

Someone's In The Kitchen

Blossoming Over Time

By **RICHARD** and **AMANDA PAYATT**
Special to CASA

ALDO'S IS ANOTHER ONE OF SANTA BARBARA'S RESTAURANT INSTITUTIONS. It changed hands last December after twenty years

under the steady hand of Mark Sherman. The new owner, Brad Sherman, is no relation to Mark, but his approach to Aldo's is very much the same. To begin with, Brad hasn't changed the menu. Thankfully, he hasn't changed the décor either. He is taking it slowly and gently to keep that warm, friendly environment that everyone loves about Aldo's. But he has made subtle changes that he thinks are going to make a difference. He seems to be on to something.

Brad hails from Philadelphia and, as a kid, worked in his father's doughnut shops. He was a part of that lovely family tradition of planning the next meal while you are finishing up the meal that you are eating. Food has always been on his mind. But owning an Italian restaurant wasn't something that he had planned on.

He came to Santa Barbara to attend

UCSB and to play music. The music thing worked out pretty well, as he has been the drummer for the local band, Area 51, for sixteen years. But long before that, he realized that restaurants were what he wanted to do for his living. He went to



Brad Sherman, Owner

work for The Sojourner Café in 1990. For twenty-one years, there he stayed. He loved the community-oriented atmosphere at the Sojourner. He loved the people he worked with and the customers that he served. He loved watching the children grow up, and then come in with children of their own. He grew deep roots there, and learned the craft of making a restaurant last and last. And in this point, above all others, he and Mark Sherman are in perfect harmony.

Brad wants to keep Aldo's the way it is, but he does want it to blossom a little over time. He has tinkered ever so slightly with the food. Again, the menu is the same, but some of the recipes have become more wholesome and of a higher quality. There are now vegetarian, vegan, and gluten-free options at Aldo's. That is a small change,

with big implications that will set Aldo's apart from most Italian places. But did he change that wonderful All-American Italian taste of Aldo's? No. The food tastes as good, except that you can tell it was made with fresher, better ingredients. The overall effect is that the dishes are lighter, and have a lot more sparkle than they did before. Our old favorites, like the swordfish soup, ravioli rosa, chicken picatta, and pasta alfredo are all the more delicious. The kitchen is clearly out to impress the new boss, as well as the guests. Beautiful roses from Brad's own garden adorn the tables. It is a homey touch, but it makes a difference. So does the fact that you will be greeted with hugs, once Brad gets to know you.

So, drop in at Aldo's, just like you would have anyway. Order your old favorite dishes. You will certainly recognize them, and perhaps love them more. See if you can detect that something special, a fresh approach, a joy of food emanating from the kitchen, while you savor the continuity of that charming atmosphere tucked just inside a tiny little courtyard on State Street.

Aldo's Italian Restaurant is located at 1031 State St. and is open daily from 11am-10pm. Reach them at (805) 963-6687.



Amanda and Richard Payatt combine their considerable writing skills with their incredible knowledge and experience of fine dining to bring you this column.