the world of olives...

My husband & I planted a small olive grove 28 years ago in Masterton and my love for the olive tree grew, indeed it has been said I became obsessed. This is probably true, as I have visited many 'olive' countries since planting those trees, established a business, Elaia Gourmet Olives and written a cookbook, The Olive Tree in my Kitchen which has 80 mostly original and unusual recipes and outlines recent research and some of my travels.

In Greece, I met the producer of the Kalamata olives I had been buying for my business. We shared jars of our sweet olives and he agreed mine were far superior!

In Croatia, I participated in the 1st World Olive Picking Championship.

In Crete, I hugged the ancient olive tree in Vouves, said to be about 4,000 years old and bought home bottles of its precious oil.

In China, I was there for the release of their very first *olea europaea* harvest.

In Syria, I met an 80yr old olive grower who took me into the cave he was born in.

In Morocco, I visited ancient groves and met a donkey which still pulled the ancient stones to crush the olives (and I fulfilled my dream to go into the desert on a camel!)

In France, I took Wairarapa oils to the World Institute of the Olive Tree, for tasting, to glowing reports.

I was in Crete this September and discussed an idea for a children's 'olive' book with Katerina, the granddaughter of the family who owned the Vouves olive tree before gifting it to the city of Chania. She remembers as a child playing in the hollow trunk.

And my friend Kiara who is passionate about teaching children to recognise and appreciate 'real' olive oil and hosts on site creative workshops. A current trend overseas. Together we hope to inspire both children and adults.

Kiara and George are biodynamic growers of Koroneiki olives. Their oil is top quality and sold worldwide. I took two bottles of organic New Zealand Koroneiki with me for them to taste, compare and comment - Ross Vintiner's, Dali and Peter Crelinsten's, Puketi Olives Farm. Both

were highly regarded by George and a couple of other expert tasters. They were amazed at the quality of these NZ oils. A big thumbs up!

If you are interested in finding out more or get a copy of her book (discounted price of \$25 including urban postage), please do not hesitate to contact Helen by email helen.melser@gmail.com.



Helen grove in Masterton before they sold it in