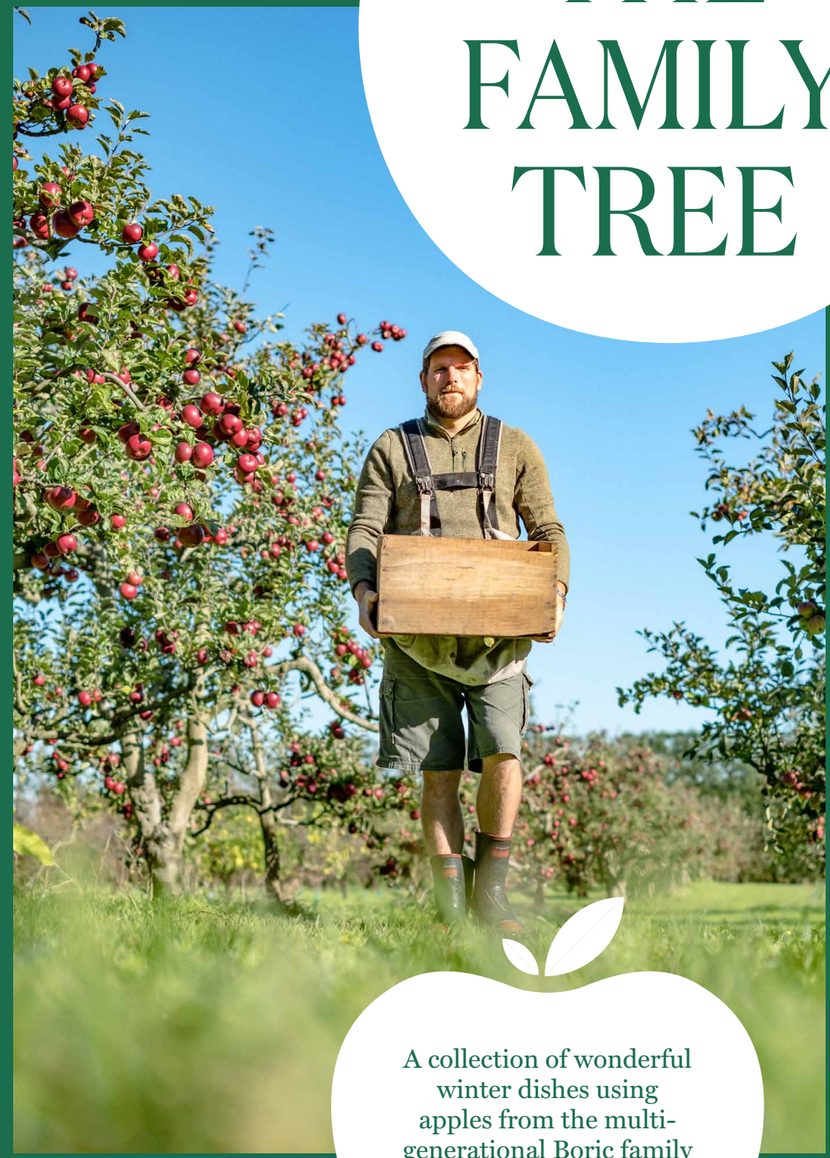
THE FAMILY TREE



A collection of wonderful winter dishes using apples from the multi-generational Boric family orchard in Auckland

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PHOTOGRAPHS Vanessa Lewis

Roadside fruit stalls selling fresh produce on the very property where it's grown are scarce in Auckland these days, but you'll find one of these rarities at the family-owned and operated Boric orchard in Kumeu, northwest of the city centre. Seventeen varieties of apple are grown here, along with pears, citrus, figs, plums and quince. The 'stall' is actually a food market, selling not only the fruit that grows just a stone's throw from the door but also a fantastic range of gourmet products, fine wine and craft beer. Growing apples, though, forms the core of the business and lies at the heart of a family story which begins with Frank and Zorka Boric.

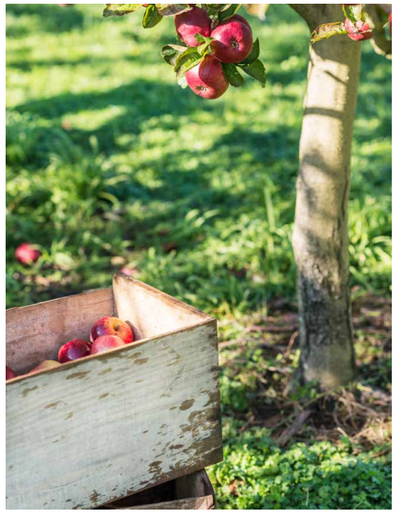
Frank emigrated from Croatia's Dalmatian coast in the late 1920s and Zorka followed suit a few years later, both making their way to Auckland's western suburbs where they met, married and started a family. In 1941, they established an orchard in Henderson where many other Croatian families were planting some of New Zealand's first vineyards. In the early 1960s, the couple bought some land in Kumeu and their sons, Milenko and Barry, together with Frank, transformed the property into a working orchard. Apple trees were planted with various other fruit trees to help with pollination – among them are some old apple and pear trees which were transplanted from Henderson and are still producing fruit 75 years on.

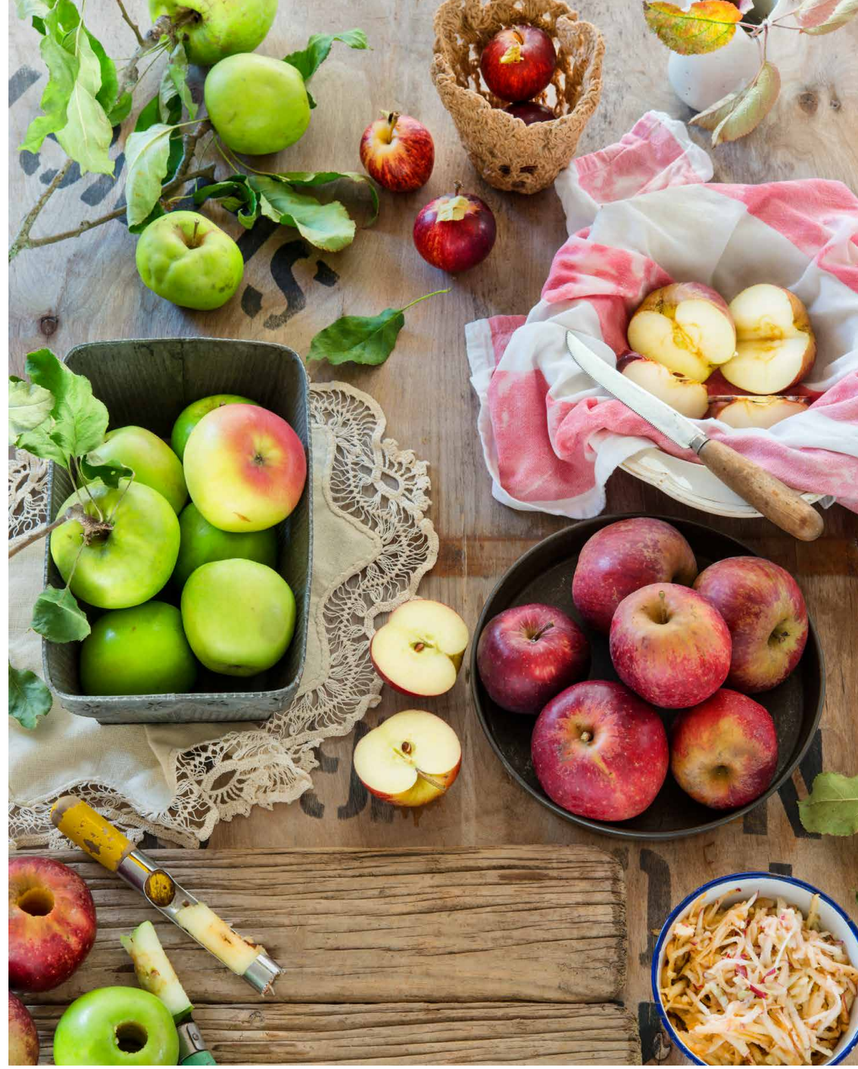
THIS PAGE
Frank and Zorka Boric (above) founded the orchard, which is now managed by their grandson Michael (below). Grandsons Stefan and Franco run the food market.

OPPOSITE PAGE
Milenko Boric, Frank and Zorka's son, helped plant the orchard in the 1960s.

Today the orchard is managed by Michael Boric, the son of Milenko and his wife Sonja. The orchard is now mostly organic, with limited spraying, lots of beneficial insects, and roaming chickens helping to reduce pests and diseases. Gala, Braeburn, Granny Smith, Golden Delicious and Red Delicious are just a few of the popular varieties they grow. Some have an interesting back story such as the tart Oratia Beauty, which takes its name from the place where it was discovered and listed as a new apple by the New Zealand Institute of Horticulture in 1932.

For better quality control, the Boric orchard's apples are 'select picked' as they ripen rather than





All their late-season apples are good keepers and will be stored and chilled on-site to sell throughout the winter

'strip picked', where you just pick every fruit on the tree. This way the fruit's natural sugars and flavours are allowed to develop. For example, Galas can be picked up to five times in a season which starts in late January and finishes in May. By the end of this period, the apples have turned a deep burgundy. By being left to ripen on the tree, the fruit develops more flavour, sweetness and beneficial antioxidants. The apple skin is also known to be packed with vitamin A and C; the old saying 'an apple a day keeps the doctor away' wasn't coined for nothing.

The harvest usually finishes in early June when the family pick their Pink Lady crop. All their late-season apples, including Splendour, Winesap and Kempton, are good keepers and are stored and chilled on-site to sell throughout winter.

Barry and his wife Maria's sons, Franco and Stefan, were responsible for expanding the original fruit store into a food market in 2012 in order to sell vegetables, seafood, meat and wine alongside their orchard produce. They realised the family had a unique location, with their orchard and shop sitting on the corner of State Highway 16 and the Coatesville-Riverhead Highway. In 2014, they turned the old packing shed into a delicatessen with ice cream, coffee and a juice bar, while the wine and specialty area was enlarged to sell homeware and local artisanal food items.

This family recipe was handed down by Zorka Boric who immigrated to New Zealand in 1941 and founded the Kumeu apple orchard with husband Frank. It's a traditional Croatian apple cake and very simple to make. The cake is firm and high, cuts beautifully and keeps well. The texture is reminiscent of a European apple strudel.

Baba Zorka's apple cake

READY IN 1 hour 30 minutes
SERVES 12-16

- 3 eggs
- ¾ cup olive oil or butter
- 1 cup sugar
- 2 tsp vanilla extract
- Finely grated zest 1 lemon
- 3 cups grated Granny Smith apples (about 6 large ones)
- 2 cups flour
- 1 tsp baking powder
- 1½ tsp baking soda
- 1 tsp cinnamon
- ⅓ cup walnuts, roughly chopped
- 1 cup sultanas or sliced prunes

TOPPING

- 1 Tbsp sweet sherry, brandy or rum
- 1 Tbsp chopped walnuts
- 1 Tbsp raw sugar
- 1 tsp cinnamon
- 1 Golden Delicious apple (or Braeburn or Pink Lady)
- Juice ½ lemon

1 Preheat oven to 180°C. Grease and line the base and sides of a 23cm springform cake tin with baking paper.
2 In a mixing bowl, beat eggs, oil, sugar and vanilla together until well combined. Add the lemon zest and grated apple and mix again.
3 Sift in the dry ingredients with a pinch of salt and combine thoroughly. Mix through the walnuts and sultanas then pour into the lined cake tin.
4 In a small bowl, add sherry, walnuts, sugar and cinnamon and stir to mix.
5 Peel and core the apple, cut in half and then into thin slices. Place in a bowl, squeeze over lemon juice and toss apples to prevent them browning.
6 Fan apples out on top of the cake and drizzle sherry mixture on top. Bake for 1 hour or until a small, sharp knife comes out clean when inserted into the centre (if not, bake for 10 more minutes then test again). Place a piece of baking paper over the top of the cake to speed up the final cooking time and prevent the cake from browning too much.

Alpine macaroni with roasted apples

READY IN 1 hour **SERVES** 6

This recipe is based on a typical European 'alpine macaroni'. The béchamel sauce is improved with tasty gruyere cheese, and roasting the apple slices lends sweetness and helps balance out this rich, savoury comfort food. It is lovely served with a crunchy winter salad.

- 500g large Italian pasta tubes (I used rigatoni)
- Juice ½ lemon
- 2 Tbsp olive oil
- 2 Winesap apples (or try Braeburn or Pink Lady)
- 1 red onion

BÉCHAMEL SAUCE

- 3 Tbsp butter
- ¼ cup flour
- ½ tsp salt
- Pinch white pepper
- Pinch ground nutmeg
- 1 bayleaf
- 2½ cups dark blue (full cream) milk
- 1 cup grated gruyere or tasty cheese

TO ASSEMBLE

- Oil, for frying
- 250g middle bacon rashers, rind removed, roughly chopped
- ½ cup grated gruyere cheese

1 Preheat oven to 180°C. Grease a deep 30cm baking dish with butter. Line an oven tray with baking paper.
2 Cook the pasta in a large saucepan of salted water for 10-12 minutes or according to the packet instructions. Drain into a colander.
3 In a small bowl, add lemon juice and olive oil. Core and slice the apples into thick wedges. Toss a handful at a time in the juice and oil then place on the oven tray. Cut onion into thin wedges and toss in the remaining juice and oil then add to the tray. Bake for 10-15 minutes or until just cooked.
4 For the béchamel sauce, add butter to a small saucepan over medium heat and melt. Stir in the flour and allow it to bubble for 2-3 minutes. Add salt, pepper, nutmeg, bayleaf and ½ cup of the milk then stir until smooth.
5 Gradually add the remaining milk in ½ cup amounts, stirring after each addition until smooth. Turn heat to low, add grated cheese and simmer for 8-10 minutes, stirring occasionally. Check sauce for seasoning and adjust if necessary. Remove bayleaf.
6 Heat a large frying pan on medium heat, add a drizzle of oil then the bacon and sauté until just cooked and lightly coloured.
7 Drizzle a little béchamel into the base of the dish, add all the pasta tubes then scatter with most of the apple, onion and bacon. Top with remaining béchamel, apple, onion and bacon plus the gruyere cheese.
8 Bake for 25-30 minutes or until golden on top. Serve with a winter salad.

Little fruities

READY IN 40 minutes
MAKES 30-35 mini balls

These little fritters can be made at short notice and are such a treat to enjoy in the midst of winter after a chilly day out.

- 1 cup milk
- 1 tsp salt
- 2 Tbsp sugar
- 65g butter
- 2 Tbsp rum
- 1 Tbsp sultanas
- 2 Tbsp chopped walnuts
- 1 egg
- 2 tsp vanilla extract
- Finely grated zest 1 lemon
- Finely grated zest 1 orange
- 1 apple, peeled and grated (try Kempton, Ballarat or Braeburn)
- 1¾ cups self-raising flour (see Cook's Notes)
- 2 cups olive oil, for frying
- Icing sugar, for dusting

1 Add milk, salt and sugar to a small saucepan and bring to boiling point. Add butter and stir until it is dissolved. Leave to cool on a trivet or wooden board.
2 Place rum, sultanas and walnuts in a large bowl and soak for 5 minutes. Add egg, vanilla, lemon and orange zest and grated apple to bowl and stir to combine.
3 Gradually add flour and warm milk mixture to wet fruit mix by alternating a little flour and a little milk while whisking with a fork. You should end up with a wet-but-thick mixture that will drop off a spoon. Let it rest for at least 10 minutes.
4 Heat oil in a small pot on medium-high heat until very hot. Gently drop 1 tsp of mixture into oil as a test; if mixture turns golden quickly, the oil is ready.
5 Fry the fritters in batches of 4-6 by dropping dessertspoon-sized amounts directly (and carefully) into hot oil. Cook for 30 seconds until deeply golden then turn and cook for another 30 seconds. Remove and place on paper towels.
6 Sieve icing sugar over the fritters and serve immediately (see Cook's Notes).

COOK'S NOTES • If you don't have any self-raising flour, make some by adding 1½ tsp baking powder to 1 cup plain flour. • If the oil is not hot enough, the fritters won't cook quickly enough and they will be oily. They should turn golden very quickly. • I recommend having a helper to dust the fritters and help with the serving as it is best to eat them right away.

Raw apple muesli

READY IN 20 minutes plus overnight soaking **SERVES** 6

Muesli was created by Swiss physician Maximilian Bircher-Benner in the early 1900s. His original recipe was used to give his patients a healthy alternative to the normal cooked breakfasts. This recipe is basic and easy but can be glammed up with extra grains, seeds and nuts, if you prefer.

- 120g large rolled oats
- ½ cup milk
- ½ cup fresh apple juice
- 1 cup natural yoghurt
- 2 Tbsp lemon juice
- ½ cup sunflower seeds
- 3 large red apples (try Splendour, Braeburn or Kempton)

TO SERVE

- ½ cup thickened cream
- ½ cup natural yoghurt
- ½ cup dried cranberries
- 1 cup Brazil nuts, roughly sliced (or use almonds)
- Raw honey or honeycomb

1 In a medium bowl, mix together oats, milk, apple juice, yoghurt, lemon juice and sunflower seeds.
2 Grate the apples whole and discard the core. Stir the grated apples into the muesli mix, cover and chill overnight.
3 In the morning, fold in the cream, yoghurt and dried cranberries. Sprinkle with Brazil nuts, sweeten with a little honey if needed, and serve. Leftover muesli will keep for two or three days in the fridge.

For more fruity recipes search apple on FOODTOLOVE.CO.NZ

Know your apples

GRANNY SMITH apples originated in New South Wales, Australia, and are named after Maria Ann Smith who propagated the cultivar from a chance seedling in 1868. Maria had many children and became known in the local area as 'Granny Smith'. In 1895, the apples were officially recognised for their excellent shelf life and their suitability for export. They are now grown all around the Southern Hemisphere as well as in France and the US.

WINESAP apples were known in the colonial period in the US. Although their origins are not clear, they are thought to have come from New Jersey. Winesaps are small to medium with a deep cherry-red skin and crisp, yellow flesh. They are a good all-purpose apple for eating, cooking and cider-making.

PINK LADY apples are a very modern apple, first known as Cripps Pink. They are bright red with sweet, pale yellow flesh. They were developed from Golden Delicious and Lady Williams parentage in Western Australia and first produced in 1973. They are a late-season apple, which develops flavour and sweetness on the tree. They are now trademarked.

KEMPTON are a late-season apple, with a thick, dark red skin. They are excellent keepers and good for making cider.

BALLARAT apples originated in Australia in the 1930s. Also a late-season apple, they are green-skinned with a pink blush. They store well and are ideal for cooking and desserts.

SPLENDOUR apples were discovered in a garden in Napier in 1948. They are very crisp and juicy with white flesh and bright pinkish-red skin with occasional russeting. They are available in late autumn and will last well through the winter. They do not travel well and tend to bruise, which is why they are no longer an export fruit.