



## **BETTINA: AN INTERVIEW WITH RACHEL GREENSPAN**

BY MARINA CROUSE

When you walk inside Montecito's corner Pizzeria, Bettina, you will immediately feel a sense of home. The decor is reminiscent of an Italian grandmother's living room, colorful, cozy, with vintage flair, and Rachel, co-owner and co-founder of the restaurant, stands smiling, greeting you as you walk into the space. Bettina is inviting, and is warm, and it offers a taste of what your grandmother might be cooking up in her kitchen.

Bettina was born between Brendan and Rachel, two food-focused people with a lot of experience in different parts of the industry. Brendan was the bread man, having worked in a pizzeria in Brooklyn and then later running the Bakery of New Vineland in the Lompoc Wine Ghetto. Rachel also worked out of New York, though in sales—food sales, where she worked with restaurants, artisanal shops, and

chefs to source the right ingredients and get new and exciting products into the hands of chefs. After seven months at New Vineland's bakery, Brendan and Rachel moved on to start their own mobile catering business, Autostrada.

She graciously chatted with me over the phone and let me pepper her with questions. I learned about the heart of the restaurant, the spark of Bettina, and what community really means to a local restaurant.

**Marina Crouse:** Why the name Bettina? And why a pizzeria?

**Rachel Greenspan:** Both Brendan and I have grandmothers named Elizabeth, and while he's Irish and I'm Jewish, we wanted a name that had history, and fit with the vibe we were looking to create. Bettina is a nickname for Elizabetta, which is the Italian version of Elizabeth. We wanted a name that would invoke that same sense of home for our customers as we feel in the kitchen. We chose to create a pizzeria because Brendan did have a strong background in bread and pizza felt both approachable and relatable, and it's something we felt we could grow with.

**MC:** I love that. So it seems as though food has been important for both of you. Did you grow up in a food world?

**RG:** Brendan and I have both been passionate about food since we were kids. We both cooked for our families and watched cooking channels and the Food Network. Even now we try to cook as much as possible, when we have the time!

**MC:** I'm a big fan of cooking shows, too. What is your go-to dish right now?

**RG:** Always Pasta! I get really good pasta, dried pasta, from a small company in Italy, and I buy it by the case. We also bring a lot of pizza home, sometimes whole pizzas, which we heat up in the oven at 400 degrees.

**MC:** Do you have a pizza oven at home, too? I'm kind of hoping the answer is yes, and that you can tell me where I can get one...

**RG:** *Laughing*, No, we just use our regular oven. That's a pro tip! Regular oven, unsliced pizza which is key, at 400 degrees. The crust gets nice and crispy and everything heats evenly.

**MC:** Every time I've been to Bettina, I've seen you there no matter the time! What's your favorite part of the night?

**RG:** Seeing people in the restaurant, and seeing people see each other or bump into each

other at random. There's also a certain rush when things are so busy and the little ecosystem of your team and community falls into place...you feel the magic when things click into place. I love it.

**MC:** Community seems to be very important to Bettina. I notice that whenever I'm there. How does community play a role in your business?

**RG:** We try to donate to causes that are important to the community. For instance, we'd donated to the Montecito Nets Project, a non-profit focused on debris flow prevention in the area. Another example is that we pick a pizza of the month from our menu and for that month we donate \$1.00 for every pizza sold. We like to stay involved in the community. Part of how we do it is by creating a space that is approachable to everyone. We want to encourage people to eat together, and share among generations. I love seeing families come in, and you have someone in their eighties sharing crust with a five year-old. It's amazing.

**MC:** I get that, and I see it too. When I go to Bettina, no matter who I'm with, one of us sees someone we know, and I love the feeling of family and feeling of home. Is that something you think about when you create your menu? The feeling of home?

**RG:** The foundation for our menu is definitely something that considers home. We focus more on quality ingredients and simplicity and the actual execution of how we create our food makes it feel like something your Italian grandma would make and serve. That's advice I'd give to anyone no matter their cooking level: simplicity is what makes things approachable and just using the best quality ingredients you can find.

**MC:** And then?

**RG:** And then you get to devour.

And devour you must. When I first visited Bettina, I tried the Potato Pizza. Their menu changes frequently, and seasonally, and I felt so lucky to visit when this pizza was on the menu. The pizza had roasted petite fingerling potatoes smothered with Raclette cheese, and it was divine. The perfect combination of crispy, tender, creamy, cheesy, with a floury bite of tangy fermented crust. I had a chance to study abroad while I was in college and for four months I lived in

Northern France with a charming family, who treated me as their own, and they fed me the most French cuisines they could think of to help fully round out my experience. They served a dish called Tartiflette, which was basically potatoes, ham, onions and raclette cheese baked Gratin-style. I still think and dream about this dish, and when I took a bite of that pizza at Bettina I was instantly transported home to my French family's kitchen.

Food is powerful because it is a space where your memories reside and bonds are built. Thank you to Rachel, for taking time to chat with me about your lovely restaurant! If anyone is passing through Santa Barbara and Montecito, California, Bettina is a MUST visit.