

BUSH


Keir Tunbridge finds that a uniquely Australian food venture at Youngs Siding was set up by a Swiss couple who did their homework on the Internet before making the move to Albany.

NESTLED ON A HILL IN PICTURESQUE Youngs Siding is a café that, according to its owners, is the only one of its kind in WA.

Its uniqueness lies in the fact that it's not just serving and selling home-grown native Australian bush foods, but is also part of a venture that includes a plantation, a bush-food factory and tourist accommodation.

Surprisingly, this unique corner of WA wasn't even started by Australians.

Swiss couple Bjorn and Claudia Form set up The Bushfood Factory six years ago after some extensive research in Switzerland on Australian native plants.

A woman with dark curly hair and glasses, wearing a white patterned button-down shirt, sits at a dark wooden table in a cafe. She is holding a white menu board on the left and a silver binder menu board on the right. The cafe has large windows looking out onto greenery. In the background, there are wooden chairs and tables, and a counter area with various items.

Claudia Form's speciality is curry, flavoured with bush spices.

FOOD SWISS STYLE



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CLAUDIA FORM, FAR LEFT



They began their Internet research after wondering if, like their homeland, Australia had its own edible native plants.

Bjorn said the couple's crops yielded fruit for the first time two years ago, which is when the café opened.

"The idea was not to make a café at first, the idea was to have a commercial kitchen to process our Flavours of Oz products," he said.

"We have different types of jams, sauces and chutneys and things like that, made with bush foods.

"These are processed in here, so that's the other business we have. Then the café came on top of that."

Before leaving Switzerland and flying down under, the couple did as much research as they could on the Internet.

"We didn't know anything about

bush foods, we're not from agriculture," Bjorn said.

"I'm an engineer, so it's completely different.

"It wasn't easy because there was nothing we could taste or see in Switzerland."

After arriving in Australia, the couple travelled down the east coast, visiting some established bush-food growers and learning as much as they could.

The early years were largely trial and error.

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Now the Forms are growing about

20 different types of bush foods, including lemon myrtle, bush tomato, wattle seed and native mint.

CLAUDIA TAKES CARE OF THE cooking in the café.

Her specialty is curry – flavoured with bush spices, of course.

Bjorn said there is a distinct difference between traditional Australian bush tucker and the term "bush food".

"Bush tucker is when you're in the outback and you have to survive and suddenly you have to eat anything," he said. "What we are trying to do is to integrate that into an international dinner for everyone's tastebuds.

"The menu we have here is not something you are going to eat in the outback. It's more gourmet, with new flavours.

"The thing with bush food is how to integrate it into everyday cooking, so that's what we want to show."

But what made a Swiss couple want to jet to the other side of the world and start a business based around little-known Australian bush foods?

"We left Switzerland to get out of the rat race," Claudia said.

"My family thought we were a bit crazy, especially ending up in WA in the Great Southern, which is quite different from Switzerland."

Bjorn said the couple decided the Great Southern was the place to live after visiting his brother, who lives in the Porongurups and runs a well-regarded Thai restaurant with his wife, Maleeya.

"It's a paradise, one of the best places in the world," he said. 