

NORTH BEACH FLAVOR

San Francisco natives bring tastes of the Bay Area to Reno.

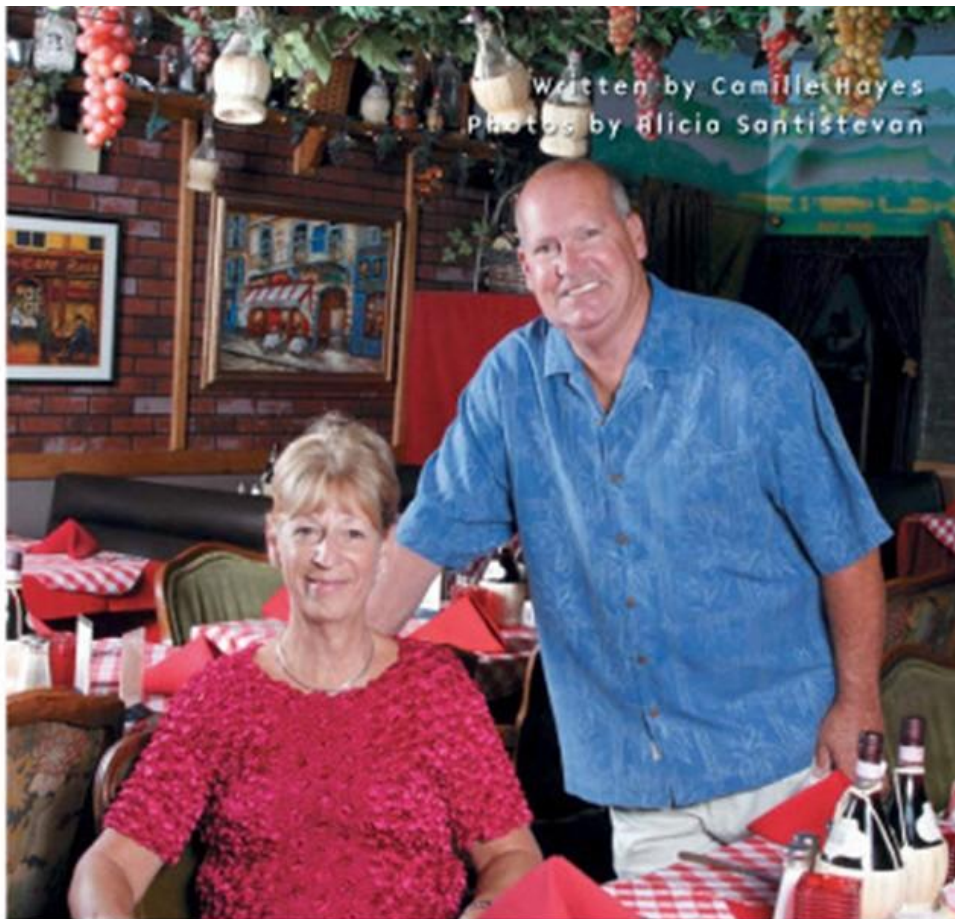
IF JUDY AND SID ASHTON LOOK AT HOME IN ZOZO'S, their cozy storefront Italian restaurant, there's good reason for it. Their first date in 1965 took place in San Francisco's North Beach, an Italian neighborhood filled with restaurants just like it — right down to the wicker-covered wine bottles.

The Northern California influence makes itself known in more than just the décor. When asked to describe the style of food their restaurant serves, in unison they declare it's "North Beach Italian." What they mean by this is that Zozo's offers an eclectic mix of mostly northern Italian fare such as spaghetti Bolognese and pesto Genovese, lightened up by daily seafood specials that highlight fresh seasonal vegetables.

Given their menu's Northern California slant, it's not surprising that the most popular menu item at Zozo's is cioppino, a seafood stew created in North Beach's fishing communities. The combination of shellfish and white fish in a rich tomato base is a perennial favorite, according to the Ashtons.



A Fresh fish Zozo's cioppino is a popular choice.



A Go team Judy and Sid Ashton own Zozo's, a Northern Italian restaurant with Bay Area flair.

FAMILY AFFAIR

Sid and Judy have been in the food business together for 20 years and have worked side-by-side even longer than that, a level of togetherness some couples might find challenging. But Sid says the pair has learned to balance the "24/7 thing."

"The fact that we're best friends is probably the main thing that keeps this working," he says. "We've worked together 35 years, and we're a team. Really, our whole family is a team in this restaurant."

Their sons, Kevin and Chris, have worked at the restaurant over the years. After graduating from culinary school, Kevin took over as executive chef in 2000 when the Ashtons first acquired it. Although Kevin left the business in 2006 to pursue other interests, he still helps out occasionally, as does his older brother, Chris. Chris drives from his home in Placerville, Calif., to play host at the restaurant on Sundays and Mondays, giving his parents some needed time off.

Despite their demanding schedules — Sid says his average day runs from 9

a.m. to 10:30 p.m. — you won't catch the Ashtons complaining. A love of food and a knack for the convivial side of the restaurant business keep them happy to show up for work each morning, even after all these years.

"I love the customers who come in; they turn into friends," Sid says. "We've met some wonderful people. That's the whole reason we're still doing it. It's just plain fun."

As for Judy, while she spends much of her time in the front of the house greeting guests, her heart is in the kitchen.

"People come in and they ask me 'what's your favorite thing on the menu?' And after seven years, I have to say that I like it all. I still talk like an eater, not an owner. I love everything on our menu."

Judging from Zozo's bustling dining room, it's fair to say that Judy isn't the only person happy to have a dash of North Beach flavor right here in town.

Camille Hayes lives in Sacramento and works in the field of domestic violence education. She is a former food writer for the Reno Gazette-Journal.