



People, Provenance and Passion Drives New Eateries

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A restaurant with its ethos firmly focused on its connection with mana whenua, the region and a wider investment in the community is edging closer to completion as part of the Midway Surf Rescue Community Hub on the beachfront.

Tahu is the creation of Jared Johnstone and his partner Rhiannon. The more than 200-seat multi-space restaurant will occupy the top level of the community hub with the more casual grab-and-go operation, 'The Kiosk' below. The name, Tahu, represents the embodiment of food and feasting, and is a reminder of the connection between people and nature, and food and identity.

Johnstone, a 30-year veteran of the hospitality industry, moved his family home to reconnect them to their place of origin, where his previous 29 generations had been born and raised. Their two young children are the 31st generation in their Rongowhakaata, Te Aitanga-a-Māhaki and Ngāi Tāmanuhiri ancestry.

Their vision for Tahu is simple, with a focus on locally-sourced ingredients wherever possible. "We are a region of abundance on so many levels," says Johnstone. "We farm, grow and catch all sorts of things we don't even see. We are rich in stories, culture and manaakitanga but this could be practiced more in commercial spaces. I want to harness this."

He sees limitless potential. Tahu will be completely family-focused, and a place where the community can meet, share food, network and just relax, enjoying one of the most stunning vistas in the Bay from the sweeping decks around the building. "Looking back 20 years, Gisborne had such a thriving hospitality scene – the place was bustling and people were out there connecting, meeting and enjoying themselves. I want to see that return."

The surf club will play a big part in the restaurant and Johnstone is planning industry-led training that will benefit the wider Tairāwhiti hospitality industry. "Innovation is required in the hospitality sector, whether it's the visitor experience, the value proposition for employment or the way in which we operate sustainably."

The Kiosk will be the early opener, where people can grab a good coffee, pastries, lunch and snacks – all stacked with quality, local ingredients. Always with an eye to sustainability and the environment, Johnstone plans to use milk from a keg to reduce the footprint of plastic. "We have so many great ideas in the pipeline that are new to Tairāwhiti and will create something quite special at Tahu and the Kiosk," he says. "I am excited ... really excited!"

He's been here before, having steeped into hospitality at a young age, working at Scrumplés and the Irish Rover before heading to uni. Since then he has established and ran everything from cafes to high-end operations like the Hilton Bellini Bar, Denim in Parnell, Nomad in Point Chevalier and Morrisson in Fort Street, and the much applauded Chaise Lounge in Melbourne.

"This is a big commitment but I can't not step up and make the absolute most of this opportunity," says Johnstone. "We deserve the best of the best in Tūranga. We want to appeal to every sense – what you taste, smell, hear, the connection and your interpersonal experience, are all very much a part of it".

He wants all families to feel a sense of ownership when they enter Tahu or visit The Kiosk. That includes his relationship with the surf club, whose members will have benefits too. "Our region is unique and this is a significant opportunity for a place that is underpinned by culture to create a very special hospitality experience for our region. I foresee it as being a bit raw, but a good laugh, lots of fun and underpinned with manaakitanga." Tahu and The Kiosk is set to open in September-October.

Anyone interested in being part of the journey should contact jared@tahu.co.nz

