



The sweet life

When Rachel Savage and her family left their home in Wellington for Banks Peninsula, they found a more creative, community-focused lifestyle – thanks to the humble doughnut

In the picturesque seaside settlement of Akaroa on the Banks Peninsula, a 1959 aluminium Airstream caravan is carrying a very special cargo. You can spot it cruising up and down the windy hills before parking up with windows open wide. Hungry patrons arrive in droves, following their noses towards the sweet scent of delectable, often slightly outrageous, homemade doughnuts.

Rachel Savage, the Sweet & Savage doughnut queen, blames her obsession with these sweet, fried favours

The cherry on top For Rachel, there are no rules when it comes to toppings and presentation – the aesthetics of Sweet & Savage's doughnuts are all part of the charm. One thing's for sure, though: they have to taste good!

on the fresh country air and the range of produce running rampant in her garden, begging to be showcased. She's clearly a woman with a vision who doesn't rest on her laurels for long – her current list of job titles includes food stylist and contributor, registered nurse, wife and mum of two. But it's Rachel's talent for concocting creative doughnut flavours that's delighting tourists and locals alike and making the name 'Savage' synonymous with something sweet rather than something scary.



Wheels in motion This 1959 Airstream caravan may have been renovated into the perfect vehicle for selling doughnuts, but it's Rachel who's the real driving force behind Sweet & Savage. Her family's rural property on the Banks Peninsula provides a lot of creative inspiration for the mum-of-two.

As we reminisce about when her doughnut obsession began, Rachel laughs that it started out unintentionally with a food blog. A kitchen junkie from way back whose friends often asked her for recipes, Rachel started posting online to make sharing them easier. Following a move from central Wellington to rural Banks Peninsula, Rachel began playing around with a basic doughnut recipe in her spare time and adorning her creations with an eclectic assortment of toppings before testing them out on appreciative family and friends.

Needless to say, her experiments were a hit, although Rachel insists they aren't anything fancy. She says there are no particular rules when it comes to the toppings. "They are all simple with delicate flavours based on classic combinations," she explains. "I enjoy experimenting and playing around, but you do have to keep it reined in as it still has to taste good!"

Selling these sweet creations on a large scale wasn't in the plan until Rachel and husband Kristin happened to drive past a beautiful, retro Airstream caravan parked up on the side of the road in Burkes Pass, not far from Lake Tekapo, last year. On a whim, Rachel enquired at the local store as to who owned the caravan. The option to buy it was offered right then and there and, after a

year spent renovating the beauty to its former glory, the Sweet & Savage doughnut eatery was born.

Best-selling flavours include chocolate with mint and hazelnut, gin and lemon with poppy seeds, peanut butter with cream cheese and homemade raspberry flakes, vanilla and strawberry with pistachio and rose flowers, and raspberry with lemon and coconut. Presentation is paramount and allows Rachel to let her creative talents shine. "For me, a big part of the doughnut is the aesthetic. Every doughnut is individually hand-crafted and uniquely imperfect."

The caravan's doughnuts now sell out at its pop-up locations thanks to a loyal following on Facebook and Instagram, and the couple supply a number of local Canterbury eateries, too. They've also launched online sales for their Box of Nine, which is proving a hit.

It's safe to say the first year of business has been a busy time. "We have a bit to juggle at the moment with the farm, nursing and family, so I need to be pretty organised," says Rachel. "Every night I prep stuff for the day ahead and get up at 4am to cook the doughnuts fresh while the girls are sleeping. When they wake up around 7am, I'm still beavering away in the caravan to get my orders sorted for the day, so





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Family ties Sweet & Savage is a family affair, with Rachel's husband Kristin heading up the brand's strategy and getting stuck into selling during the busy summer months. Their two children, Pippin (on the right) and Fern, love to lend a hand, too.

my husband gets the kids breakfast before he heads out the door for work.”

But she's not complaining: it's an exciting growth phase for their brand and Rachel enjoys the process of baking, creating and marketing her products. It's very much a joint endeavour, with Kristin dedicating hours to business strategy, as well as getting stuck in with setting up and serving coffee. Friends and family jumped on board to help get the business off the ground last summer and friendly customers often return for more.

Their daughters, Pippin, 5, and Fern, 3, love to help out. “Pippin is obsessed with the caravan and spends hours drawing signs for the eatery. She loves any opportunity to sell as well. Often I'll hear a tiny knock at the caravan door and it's Fern popping in for a visit, but I'm pretty firm with the kids about staying out while I'm prepping.”

For Rachel the best part of the job is the people she meets as she sells her treats. “It's not just about the doughnuts, it's really the people that make it all worthwhile,” she explains. “The basis of Sweet & Savage has always been about people and having a platform to make connections. Sharing food and coffee is a beautiful way to enable this.”

Some exciting opportunities have arisen through these connections too, with Rachel being invited to write recipe contributions for magazines and work on food styling jobs, which she loves. “There are a ton of clever people out there doing some exciting things and we love being able to collaborate with other creatives,” she says.

So next time you are in Akaroa, keep an eye out for the gleaming Airstream. You're in for a treat. •

Doughnut lovers can enjoy coffee and a palm-sized sticky treat from the Sweet & Savage caravan over the coming warmer months when it will be parked at a range of pop-up locations around Akaroa, including a few local music festivals. Follow the caravan's travels online at SWEETANDSAVAGE.CO.NZ | [@HELLOSWEETANDSAVAGE](https://www.instagram.com/hellosweetandsavage)