

at home with kiwi CAFÉ CULTURE

CHINESE COUPLE FIND THE ROBERT HARRIS COFFEE ROASTERS WAY TO PUT DOWN ROOTS

⇒ After six years running their own gift shop, Ginny Zhao and Tao Ma decided they really wanted to have a business that would teach them about Kiwi culture. 'We came here ten years ago from China to learn English and management,' says Ginny. 'We loved New Zealand and stayed, and now we have two Kiwi sons. We wanted to put down roots and learn about our adopted country as well as provide for our family and decided a café would be a good way to become part of the local community.'

There was only one problem – neither of them knew much about coffee or cafés. 'We did a lot of research, asked many questions and approached just about every franchise in the country, but they were not very encouraging. They tended to treat us like foreigners and implied that they were only really looking for 'genuine' Kiwis as franchisees. However, when we went to talk to Robert Harris Coffee Roasters they were much nicer and explained everything carefully. We liked them and decided this was the one for us.'

Ginny and Tao had intended to keep running their shop as well as their new enterprise, but Ginny became ill at the crucial time and they decided the best thing was to close the shop and start the new café together. 'So that is what we did, and haven't regretted it,' smiles Ginny. 'Our café is in a busy shopping mall, The Base, in the centre of Hamilton. We've been open 19 months and very busy most of that time.'

Ginny and Tao obviously believe in hard work. The café is open seven days a week from early to 6pm and one or other of them is usually in the store. This dedication resulted in them winning the Robert Harris *Rookie of the Year* prize and shortly they are to open a second outlet. This will be a kiosk 500 metres away from their current outlet and convenient to the major car-park adjacent. 'We would like to open another outlet too but we are taking one step at a time,' smiles Ginny.

The couple maintain the key to the success of their Robert Harris Coffee Roasters café is their staff. 'We like our staff to smile,' says Ginny very simply. 'We prefer them to have had hospitality experience but actually the smile is the most important thing. If they can smile all day and serve great food and coffee, then we will have happy customers.' And with rock star vocalist Jennie Skulander among their staff, Ginny and Tao are certainly learning about all sorts of Kiwi culture!

SUPPORT WHEN YOU NEED IT

New Zealand's original café franchise, Robert Harris Coffee Roasters is looking for more franchisees for both new and existing cafés nationwide.

'If you are interested, visit any of the 50 existing outlets around the country and talk to the owners,' says Rod de Lisle, the company's business development manager. 'Ginny and Tao opened a brand new café, which is quite a lot smaller than usual but has excellent outside seating capacity. We also have a growing number of café owners converting their premises to the Robert Harris brand,



TAO MA & GINNY ZHAO (UNDER THE 'SMILE' SIGN)
WITH THEIR TEAM AT THE BASE IN HAMILTON

which of course can be a cheaper option. No matter what your experience, you can be assured of our solid support during every step of becoming a Robert Harris franchisee. Ginny may have been a novice but she recently competed with distinction in the Robert Harris barista awards.'

'The training is very good,' Ginny confirms. 'Even now we are still learning and the franchise team are always happy to help. Nothing is a problem for them and they have treated us the same as anyone else. Whatever your background or nationality, don't be scared to contact them and find out more – as we have proved, Robert Harris Coffee Roasters will give you a chance to make your own business succeed.' ■

ADVERTISER INFO



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