

One very smart cookie

A biscuit maker with a soft spot for chooks has cracked the riddle of egg-free icing, writes **Sara Irvine**.

ANXIETY about using eggs from caged birds led to one woman's baking innovation. Karen Sharman, who makes up to 2000 gingerbread biscuits a day, has developed an egg-free royal icing recipe.

Royal icing is a pure white icing favoured by baking professionals who want to create intricate designs on cakes and biscuits. It sets firm and matt and is an excellent base for colour. The traditional ingredients are icing sugar, lemon juice, glycerine and egg whites.

As her Blue Mountains business, Gingerbread Folk, began growing, Sharman moved from cracking fresh eggs to using powdered egg whites but began to feel guilty that she wasn't using a chicken-friendly recipe in her commercial kitchen.

The search for a free-range powdered alternative proved fruitless, so she began to research egg-free icings. "I made it my mission to formulate an egg-free [royal



icing," Sharman says. "The search took two years and took me overseas ... The fun part was going back to the chemistry books."

Sharman found a secret ingredient overseas and has developed a formula that is not as temperamental as the traditional recipe. It is unique to Gingerbread Folk and now the cookies – and her kitchen – are free of eggs.

Sharman worked as an architect before leaving the city and heading for the mountains. For her, it's not about the icing.

"I actually can't stand [the taste of icing]," she says. "For me, it's a creative thing, it's my medium to draw ... I love the pristine white against the golden gingerbread."

Distributor Marita Barron, of Love Your Food, says: "Karen's unbelievable. She's a pioneer at what she does."

See gingerbreadfolk.com



Brilliant bikkies ... Gingerbread Folk cookies; (left) Karen Sharman. Photo: Jennifer Soo