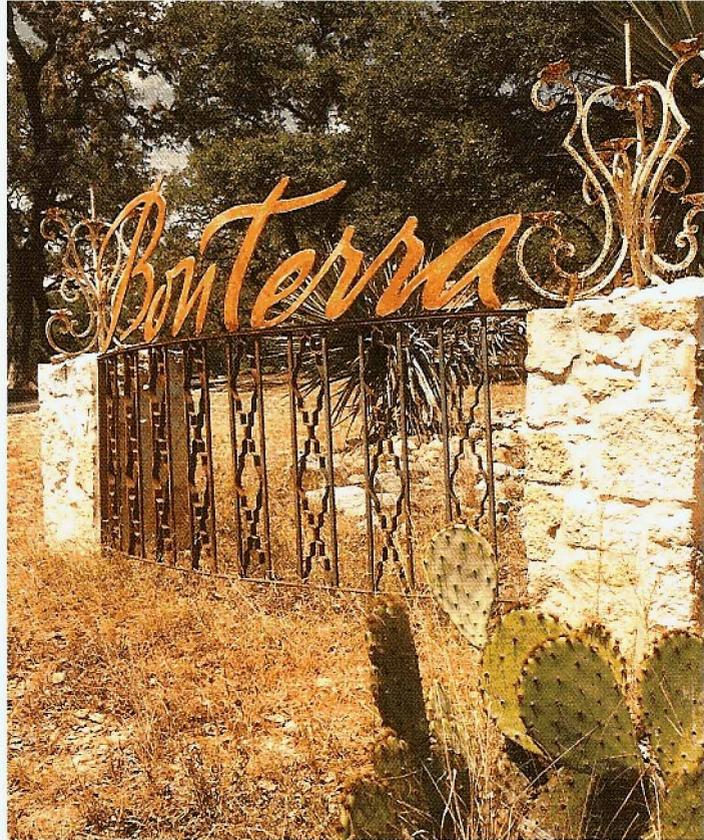


Bonterra

Where Life, Food, Wine, and Art Meet on the Hill



AFTER 10 YEARS IN NEW ORLEANS presiding as executive chef of Emeril Lagasse's famed restaurant NOLA through the mid-1990s, and as sous chef for Paul Prudhomme before that, native Texan Steve Howard was finally ready to create his own culinary signature.

He had learned from these veritable masters of Creole and Cajun cooking, and now just needed that final ingredient — a place where he could make it happen. He found that place in Fredericksburg, where he opened Navajo Grill.

Fast forward several years. Howard has sold Navajo Grill after a successful run and moved on to his next challenge. Not far from Main Street, a small hill slopes gently up from the county road, revealing an old homestead visible beyond a scattering of trees. This is where Howard, along with his wife, Sherry, has opened a restaurant called Bonterra (*good earth*).

Bonterra evokes thoughts of idyllic living ... a shaded patio, expansive grounds patrons are encouraged to roam, and the Howards' friendly dog all contribute to these memories of simpler times. Customers enter Bonterra in much the same way neighbors would approach: first by walking along the backside of the house, and then onto the patio or into the dining room.

While Howard attends to the food, his wife works out front, greeting the arrivals to their culinary home. The menu — a blend of Texas, Creole, New and Old Mexico flavors with

an eclectic twist — changes regularly: crawfish enchiladas, Creole eggplant and chocolate chipotle pecan buñuelos are examples of Howard's artistic streak.

The couple's love for creativity extends beyond the menu. With the help of artist Ken Malson of Hunt, they offer their original food in a cozy art gallery setting. There are sculptures, ironworks, paintings, drawings and yard art for sale. Even the chairs are art pieces, and customers especially enjoy the beauty of the wine bar. Howard believes the visual experience can be just as memorable as the culinary experience.

The Howards live in a bungalow behind the restaurant. Their motto, "Never Leave the Hill," expresses their love for Bonterra, which encompasses so much of what they enjoy: life, food, wine and art. They pride themselves on the relaxed atmosphere, the comfort of feeling at home and, of course, the food, which draws customers back to Bonterra.

For this issue of *Country Lifestyle*, Chef Howard prepared a selection of autumn recipes to tantalize and surprise the readers' taste buds. And he personally invites each of you to visit Bonterra, where you can experience "life on the hill" for yourself. ☞

— by Joanne Liu

