

Essential port of call

Lyttelton's culinary star has risen another notch with the opening of Ground Culinary Centre.

Kate Fraser surveys the shelves.

Lyttelton — port town, historic town, and now food town? Take a walk down London Street and it is hard to disagree with this latest definition of Lyttelton. If it's not a new coffee spot opened, it's a cafe, or a deli, or a restaurant or a revamped bar. The (very good) secondhand and new bookshops, supermarket and galleries could feel left out of it, but they're probably too busy. Shoppers and browsers, eaters and sippers crowd the footpaths, and there are days when finding a free car park requires patience and occasionally a drive around the block. The street shows all the signs of a good business site.

Which could be why Jenny Garing, who owns Ground Gourmet Essentials, a range of spice blends and condiments, bought what was Lyttelton Liquor Centre, on the corner of London and Canterbury Streets, for her new Ground Culinary Centre.

She says that as a port resident, she had always wanted a shop where



All things gourmet: the latest Lyttelton drawcard for foodies is Ground Culinary Centre.

Photos: John Kirk-Anderson

she could buy the type of ingredients that would add a bit of inspiration to her cooking.

"When the liquor centre closed, a few locals expressed their dismay at losing a good wine shop to another food place, but as it happens we kept the liquor licence and have expanded the wine list and everyone seems happy," she says.

Ground was one of the original stallholders at the Lyttelton Farmers Market when it opened in 2005. Its condiments and spice mixes are now available throughout New Zealand.

The Culinary Centre, however, is a step beyond small jars of hand-ground spices. It displays a wealth of detail, and in its scope (although not its size) is not unlike the Dean and DeLuca shop in New York City.

The shelves are arranged in large bays, and, along with a corner of freezers and cabinets, are stocked with what Garing calls "culinary essentials". That translates to fresh pasta (including a chocolate-flavoured pasta — "delicious", apparently, when swirled through creme anglaise), salami, cured meats and cheeses, oils, condiments, organic vegetables and fresh spices. For name-brand shoppers, there is Annie's free-range eggs, Murellan

pork, Lovat Farm venison, Canter Valley duck, Vic's breads and, of course, Ground hand-ground spices and dukkahs.

The whole-spice section, which features a ground-to-order service, includes hard-to-find ajowan and cassia. "You should get them to make you their ground spices for curry," says a passer-by, keen to show local endorsement. "They did one for me and it turned out to be the best curry ever."

Garing wants the shop to be more than a retail outlet. As a seasoned traveller she has enjoyed shopping in major cities and marketplaces, and her palate has been exposed to the traditional spices of China and the elusive flavours of Japan. The Culinary Centre reflects those experiences.

As an enthusiastic cook, she appreciates good tools and her shop also sports a small but interesting selection of good pots and pans, cook books and food and wine magazines. There is coffee to drink there or take away (organic beans from the Lyttelton Coffee Company) and tea, too, with a chest full of black, green and organic blends from Tea Total.

And there is a kitchen. A busy, bustling, steaming, simmering

kitchen, run by chef Barbara Cook, who produces a wide variety of take-home meals. On any given day the selection can include risotto, soups, pasta dishes, roast-chicken meals, and house-smoked salmon and turkey breast. Sandwiches are made to order from Vic's breads and a selection of cheese and deli meats.

Ground had its official opening last Friday after three weeks of settling in. No need to ask how it's going. Even the stock of Ground jars and bottles shows there has been little time for restocking shelves.

"It has been a bit of an upheaval," says Garing.

She is consoled by the thought that no matter how busy her new venture becomes, she will at least be working on one level.

"Up until now we have been making all Ground products in a commercial kitchen that was 67 steps up and then 67 steps down. This is going to be much easier."

□ Ground Culinary Centre, London Street, Lyttelton, is open Monday to Saturday, 10am to 7.30pm, and Sunday, 10am to 5pm. Phone and mail orders welcomed. Phone 328-7275 or go to www.ground.co.nz



Inspired: a seasoned traveller and enthusiastic cook, Jenny Garing has created the sort of place she likes to shop in herself.