

THE BEST SHORTBREAD IN THE COUNTRY

'You can't go home without Nerida's Highland Shortbread!'

Shortbread seems such a simple product, doesn't it? Just mix flour, sugar and butter - and some time later, out of the oven comes heaven on a plate. Anyone can do it ...

Or can they? How is it that, in the beautiful southern highlands of NSW **Nerida Barnsley** has managed to corner the market in our favourite tea-time and after-dinner treat?

Visiting Nerida in her new shop in the **Mittagong Antiques Centre** it's easy to see her dedication to all things Scottish – not least the Scot's love affair with all things sweet.

It's here that visitors from all over the world come to nibble, savour and buy a home-baked delicacy that is as much a part of traditional Scotland as its other notable export – Scotch whisky.

The sampling is accompanied by Nerida's story of the journey of her famous shortbread from her Scottish grandmother's kitchen to modern Australian icon:

"My shortbread is from a traditional Highlands recipe because the baking skills I learned have been passed down in the family from mother to daughter.

"My shortbread seems to have become the essential taste of the southern highlands. Everyone says 'You can't go home without Nerida's shortbread – it's the best shortbread in the country!'"

So, why is it called shortbread – what's *short* about it?

"There has always been basic bread made with an elastic yeast dough: 'the staff of life' " explains Nerida. "But the Scots enjoyed finer things. They used the sweet butter produced from the cream when the cattle grazed on the summer pastures to make this rich, thick biscuit. They called it shortbread when it easily snapped into small pieces because of its high butter or 'shortening' content.

"They say that when Mary Queen of Scots journeyed from France to take up her claim to the Scottish throne she brought with her French pastrycooks, and their influence at the Scottish royal court helped popularise shortbread and make it indelibly linked with Scotland."

Nerida's shortbread comes in just two configurations, clear-wrapped with a cute tartan bow, but each contains the same essential ingredients and is baked to the same well-guarded family recipe.

"You can have a traditional round, six pieces, patterned with thistles, or my favourite - because it's best value - and that's my bounty pack, popularly known as '*the greedy pack!*' It's twenty four petticoat tails of pure indulgence!

"People often ask me how long my shortbread keeps. I tell them that it has a shelf life of many weeks when properly stored – but rarely can anyone resist it for more than ten minutes!"

The fun really starts when you bite into a piece of Nerida's shortbread. It breaks with a satisfying pop.

Then, you get that melt-in-the-mouth sensation as the sugar-laden butter rolls tongue-smackingly around your mouth ...

The proof truly is in the eating: Nerida's Highland shortbread has a rich buttery flavour that appeals to everyone. And she isn't just selling shortbread – she's selling the purity of country home-baking, made with the finest Australian farm ingredients, and the legacy of her family heritage from the highlands of Scotland.

A visit to the southern highlands is a rare and special chance to experience a wee bit of Scottish tradition yourself – not least because Nerida's shortbread is available only from *A Little Piece of Scotland* at the Mittagong Antiques Centre.

It's true: you just can't go home without it ...
