



Paul Wellman

Brendan Smith and Rachel Greenspan met at the legendary Roberta's pizzeria in Brooklyn, then launched a mobile pizza service in Santa Barbara called Autostrada. Today they're running Bettina, their very own restaurant.

## **How to Linger at Bettina Pizzeria**

### **Brendan Smith and Rachel Greenspan Open New Hangout on Coast Village Road**

Tuesday, October 30, 2018

by [NINETTE PALOMA](#)

Brendan Smith wanted to be a lawyer. Holed up in his D.C. apartment most nights studying industriously for the LSAT, he had already outlined a detailed career map for himself that included a move to New York City and a corner office at a prestigious East Coast firm. But during one notably grueling study session, when the weight of

principles and analytics threatened to send him over the edge, Smith made a compulsive decision that would alter the course of his life forever.

“I put my books down, walked into the kitchen, and baked a loaf of bread,” he laughed. Using a recipe he’d been carrying around for a year, he found the process to be curiously therapeutic. “There was a real science to it; the precision and focus made me instantly obsessed.”

For Smith, the next few years would play out like a modern Jules Verne novel: the sheepish phone call to his parents relaying an unceremonious career shift, the long train ride to rural New Hampshire for a one-year baking internship on a sustainable farm, and that eventual move to New York—baking bread in the dead of winter out of an outdoor shipping container at the infamous pizzeria Roberta’s.

“Those were surreal times,” he recalled. “Four a.m. shifts in the middle of a snowstorm aren’t for everyone.”

It was there, as the newly appointed bread director for one of the country’s most esteemed pizzerias, that he would meet Rachel Greenspan, a fancy-foods specialist peddling foraged mushrooms and dry-cured *salumi* out of her oversized messenger bag. Together, they would make the decision to move cross-country to Santa Barbara, where temperate climates and a reverence for the handcrafted would serve as ideal environs for Bettina, their long-anticipated restaurant marrying Smith’s exacting passion for flour and yeast with Greenspan’s encyclopedic knowledge of artisanal practices.



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Bettina owners Brendan Smith and Rachel Greenspan use a naturally leavened sourdough recipe for their pizza dough and bread (Oct. 26, 2018)

Stepping into Bettina is not unlike visiting the home of a well-traveled friend, where Heath Ceramics dinnerware and Duralex glasses are set against a backdrop of bayou-inspired wallpaper, pale-pink roman shades, and slick, French leather banquettes. A striking, horseshoe-curved Carrera marble bar encourages guests to linger, Euro-style, over an espresso and a good book. “We want people to feel completely at ease from the moment they walk in,” Greenspan stressed. “We take our aesthetic and presentation seriously, yes, but nobody here buys into the whole restaurant snobbery thing.” Bettina’s singular goal of tempering wanderlust is represented through a skillfully edited menu that begins with botanically infused spritzers before launching into a dazzling arsenal of small-batch *vermuts* with all of the traditional Spanish fixings. (I challenge anyone not to order a second Partner *vermut* garnished with Castelvetrano olives and orange peel.) The food — expertly turned out small plates to be passed around a table — spotlights the region’s agricultural bounty, with offerings like roasted carrots dressed with sumac and pistachios, long slices of bread-crumbed zucchini, and crisped Broccolini with briny capers and shaved ricotta *salata*.



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And then there’s the pizza: eight tear-inducing pies with charred and fragrant crusts, naturally leavened and enrobed in a delicate tomato sauce or spread thickly with house-

made ricotta. One might be topped with sherry-soaked *maitakes* and massaged kale, or butterball potatoes and peppery radicchio. The mozzarella? House-made, full milk fat, and hand-pulled. “We tapped the food culture of some of our favorite cities from around the world to land on this menu,” said Greenspan, “and it was important for us to balance the familiar with the inventive.”

Smith may have traded in his dream of a corner office in Manhattan for a corner restaurant in the Montecito Country Mart, but one is apt to believe that his decision will pay off in spades. Bettina will no doubt become one of those beloved Santa Barbara establishments where an after-work cocktail easily morphs into a three-hour dinner with friends. “If you end up staying here a lot longer than you originally anticipated,” stressed Greenspan, “then you’ve done Bettina right.”

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