

fine dining



in the mining city

STORY BY BETH JUDY | PHOTOS BY JASON SAVAGE

After 23 years, the Uptown Café is still bringing new flavors and creativity to its famous Butte home

In Butte, from the corner of Broadway and South Wyoming, at least three headframes—towering structures left over from mining days—are visible, ultimate icons of this city. Behind you on Broadway, another Butte icon stands. Less dramatic physically and only 23 years old, it has won the hearts of residents while impressing reviewers from *Bon Appétit* and *Gourmet* magazines. It's the Uptown Café, owned by Guy Graham, chef, and Barb Kornet, business manager.

The Uptown got its name because “we were in love with Uptown Butte,” says Kornet, a fit, slender woman in her 40s. “We moved here when many buildings were boarded up and the town needed TLC.” ▶



'Butte's been through hard times. People may be skeptical initially, but their hearts are open wide. They wrap themselves around you very quickly.'

Barb Kornet, Uptown Cafe business manager

"The Berkeley Pit had just closed," Graham adds. "Everyone said 'You're out of your mind,' starting an upscale, white-tablecloth restaurant when the top employer has just closed." But Kornet had lived in Butte for six years and believed the city needed an alternative to the usual steakhouse. She convinced Graham and a third partner (who later moved away) to come to Butte from Pittsburgh, where Graham had trained since an early age at the elegant Common Plea restaurant. The partners gambled that Butte would respond to quality cuisine. It did. It does.

The Uptown has two personalities—one daytime, one night. At the moment, it's lunchtime. Under spotlights, two entrees—chicken crepes and spinach pie—tempt business people who rush in for lunch. There are also two

soups today—roasted red potato and clam chowder—and prepared salads to grab and go. The scene is elegant yet functional, geared to working people. "When we opened the restaurant in 1985," Graham and Kornet remember, "we kept what worked. There had been a restaurant here already, the Greenhouse, that served lunch cafeteria style. We thought we'd phase that out, but we didn't. Lunch is our bread and butter."

If lunches are the café's bread and butter, dinner is where the Uptown struts its stuff. "We're still the alternative restaurant here," Graham says, "the ones making beef stock that we've reduced with port, always something with roots in classical French cooking. Most restaurants don't bother. We cook practically everything from scratch—the salad dressings, the chicken, the sauces. Our pastries are made here. Even bakeries don't do that anymore."

Specialties of the house? "Pork Prime Rib with Mahogany Sauce," Kornet says.

"Molasses, maple syrup, caramelized onions," Graham explains. "Served with whipped Yukon potatoes."

"The Uptown Filet," says Kornet. "A tenderloin. The sauce has lingonberries, port. A guy came in, a local with a cowboy hat, and ordered the filet. He was blown away. He said ▶



Facing page: Guy Graham and Barb Kornet have created one of Montana's best eating establishments in Uptown Butte. Photos on these pages: Food presentation and a comfortable environment are two of the highlights of dining at Butte's Uptown Cafe.

he eats beef every other day and he'd never had a sauce like this."

"Since beef is big here, I've tried to develop great recipes," Graham says. "Beef Wellington, Cajun Sirloin, short ribs—beef with a great twist."

At the same time, the duo strives to keep the Uptown unpretentious. Corned beef and chili appear regularly on the menu. Every month there's a turkey dinner with all the fixings. (Without fail, even in the heat of August or the week before Thanksgiving, a line of people snakes

out the door.) The restaurant's decor is simple, elegant only through the use of mood lighting and local art displayed on the walls. And, unlike in most upscale restaurants these days, you can actually understand all the words on the menu—something Graham, who writes them, insists on.

In his 40s with boyish blond hair, Graham is the stereotypical food-obsessed chef. "I do this because I love to cook. Meals start as a picture in my head. Like right now, I'm thinking about some kind of fish dish with a

turnip puree on the plate. The recipes evolve from playing and going off on tangents.

"My last tangent was preserved lemons. It's really easy." He tells how to preserve lemons in salt. "We used it in an appetizer, a smoked salmon and preserved lemon tart." The appetizer was one of 9,000 the Uptown crafted recently for a catering job, one of the restaurant's side enterprises. Another appetizer was classic seven-layer bean dip made the Uptown way with sharp white cheddar, a black bean mixture, and—get this—sour cream from scratch. "It's a breeze," he says.

"Guy is meticulous about everything he does," says Kornet. "He's really handy too, which helps when the pipes break."

Kornet admits the restaurant doesn't make a lot of money. To succeed, she and Graham are constantly seeking new niches. "In addition to catering, we sell hundreds of cheesecakes and pumpkin rolls at Christmas and Thanksgiving. We bake wedding cakes. We just started lunch delivery." Dinner specials before 6:30 p.m. draw in the pre-event crowd. Kornet and Graham work all the time. Kornet dreams of vacation, or at least a more relaxed life.

But neither restaurateur would trade living in Butte. "I love the headframes," Kornet says, "and the big pit in the middle of town. It's industrial art. Yet five miles out of town: wilderness." Likewise, Graham: "I was blown away when I set foot in Butte. I mean, I'm from Pittsburgh. Pittsburgh's just a big Butte." (Actually Graham's from nearby Connellsville, Penn., the birthplace of copper king William A. Clark.) Kornet and Graham appreciate Butte's size, the fact that everyone says hello in the grocery store. "Butte's been through hard times. People may be skeptical initially, but their hearts are open wide. They wrap themselves around you very quickly." Kornet feels safe in Butte. "I walk to work and walk home, no problem. In fact, my favorite thing to do, after the restaurant closes at 11:30 (or) midnight, is grab a beverage and a watering can. I walk around the streets and water the planters and I think about the restaurant." **M**

*You may never drive
a Lamborghini. You may never own a villa
in the south of France. You may never watch
the sun rise over Machu Picchu. Or enjoy a
bottle of Lafitte Rothschild '37. Or inherit
a family fortune. Or date a supermodel.*

*But at least you can say you've played
Circling Raven.*

Enjoy a world-class lifetime golf experience at the Steve Luter-designed course named a "top ten" by both Golf Digest and Golf Magazine. As nature intended.

1.800.831.2444 | 65 AIRY RD, WORLDV, ID. CIRCULINGRAVEN.COM