

# STAYING POWER

Longtime Scottsdale Restaurants Share Thoughts on Success

There are an estimated 600 restaurants in this city according to the Scottsdale Convention and Visitors Bureau. Some restaurants seem to have a fleeting presence. They are “here today, gone today.” Others seem to have that extra something that experts might describe as “staying power.”

For this issue, *SB+L* talked to three restaurants in Scottsdale with diverse menus and décor. What these three dining destinations have in common is that they’ve all been open for over ten years and they all still bustle excitement on a Saturday night (and many other nights, too). By the way, they also are *all* on N. Scottsdale Road, a detail that we didn’t plan.

• **RESTAURANT NAME/LOCATION:**

Fleming’s Prime Steakhouse & Wine Bar – 6333 N. Scottsdale Road

• **DATE OF ORIGINAL GRAND OPENING:** April 16, 1999

• **MEMORABLE DETAILS FROM THAT NIGHT:**

When Fleming’s first opened, there was a lot of curiosity about whether the restaurant would really have 100 wines by the glass – and have them all available every night. A wine program like this had never been done on that scale before. Co-founder Paul Fleming, who lived in Scottsdale at the time, was in the dining room nearly every night. And there was literally quite a buzz every evening. The Hilton hotel next door was still under construction and without fail, the fire alarm would go off once or twice a night.

• **ESTIMATED NUMBER OF PATRONS SERVED SINCE:**

approximately 806,000

• **WHY GUESTS NEED TO RETURN/WHAT’S NEW OR DIFFERENT?**

Fleming’s defined the contemporary steakhouse 13 years ago and continues

to respond to guests’ evolving tastes and preferences. In addition to updating the menu at least once a year, Fleming’s reinvents the Fleming’s 100, their list of 100 wines available by the glass, every September. Most recently, the menu has

been expanded to include a selection of Small Plates like Sliced Filet Mignon with Shiitake Risotto and New Bedford Scallops with meyer lemon-honey glaze. These lighter, healthier dishes can be enjoyed anytime with a glass of wine, shared with





friends, or enjoyed as a starter course to a larger meal.

• **WHY DO YOU THINK THE RESTAURANT HAS ENJOYED SO MUCH STAYING POWER?**

Fleming's continues to be a neighborhood steakhouse that is both familiar and personal. The Operating Partner, Darrin Visser, and Chef Partner Jason Phipps are just that – partners in the success of the restaurant and actively involved in the community. Fleming's prides itself on adding personal touches and memorable service to the guest's experience – whether it's a special occasion, adding a popular Chef Feature to the menu, or selecting 30 of the Fleming's 100 just for the restaurant. It's these relationships built over time that help Fleming's bring in new guests year after year.

• **RESTAURANT NAME/LOCATION:**  
Los Sombreros Café and Cantina – 2534 N. Scottsdale Road

• **DATE OF ORIGINAL GRAND OPENING:** September 1994

• **MEMORABLE DETAILS FROM THAT NIGHT:** Chef and owner Azucena Tovar fondly remembers the food from that night, and how much her menu has transformed since then. From the opening night and for the next three years, Los Sombreros served typical Sonoran fare, like fajitas and burritos; then began to offer more authentic Mexican recipes, using mole and adobo, and today with a more gourmet and avant-garde approach to the menu. Around the time of the opening, Azucena had taken one of her many routine trips back home to the city of San

Miguel Allende, Mexico. For Azucena, home is the heart of her culinary ambition, inspiring her just three years after opening Los Sombreros to revamp the menu. She took a risk by going against the grain so soon into opening, but it was a risk she was willing to take. She sought to create a menu that showcased regional items, and made-from-scratch, fresh ingredients.

• **ESTIMATED NUMBER OF PATRONS SERVED SINCE:** about 1 million

• **WHY GUESTS NEED TO RETURN/WHAT'S NEW OR DIFFERENT?** Over the past 15 years Azucena has continuously traveled back and forth between the Valley of the Sun and her hometown of San Miguel Allende. There she noticed a change. As more culinary schools began to develop in Mexico, the culinary prowess



Sapporo

had been steadily increasing too. Azucena noticed the ways in which Mexican fare was evolving. Ingredients were being used like never before and French technique was crossing over into Mexican cuisine. Azucena wanted Los Sombreros to reflect that same sophistication and added a total of 20 new menu items. Crafted with flavorful ingenuity and authentic inspiration, the menu offers refreshing new fare while still serving beloved favorites.

Not impervious to change, the restaurant has produced innovative menu items that are sure to be newfound favorites. This includes **Jicama Tostadas** made with mixed greens, sweetly seasoned shrimp and drizzled mango dressing; **Hibiscus Enchiladas** with salsa verde, crema blanca and refried black beans; **Pato en Mole Nayarit**, a baked and shredded duck; **Chicken Chiles Rellenos** in a pork rind cream sauce; **Pork Shank** marinated in a coloradito mole sauce and baked in banana leaves; and **Cornbread Soufflé**, a warm delight served in a zesty mole sauce.

• **WHY DO YOU THINK THE RESTAURANT HAS ENJOYED SO MUCH STAYING POWER?** Head chef and owner Azucena understands what is happening in Mexico's culinary scene and wants to bring that back to the Valley. Mexican food has truly evolved and her new menu

items reflect that change. Los Sombreros is a true reflection of the revolution of Mexican food; starting with traditional fare and regional food to dishes with a more gourmet flare. Azucena has made it her goal to inform and teach people with her menu. For Azucena it's important not to get stuck on one menu for too long. Since culinary schools have been opening in Mexico, new trends are surfacing all the time. As a chef, Azucena has made it her goal to stay current with the culinary revolution and bringing her own rendition of these new techniques and flavor to the Valley.

• **RESTAURANT NAME/LOCATION:**

Sapporo - 14344 N. Scottsdale Road

• **DATE OF ORIGINAL GRAND OPENING:** November 2001

• **MEMORABLE DETAILS FROM THAT NIGHT/DAY:**

It was a "who's who" night of Scottsdale. With a line out the door, it was the beginning of what guests still see to this day: high energy, awesome food, great music and people watching.

• **ESTIMATED NUMBER OF PATRONS SERVED SINCE:** Over 1.4 million!

• **WHY GUESTS NEED TO RETURN/WHAT'S NEW OR DIFFERENT?** While

remaining Scottsdale's favorite hot spot, Sapporo has been decked out with new décor and an expanded lunch and dinner menu. Huge replicas of traditional sake barrels now anchor the dining room and the new Torii gate that leads to the sushi bar is a symbol of the escape from the mundane that we strive to provide for our guests.

There are many ways and places to enjoy Sapporo – meeting friends in the vibrant lounge, relaxing on the patio with great food and drinks, watching each dish being prepared at one of our teppanyaki tables, sitting at the sushi bar or sampling Pacific Rim dishes in at a quieter booth overlooking all the action. Guests could visit a half a dozen times and have a completely different type experience each visit.

• **WHY DO YOU THINK THE RESTAURANT HAS ENJOYED SO MUCH STAYING POWER?**

The people – both the guests and the staff – is what make Sapporo the great place it is. The servers, bartenders, managers and chefs all have a true passion and a contagious enthusiasm for food, drink, and making new friends. Armed with a great personality and a dedication to the service and atmosphere that guests of Sapporo have become accustomed to, every staff member ensures that each visit is a special one and leaves with the feeling that Sapporo is *their* place. ■