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Jamie and Josie brew up a storm to take Dilmah crown

Jaimie Stodler, Queenstown's Cup & Cake store owner, and her German-born pastry chef Josie Geimecke have won the Dilmah High Tea competition at the NZ Chefs National Salon final.

Their prize includes a trip to Sri Lanka to attend the Dilmah School of Tea, to help mentor students at the MJF Charitable Foundation's culinary training centre and to see the tea plantations and spice gardens for which the country is renowned as the Isle of Spices.

"We are so proud to have had the honour to compete and to have been recognised for our efforts is amazing," Jaimie says. "I am really into tea, so winning this competition and having the honour of travelling to Sri Lanka, the home of tea, is a dream come true for me. Josie and I couldn't be happier and are so thankful to Dilmah for this amazing opportunity."

The duo won the Central Otago salon in May, which earned them a place in the final to compete against the best in New Zealand over the weekend. Their winning menu consisted of three dishes all showcasing Dilmah tea infusions. One of the dishes included a *pâte à choux* swan filled with Dilmah Italian Almond Tea infused *crème pâtissière*, a piece of raw 'cheesecake' topped with Dilmah Italian Almond Tea pearls and spiced pinot noir cherry pearls and was served with a Dilmah Green Tea kombucha shot.

Jaimie has previously entered a national Real High Tea competition run by Dilmah New Zealand in 2013 earning a bronze medal and later went on to compete brilliantly with Bec Stanley to become runners up in Masterchef 2014.

"There's no doubt that competing in the Dilmah Real High Tea has showed me that the careful brewing of tea and how to match tea with food, or use it in the preparation of food, was as important as presenting seasonally appropriate food," Jaimie says. "While Josie and I both love to travel, we are focused on what we can learn and share as chefs during our visit to Sri Lanka."

Nigel Scott, general manager for Dilmah NZ, says during recent visits by Dilmah Founder Merrill J Fernando and his son Dilhan Fernando, funds were raised toward an annual scholarship for Kiwi culinary professionals to go to Sri Lanka. The goal was for them to help train students at the purpose- built culinary centre just outside Colombo.

The 1850 sq m centre, which was recently opened, will take around 20 students each intake from tea plantation families, those injured in the country's civil war that finished only seven years ago, or people who live with disability. The graduates will be targeted at a growing number of international hotels being developed to meet the country's flourishing tourism industry.

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