



The distinctive red facade of Andre's L'Escargot in New Plymouth.

Consistent quality is the hallmark of Andre's L'Escargot, which came out on top in Taranaki's inaugural hospitality awards. **SUE CARRINGTON** reports



Andre Teissonniere concentrates on good quality, simple French food.

Photos: MARK DWYER

NEW PLYMOUTH'S longest-serving restaurant, Andre's L'Escargot, won most of the top prizes at the inaugural Halamoana Hospitality awards recently with its traditional recipe — quality French food and top service.

Owner and chef by trade Andre Teissonniere says he doesn't know quite how the awards worked but it's always good to win.

"These awards are a bit of a mystery to many of us but it is good to recognise hospitality. It is good for a first year and it can only get better," he says.

L'Escargot won awards for outstanding restaurant, best ambience and style, outstanding chef and emerging chef.

What's the magic ingredient? Andre says it's about team work and consistency.

He has been in the restaurant business for more than 30 years, 23 of them in the red building on Brougham St and seven years before that on Devon St.

"I don't choose fashion in the restaurant," he says.

"I wanted something to last. And it's the same with our food. Good quality French food and keep it simple.

Andre says there's no secret recipe to being good in the restaurant business.

"You don't see many chefs and restaurateurs driving Mercs. At least, not new Mercs.

"It's about passion. You need to like people or you might as well go be a public servant."

He tries to greet every customer as they walk through the doors — service is key.

He gets distraught that a lot of people are only driven by cost.

"Many people ring up and say 'how much are your mains?' They never ask me 'what do you get for that?' They always look at the price, not what you get."

And anyone who has been to

# Numero un

## Simple recipe for longstanding success



Halamoana Hospitality Awards winners Tim Styles (left, emerging chef) and Erua Stockman (outstanding chef) in the kitchen at Andre's.

Andre's knows that it's an experience to savour.

The ambience is second to none, the bar is warm and inviting and the food is special.

"Going out should be a special occasion — why not make it a good one?"

He says there are too many cafes in New Plymouth for the population.

"Part of going out is being seen and you won't be seen if there's only two in the restaurant."

Erua Stockman, winner of the outstanding chef award, and his sous chef, Tim Styles, who won the emerging chef award, joke that their success has something to do

with the amount of bribing they did.

"I wouldn't have bloody clue how we got it," Erua says as he relaxes before the onslaught of evening guests.

Both chefs graduated from Witt, with Erua now out for five years and Styles for two. Both have worked most of their time at Andre's.

They, too, emphasis the team effort, saying they all work well together and get on well.

"We are like one extended dysfunctional family," Erua jests.

"I have no interest in becoming a star," he says. "Quite happy to be out the back. I like to focus on what I'm doing and do it well."

Andre is proud of his chefs.

"Anyone can cook one good meal, but to do it every night you have to be bloody good," he says.

Erua's theory is that they are similar to McDonalds in a funny sort of way.

"Every time a dish goes out it's a set routine. Always the same way."

Tim started as a kitchen hand at L'Escargot and moved up from there.

Erua gave me this soup recipe, saying simplicity is the key.

"Every dish should have three main flavours — not to complicate things," he advises.

### French Onion Soup

**11 good beef stock (they make it up and it takes about 8 hours, but you can buy good stock at speciality stores)**

**5 onions**

**250ml unoaked chardonnay**

**sour dough bread**

**Gruyere (Swiss) cheese**

Slice onions thinly and brown. Add wine and reduce by two-thirds. Top with beef stock and simmer for 30 minutes. Adjust seasoning to taste.

Ladle into a soup bowl. Cut a circle of bread or break and place on top of soup.

Top with Gruyere cheese and grill until golden brown. □