

# Culinary Cravings?

## Here's Your Guide To Great Valley Dining

**BY BARBARA BALLETO, MANAGING EDITOR**

Isn't it great when you have a friend who has the lowdown on all the great places to eat in the Valley? The one you call when you're in the mood for some great seafood, a perfect pizza or a little romantic tête-à-tête, but don't know where to go? Now we've all got someone—well, something—to turn to, thanks to Pamela Swartz. Swartz has been that go-to person for many of her friends since she authored her two editions of *Arizona Getaways for the Incurably Romantic*. "I'm often asked not only where the best places are in the state to get away," she says, "but also where the best places are to eat—whether looking for a romantic dinner, a girls' day out, late-night dining or more."

Swartz, who has lived in the Valley for more than 25 years, has not only seen the area grow in size, but in sophistication when it comes to dining. "In addition to established Phoenix favorites, new restaurants began opening all over town," she says. "Talented chefs from around the globe started bringing their culinary talents to existing Valley restaurants or opened their own."

Her frustration came when she realized there wasn't a focused, reliable source that provided the information needed to select a restaurant to match her mood, budget, craving or occasion. So she did some extensive research, enlisted the suggestions of a group of trusted advisors, industry leaders, friends and foodies, and created a guide of her own. *Dine Out Phoenix: Where to Eat from Chic to Unique* is a great, comprehensive reference to more than 200 restaurants, an unbiased look at each eatery's atmosphere, cuisine, distinctive characteristics and special offerings (Swartz does not do paid reviews), as well as all of the essential information—address, website, hours, meals and so forth. She also gives us insider tips for each place, such as when to go, where to sit, what to order and more.

"I look for characteristics that enhance the overall experience," says Swartz, "such as

being able to dine fireside, sit at a table with great views, going to a place where I won't be hurried—particularly important when I want to catch up with friends or take in a romantic dinner—or perhaps has live music." She says selecting a restaurant has as much to do with why you are going out to eat as it does with what type of food you feel like eating. *Dine Out Phoenix* is particularly unique in this regard. Restaurants are cross-referenced by cuisine, location and distinctive features, including Fabulous Views, Girls' Day Out, Dining Al Fresco, Romantic, Before and After the Game and Seal-the-Deal Power Scenes.

Above all, says Swartz, each restaurant in her book is distinctive based on the overall dining experience. "This includes great food as well as unique features such as a signature dish, a special ambiance, consistently great service and reputation," she says. "All contribute to the experience. The restaurant doesn't have to be fancy or fussy, but it does have to be a consistent favorite of mine and reviewers alike."

Swartz is quick to point out that *Dine Out Phoenix* is not a comprehensive listing, and no restaurant has paid or requested to be included. Rather it is a list of favorites from far and wide, compiled after careful research and the help of numerous people—none of whom are food critics. "Anyone who knows my previous book, *Arizona Getaways for the Incurably Romantic*, knows that I pride myself on understanding the taste of the discriminating palate, both metaphoric and literal," says Swartz. "Picking the ideal place is both an art and a pleasure, and everyone knows that the best recommendations come from trusted friends and colleagues who know your taste and can steer you in the right direction."

Pam Swartz has truly become a trusted friend in the Valley, and her new book, *Dine Out Phoenix: Where to Eat from Chic to Unique*, gives us a great tool by which to explore another delightful aspect of our vibrant city. Pick up a copy at your favorite bookstore, or online at [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com). ■



**BARBARA BALLETO** is an editor, writer and graphic designer living in Chandler with her two children: Nicola, age 13, and Luca, age eight. After seven years in Arizona, she now considers this to be home after spending the previous 13 years living overseas; first in Kenya (East Africa) for 10 years, and then England. While in Kenya she also wrote for and edited several airline and tourism magazines, as well as a series of travel guides; her editing experience in England included many titles for Insight Guides and a biography on President Moi of Kenya by Andrew Morton (author of the famed biography on Princess Diana).

## REAL ESTATE FACTS

### Just Do It!

Thinking of buying a home, but feel bewildered by conflicting reports about the state of real estate? Well, you're certainly not alone, but in a word, relax! Whether or not real estate is up, down or sideways, most people don't make their purchase decisions based on market conditions. Rather, it has more to do with lifestyle.

For most folks, a home is very much like a "durable good," similar to a washing machine. Sounds silly, but think of it this way: When you need a new washer, your decision is based upon that requirement, and you search for a machine that offers good value and service. You don't think about whether the price of washers will go up or down in the coming months or years.

You can have greater peace of mind when your purchase is made out of necessity and not out of desire to turn your property into a cash cow. You get the greatest value out of your home by simply living in it, and as long as you can continue to make mortgage payments, you run little risk of losing on your investment.

Speaking with a local real estate agent is a great place to get the ball rolling, so you can learn about local market conditions and prices. Armed with knowledge, you can move forward and move in!



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