



To market

# GEWURZHAUS

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SHARING THEIR GERMAN HERITAGE AND PAYING TRIBUTE TO THEIR OMA, TWO SISTERS LIVEN UP MELBOURNE WITH THEIR SPICE STORES.

**H**eady aromas draw me in as I approach the Gewürzhaus Herb & Spice Merchants, a European-style spice store that opened on Melbourne's iconic Lygon Street in June last year. The closer I get, the stronger the medley of smells: the piquant tang of Asia, the citrusy zest of Morocco and the rich earthiness of Europe.

Owned and managed by 28-year-old Eva Konecsny and her 29-year-old sister Maria, Gewürzhaus (German for spice house) has an exotic market feel. Large, airtight containers – holding more than 300 spices, sugars and salts from every region of the world – line the walls, along with a selection of customised chocolates, cute aprons and stylish kitchen wares you didn't know you were missing, but will probably want to have.

"We want our customers to be able to see and smell things," says Eva of the various signs that invite people to lift the lids to have a good whiff. I'm intrigued by a container of dark-red salt crystals labelled 'Vintage Merlot Salt' and, when I lift the lid, I'm amazed by its fresh, fruity nose. "That's great with white fish," says Eva. "Or chocolate!"

The siblings are passionate about sourcing the best quality spices, importing them whole and not using any preservatives or anti-caking agents. "Most spices imported into Australia have been ground and mixed with anti-caking agents long before they hit the shelves," Maria explains. "They don't have an expiry date, but they quickly lose their flavour and aroma. We want to maintain that strength, so we're always freshly grinding spices; the smell in the store constantly changes."

Eva and Maria immigrated to Australia from their native Germany with their parents



Sisters Maria and Eva Konecsny



as preschoolers, and first learned about cooking and baking with spices from their *oma* (grandmother), who lived in Romania.

“We grew up baking with Oma and fossicking for wild mushrooms with our mum,” says Maria. “Oma’s cooking was heavily influenced by spices: paprika for savoury dishes and cinnamon for sweet ones. We travelled a lot and were encouraged to taste everything.”

Regular visits back to Goslar in northern Germany, where they lived as children, has kept the sisters in touch with their culture. In 2009, while exploring a spice shop in Munich, they came up with the idea to import a taste of Europe (and other regions) to Australia.

“We were blown away by the smells, selection and creativity in the Munich spice shop,” says Eva. “We wanted to bring as much as possible of our heritage to the store,” adds Maria. “In fact, our logo is based on our *opa*’s [grandfather’s] handwriting.”

The vast number of spices inside can be a little overwhelming, but Eva and Maria know their stock and will happily give advice. Customers can bag whole spices and grind them at home or have them milled in the spice grinder that sits on top of an antique French apothecary counter. People can also choose from more than 100 savoury and sweet blends developed by the sisters. “We spent six months cooking and testing, and refining the quantities and combinations,” says Maria. “The European mixes came easily, but it took us many goes to get the Asian blends right.”

When I tell the two sisters I’m roasting a chicken, they quickly respond with cooking suggestions. “You must try our *Quatre Epices* for the stuffing,” says Eva, “It has white pepper, nutmeg, cloves, cinnamon and ginger; it’s my favourite at the moment.”

“And mix our Bavarian Roast Chicken Spice with oil and rub it on the skin,” advises Maria. “It’ll bring out the flavour of the meat.”

In April this year, the entrepreneurial sisters opened a second, slightly larger store in Toorak, so Melbourne’s southsiders can spice up their palates, too. And the girls’ plans for expansion don’t stop there. Keep your eyes (and nostrils) open for the Gewürzhaus Spice Kitchen – a calendar of cooking and spice appreciation classes, coming to Toorak next year. In the meantime, follow your nose to their wonderfully perfumed retail outlets. 🍷



### Aussie Meat Pie Spice

Add some kick to your homemade pies with this spice and herb blend of coriander, nutmeg, pepper, garlic, onion, tomato and chives.

### Ras el Hanout

Made to enhance game, lamb, couscous and tagine dishes, this spice mix includes paprika, cumin, ginger, cassia, coriander, turmeric, dill, fennel, allspice, cardamom, galangal, nutmeg, orris root, clove, hibiscus, celery, rose, bay, mace and lemon myrtle.

### Asian Wok Spice

This includes cumin, onion, raw sugar, pepper, star anise, chilli, paprika, garlic, sea salt, licorice root, Sichuan pepper, coriander, fennel, clove and allspice. It’s ideal for Asian stir-fries, soups and sauces. If you’re adding it to the latter two, do so at the end of the cooking process.

### Glühwein Gewürz

A spice blend used in mulled wine, it includes wild hibiscus, orange peel, clove, star anise, lemon peel, cinnamon, cassia and pepper.

### Chocolate Ginger Sugar

This blend of cane sugar, Dutch cocoa and ginger makes a great addition to hot chocolate. It’s also fantastic in gingerbread, as well as other biscuits, cakes or tarts you want to spice up.