

Celebrating  
old and  
new takes  
on tradition.



## Home is (still) where the heart is

IF ANYONE doubted traditional homespun kitchen values still had a champion to fly the flag, they should check out the goodies at the next Country Women's Association fair. In fact, on March 5 the association's state fair — held as part of the Melbourne Food and Wine Festival 2011 — will feature more sponge kisses, ginger fluffs, scones, jams, sauces and relishes than you could shake a wooden spoon at.

"There will also be cooking demonstrations," says Country Women's Association of Victoria vice-president Marie Vassallo. "Mainly of scones and sponges, but we'll also be teaching kids how to make pancakes."

The association was formed to support members of the community through tough times. The organisation takes its role extremely seriously; sharing resources such as home-made food and recipes and holding on to heritage values is seen as a way of maintaining the fabric of a community.

And it sees the festival as the perfect vehicle to share its knowledge. "All our events will be about teaching people about some of these traditional skills in a simple, non-threatening way," Vassallo says.

As part of the festival the association will also conduct cooking

classes at the Prahran Market and baking demonstrations during the lunch break at the Masterclass sessions at The Langham. These are part of a program packed with events celebrating heritage, tradition and lost arts of the kitchen.

Another group that holds traditional values dear to its heart and which is hosting an event at the festival has a way of celebrating tradition that might raise eyebrows at the Country Women's Association.

The Hotham Street Ladies (above) grew out of a house the women shared in their younger days.

### Our philosophies are a bit edgier than some.

LYNDAL WALKER

Initially, a casual group of friends with similar interests in food and art and a shared sense of humour, they have evolved into a slightly more formal — if irreverent — unit undertaking food-related projects of various kinds.

"We sort of make it up as we go," says Lyndal Walker, the group's spokesperson. "It varies from recipe books to art installation to cakes in the Royal Melbourne Show."

The group's most recent entry into the show's cake competition was

disqualified for being in "poor taste". Their "Miss Havisham Cake" was a playful work representing a cake that was half-collapsed, with holes chewed in various spots, insects running over it and rats' tails and maggots hanging out.

"I guess our philosophies are a bit edgier than some other people interested in traditional skills like cake decorating," Walker says.

"The forms we admire are very much rooted in tradition but the ideas behind them are more contemporary. We believe that the best way to preserve traditions is to update them and keep them fresh and vital."

The group will host two dinners at Fitzroy's Panama Dining Room inspired by share-house dinners.

Forget tricked-up and beautifully plated food; think home-style share dishes, imaginative cocktails and plenty of laughter and reminiscing.

"It will be a little bit experimental but we hope a lot of fun," Walker says.

DAVID SUTHERLAND

