

MY FAVOURITE TABLE

David Sole, Botanic Garden manager

I'VE been to Restaurant 88 three or four times and I've always loved going. Look it up – it has great reviews. The food is absolutely good, clean and crisp, with nice flavours. It's slightly Europeanised Vietnamese cuisine but distinctive, with lots of vegetables, very, very cleverly put together, simple and tasty.

The restaurant itself is at street level, clean, comfortable and tidy, with not a lot of background noise. There's certainly a strong hint you're in an Asian restaurant. I try something new each time I'm there. Last time I had lemon chicken on coconut noodles and that was absolutely divine. It's not one of those restaurants you go to and think you could have done just as well at home. The food appears to be simply put together, but it's not. It's really absolutely lovely.

I enjoy cooking. We all cook at home. We have one daughter still living with us and she cooks, too.

I go to a few places in the city. A good one for a quick meal is Public in Courtenay Place, for a pie in a deep plate and a glass of wine for \$15. It's a good deal and I might go there between work and doing something else.

Of course, I sometimes go to Picnic Cafe in the gardens. It's a very distinctive cafe and I think Paul Lester who runs it has cracked it.

This is a beautiful time in the garden, with Tulip Sunday coming up this weekend. The tulips came up early this year but as long as there's not too much heavy rain and wind they will be fine on Sunday. Heavy rain does a lot of damage if it comes when they're on the verge of opening. We know if we plant them in April they'll come out sometime in September. The ground temperature governs the flowering. This has been a warm winter that



Soul food: David Sole eats his favourite dish – lemon chicken on coconut noodles. Photo: KEVIN STENT/FAIRFAX NZ

The details

Restaurant 88

Address: 88 Tory Street, Te Aro, Wellington 6011

Phone: 04 385 9088

Opening hours: Lunch, 11.30am-2.30pm, Friday-Sunday; dinner, 5.30pm till late, Tuesday-Sunday.

brings them on sooner. We don't change the date if they look like they're bursting into bloom before the allotted Sunday. We organise the spring festival around Tulip Sunday.

We plant 26,000 bulbs each year, the same sort every time. We've got to know what works well. The old tried and true is reliable. Every year, the growers offer new varieties and we look at them and how the colours will work with our colour scheme. If we think it's a goer we trial it in a small bed first.

The bulbs come from Southland. After they've finished we dig them up and are happy to give them away

rather than dump them. They come out of the ground some time in late October, depending on the weather. You have to be walking past to get them. We don't advertise it or it would be mayhem. I recall years ago when bedding flowers were being taken up in Lambton Quay and someone got speared by a fork. That's the sort of thing we wouldn't contemplate in this day and age.

At the moment we've got iceland poppies out in the rose garden. The soulangeana magnolia and kowhai are at the end and so are the Sir Robert Peel rhododendron and cherries. There are lots of petals on the ground.

People are always asking what's the best time to visit. This is a special time but all gardens are lovely at any time of the year, a profusion of flowers, the scent, the garden as a green space, or lovely days with the smell of winter and the bare branches of deciduous trees.

If you think about it, there are a lot of elements of a garden in food. You should get equal joy, a feast for the eyes. **AS TOLD TO DIANA DEKKER**