

An inherent love of life and all things convivial underlines Wendy Taylor's approach to everything she does, from running a successful business to serving up a simple but sumptuous afternoon tea.

Wendy's Scottish and English parentage has imbued in her a natural tendency towards genteel pastimes, but combined with an Australian gregariousness heightened by 17 years in Byron Bay on the far north coast of NSW, even the most traditional of rituals are balanced by informality.

Nowhere is this more evident than when Wendy serves afternoon tea. Served in teapots from her extensive collection, Wendy has a story to tell about each pot, as well as a wealth of information about the history and etiquette of tea drinking.

"I became interested in teapots when we were in England 17 years ago where I met a lady who invited me for afternoon tea," she says. "She was a teapot collector and had the most amazing collection, and I thought, 'oh, I'd love to have lots of teapots like that', but you know, they're so expensive."

Wendy says it has been the guesthouse she and her husband Ross own that first gave her a reason to start collecting. "If people are here for a few days, you don't want to give them the same thing all the time," she says.

Taking tea with Wendy on the verandah of Taylors, the



## TEA-TIMING

**Debble Kruger is in time for an Australian tea poured from an Oriental pot in the best of British traditions.**

first thing to observe, then, is which teapot she selects. Today, she pours from a celadon teapot from Thailand, made of crackled green-ware ceramic.

"We've had this a long time and the tea stains are coming through. It doesn't leak, but it's getting darker down here," Wendy points out. "The shape is perfect, and also the handle, because it has something to put your thumb on so you can balance it well."

Decorative pots, such as one in the shape of a duck that spews out the tea when it is poured, is a favourite of the neighbours' children. More commonly used teapots are rose-covered vessels, sturdy brown ones Wendy describes as "perfect for tea — very utilitarian", intricately designed pots from the East and those given as gifts by well-

meaning friends and guests which don't end up in the "too vulgar" cupboard.

Wendy has no time for the stainless steel variety often used by cafes and motels, nor for the hi-tech glass versions with in-built infusers.

"There's something about china that just feels right," she says.

Although she loves to look in antique shops, Wendy is loathe to spend excessive amounts on teapots. "Unless it can go in a dishwasher, I don't really like it, although I think fine china does make nicer tea. Probably the most expensive one we have is worth \$120, although, some we have bought over the years would be worth a lot of money now. Unfortunately, they're waiting to go to the mender's because chips have come out of them," she says.

Wendy fondly recalls her childhood and afternoon teas

with her family — dressing up, polishing shoes, eating cake, then, playing in the bindies while aunts gossiped.

"At one aunt's, I never saw her teapots because she always had these amazing teapot cosies — big crinolines with dolls on them or very fancy embroidery, or lace. There was another aunt who'd only ever use silver. When you looked at your reflection in the silver you were all distorted ... that was rather fun, too."

Nowadays, taking time for afternoon tea affords Wendy the opportunity to unwind at the end of the day and prepare for the evening ahead. On weekends she pours tea for friends. "It's a good excuse to eat the cakes and biscuits we feel a bit guilty about," she says.

At Taylors, afternoon tea is a ritual guests expect, right down to the lace cloths and linen. The preferred tea is locally-grown Madura, which has no tannin and low caffeine, but guests can also choose from the popular blends of Darjeeling, English Breakfast, Earl Grey and Prince of Wales, as well as herbal teas. Wendy likes milk in her tea, although in the summer she leaves it out to keep the beverage lighter.

"People still argue about whether to put the milk in first or after. I prefer putting it in first, because then you don't have to stir it."

And the best sugar to use? "None," she says, adding, "Would you like another biscuit?"

