

"For those who are not familiar with our regional wines, we are always happy to offer pairing suggestions for all of our menu items," she says. *Susanna's* features an underground wine cellar with a 750-bottle capacity. Half of the area is reserved for holding and maturing a wide variety of fine vintages, while the other side of the cava has been converted into an intimate private dining room that seats up to 18 guests.

The restaurant changes its menu twice each year to take advantage of the season's best fresh fruit and produce as well as updated eating trends. This process usually takes Stehr and her staff about two months. She and her supervisory staff begin with a specific product, then experiment with a variety of preparation styles and blend different ingredients to create a dish that incorporates the flavors, textures and presentation that they are looking for. A written recipe is then generated and the kitchen staff is trained; of course, maintaining consistency and quality is of the utmost importance.

Her open display kitchen contributes to the conviviality of *Susanna's* atmosphere. Stehr's vision was to have her kitchen fully visible to help promote a relaxed interaction between staff and guests within a homelike environment. "I was never intending to pack people in, because space and privacy are also important to me," she says.

But pack them in, she does! Weekends during the summer season are particularly busy, as an ever-growing legion of discerning diners becomes aware of the elegantly inventive upscale cuisine that awaits them at *Susanna's*. From their authentic Mediterranean tapenade and warm, freshly baked bread to their delicious appetizers, entrées and desserts, each presentation is lovingly conceived, assembled and presented with adherence to the highest culinary standards.

This dedication to excellence has not gone unnoticed. Stehr was even invited to appear live on San Diego's *CBS Morning News*, where she deftly prepared her signature cilantro-based pesto with feta cheese, pear tomatoes and grilled shrimp on the air. Today, nearly four years after opening its doors, *Susanna's* continues to attract droves of discriminating diners from both sides of the border.

Although the day to day operation of a successful restaurant can be an extremely challenging endeavor, Susanne Stehr's basic concept, like her food, remains fresh, simple and straightforward.

"*Susanna's* is all about relaxing, enjoying the company you are with and relishing the flavors and textures of fabulous foods and wines while being served by a friendly, accessible staff."

With a business plan like that, how can you go wrong?



Susanne Stehr