



Oh Susanna!

By TOM GATCH

For a fledgling fine dining establishment to succeed in a tourist oriented coastal town like Rosarito Beach, it would seem almost obligatory that the ownership procure a prominent location in a high traffic area along with eye-catching signage.

But, for a skilled restaurateur, word of mouth endorsement is still one of the most valuable and effective types of advertising that can possibly be obtained; the only caveat is that it can never be purchased, it must be diligently earned. As one with unlimited vision, but a limited budget, Susanne Stehr realized from the very beginning that she would have to build the reputation of her new restaurant, *Susanna's*, 'brick by brick' upon a solid foundation of innovative recipes, exquisitely fresh ingredients, fine wines and attentive service.

In 2004, with over 14 years experience as director of catering for several high profile resort properties, Stehr felt that the time had finally come to try her hand at satisfying the sophisticated tastes of diners who embraced the elements of fusion cooking. This is a style that incorporates the basic concepts of California Cuisine, which utilizes only fresh food and no manufactured products, relying instead on essential oils and fats from seeds, nuts and other produce, along with lean, natural sources of protein.

"As a native Californian, there was no question for me as to the food and style that I wanted to present to guests at my restaurant," says Stehr. Leading up to the opening of *Susanna's*, she discovered that the term 'California Cuisine' was confusing to many diners, unlike less ambiguous designations such as Mexican, Chinese, or French. "California style cuisine is purely defined by combinations of food and wine that offer a consistent respect for the elements of simplicity and freshness," she says.

Speaking of wine, Stehr is committed to using only local wines given the restaurant's proximity to Guadalupe Valley, northern Baja's wine country.