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Aussie artisanal cheese, beer have B.C. roots

Canadian ex-pat from Quadra Island spreads her passion for locally produced, high-quality food

By Lisa Arcella, Special To The Sun March 7, 2011

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Meredith Morris, originally from Quadra Island, and her

husband Andre run a cheese company, brewery and restaurant in Australia.

Photograph by: Handout, PNG

VANCOUVER - When Meredith Morris was a kid growing up on Quadra Island, she'd spend winter weekends skiing on Mount Washington. Now she finds herself planning seafood barbecues at the beach in her adopted homeland of Australia.

"Life was great in Vancouver," said 35-year-old Morris, whose maiden name was Meredith Brown. "It was a wonderful place to grow up."

But now the mother of two finds herself an artisanal cheese maker, microbrewer and thriving restaurateur in the tiny, artistic enclave of Tamborine Mountain, about an hour from Brisbane, on Australia's Gold Coast.

Morris and her Australian-born husband Andre moved to Australia after 9/11 struck while they were on an extended sailing trip.

"We were in Palma, Mallorca at the time and we had to decide if we wanted to go back to Canada or go to Australia and we thought it would be safer living in Australia," Morris said. After trying their hand raising cattle, the couple decided to open a small cheese factory, Witches Chase Cheese Company after the name of the first National Park in Queensland. The neophytes seemed decidedly unconcerned by their lack of experience.

"We knew how to eat cheese and that's about it," Morris said.

Andre eventually earned a cheese training certification, but the couple quickly learned that the way to make their small business stand out was to offer a quality product.

They get their milk from a local Jersey herd whose milk has a higher fat content, and they use low-temperature pasteurization, which rids the cheese of the bad bacteria, but keeps the good in, Morris said.

Most companies bring the milk to higher temperatures, which kills off both the good and the bad bacteria, she said.

The cheese caught on, and the couple expanded to beer, opening MT Brewery, as well as a five-star Bistro & Grill called Liquid Amber.

Their cheese is now in many top restaurants and a lot of independent pubs have their beer on tap. They have now added weddings and other functions to their roster.

"And that's grown so much, we've put a staff member on that exclusively," Morris said.

Morris said her own passion for food was homegrown in Vancouver.

"I remember when a friend recommended a restaurant to me named Star Anise," Morris said. "Sammi Lalji was the restaurateur and he is quite well known on the food scene.

"The chef at the time was Adam Busby and he was a bit of a rock star. His modern approach to cooking and using fresh local ingredients definitely piqued my interest in food."

Now Australians are catching up to Canada's awareness of how food is produced and are demanding fresh, local products, Morris said.

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