Taste of Europe: Mike Williamson feels positive about the opening of his new Devon St bistro and bar.
Photo: MARK DWYER

Restaurant refines recipe to spice up Taranaki night life

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A NEW restaurant and bar opens this week in central New Plymouth – and its owner isn't worried by talk of a doomed site or cash-strapped diners.

The Garlic Press begins cooking European style food this Wednesday, with chef-proprietor Mike Williamson optimistic that crowds will come despite a host of previous tenants in the historic building.

"We have completely refurbished the inside and changed the look of the outside and given it a whole new vibe. I think if we get the recipe right the people will come."

The building most recently housed restaurant Simplicity, but in the past 10 years it has been occupied by at least seven different establishments.

Mr Williamson said opening in a recession was a bit of a challenge but Taranaki's nightlife seemed vibrant at the moment. The Mill bar and restaurant is set to reopen after a chequered few years; a new bar, Frederic's, was launched in April by the Macfarlanes group; and Jim Hadlow's upmarket wine bar Montrose opened earlier this year.

"All of these places are hiring staff and I think we're in the right part of town," he said.

The Auckland-bred chef, who completed a hotel management degree in Switzerland, used to work at Gusto restaurant and Waiau Estate winery before becoming a part-owner of the winery.

He had moved to Taranaki to be closer to family.

He said The Garlic Press would focus on Italian, Spanish and French food with a local twist.

It would serve everything from coffee and drinks to tapas and evening meals.

Mr Williamson rents the building from owner Cameron McKay, who previously ran nightclub Salvation from the site.

In the late 1990s the building housed a bar called The Thirsty Bull before being renamed The Duchess of Cornwall.

Mexican bar Areebar followed, before Salvation opened. By 2004 it was the restaurant 4 Seasons, and in 2006 Simplicity opened.