

MICHAEL'S NEW MIS

'I'm starting from scratch'

THE DOWN-TO-EARTH CHEF HAS GONE BACK TO BASICS



The *Kiwi Living* chef moved his family from the city to a coastal idyll.

Michael Van de Elzen is looking a little forlorn when the *Weekly* arrives at his rural West Auckland lifestyle block. There's been a death in the family. Rosie the chicken has flown to the big coop in the sky.

"We miss her, don't we, Rosie?" the celebrity chef says solemnly to another plump chook, before shooing her out of the house.

"All the chickens are called Rosie," explains Michael. "Every animal is called Rosie. It makes life easier."

The 43-year-old *Kiwi Living* star and his family – wife Belinda, also a chef whom he affectionately calls "Bee", and daughters Hazel (5) and three-year-old Ivy – moved from central Auckland to the wilds of coastal Muriwai a year ago, and they are loving their new home.

"The kids are really enjoying it out here," he smiles. "And after so many years of being a chef, I am loving being able to spend so much time with them. I missed those little sausages with the long hours I was doing!"

Wearing muddied gumboots is now commonplace for Michael, who loves getting stuck into all aspects of farm life – sometimes with his little helpers.

"It's still a challenge getting them outside," he grins. "Hazel's a girly girl, but I'm still working on Ivy – before she decides she wants horses."

The lifestyle block – and sometimes the house itself – is home to an assortment of creatures, including chooks, several Hereford Friesian cows, ducks, horses and sheep – with a pig on its way.

"The other day, I turned around and there were two ducks in the lounge!" Michael laughs.

"We try to explain to the kids that nearly everything is going to be eaten," he continues, adding that gender-wise, he is definitely in the minority. "Everything is female! We've got a male dog coming. But that's it. Just Hector and me." And it seems, sometimes, a few labourers.

"Don't let the guys see me in this pink shirt," he grins as a tractor zooms past. "I'll never hear the end of it..."

Michael's rural home is where he came up with the concept of *Good From Scratch* – writing recipes and collaborating with food giants, including Wattie's, for whom he's created a range of dips – and has developed several new blends for rice company Uncle Ben's. He's also working with Green Meadows Beef in Taranaki.

"I've constantly got people saying, 'What can I cook that's healthy, cheap and quick?'"

Since becoming a father himself five years ago, following a long IVF journey, Michael says he understands more than ever the need for quick, healthy family meals.

MISSION From 's

"We changed our lifestyles in the lead-up to the IVF. We improved our work/life balance and our diet significantly – cutting out a lot of the bad stuff.

"So many foods in the supermarkets look healthy but actually have really high amounts of salt and sugar in them," continues Michael. "The trick is coming up with healthy things that still taste good without it. Under the Good From Scratch brand, I've managed to do that."

The logo features a caricature of Michael. "That took several goes until I was happy with it!" he laughs. "I just hope people will try it – my mission is to get Kiwis to eat better. I think education is a huge problem."

Have his daughters inherited his adventurous taste buds?

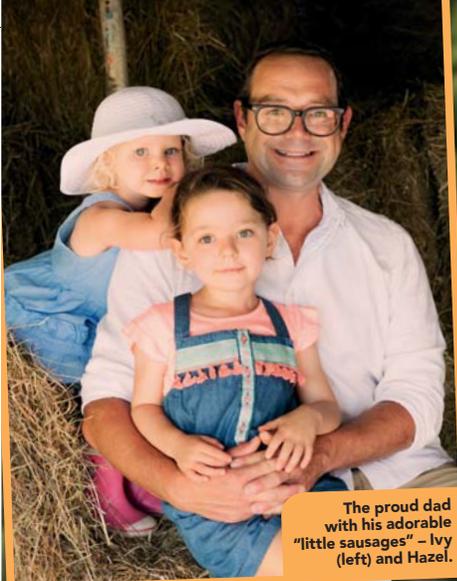
"They've discovered the word 'no'," he smiles. "They say 'I don't like that.' Ivy, the youngest, is very hard to get anything into, full stop. She's a little bean. And then when she likes something, she hoes into it! Bee's probably more of a conventional cook, whereas I'm more experimental. Sometimes they like their mum's food and sometimes they like mine. They're lucky having chefs for parents!"

While his own personal foodie hero is Nigel Slater "for his simple but tasty recipes", Michael



"We improved our work/life balance and our diet significantly – cutting out a lot of the bad stuff"





The proud dad with his adorable "little sausages" – Ivy (left) and Hazel.

'I don't miss the hours. I don't miss finding staff, training – it wears you down'



← loves what Jamie Oliver is doing to educate people about food and hopes this project is the start of something similar in New Zealand.

And despite having headed up several successful Auckland restaurants over the past two decades, including Molten, he has moved on from the restaurant business – having sold his most recent venture, Boy & Bird, two months ago.

"I don't miss the hours. I don't miss finding staff, training – it wears you down," he says. "What I do miss is that the restaurant was our living room too. People were coming to see us. Now we are out here, they don't tend to come out this way as much."

It's one of the reasons he and Belinda have decided to build a farm-based cookery school, where they hope to teach small groups of Kiwis to cook good, wholesome food.

And then, of course, there's his continuing work developing recipes with Kiwi companies and producers.

But despite lending his knowledge and passion to a range of new projects, he still finds himself answering to his Dutch-born parents, Wilhelmina (82) and Joe (79), who sold their West Auckland farm and moved to a pre-retirement home a few suburbs away.

"When Dad comes, he's straight into fixing the fences or tending to something or other. Last time he was here, he asked, 'Have you locked your chickens up yet?' Given poor Rosie's fate, I might just have to fast track that."

Carmen Lichi