

## PEOPLE & PLACES

**BELOW:** Stacy uses French cooking techniques, which she learned from the restaurant's previous owner, Gerard Brach. **FAR RIGHT:** Stacy and husband Scott cultivate a garden full of edible flowers and produce that eventually find their way into the restaurant's dishes.



# A Taste of France in Texas

For Scott Simonson and Stacy Crowe-Simonson, only their garden separates home from work. But it took time to get here and become the second owners of this Houston institution. BY **GARY D. FORD**

**T**hey are nearly always working here in their restaurant, Chez nous, on a shady residential street in Humble.

Back in the kitchen, dressed in chef's wear she designed, Stacy Crowe-Simonson directs her kitchen staff like an orchestra conductor, sending out a symphony of salads, entrées, and desserts to diners. Out in front, wearing a suit, Stacy's husband, Scott Simonson, serves as maître d' and sommelier. The diners take their time, stretching a multicourse meal into a two- to three-hour experience.

**Their Biggest Compliment** "We have one couple who comes here every Monday and Friday night," Scott says. "We have a good two dozen who come just like that. They have the discerning palate and money to go anywhere, but they still come here. When someone walks back through the door, that's our biggest compliment."

Scott and Stacy spend hours investing their time and talent into the restaurant that flies American and French flags. So does their staff that includes Paige Chishum and Danielle Heller, the daughter of the founder.

Gerard Brach and wife Sandra founded this restaurant in 1984 in an old Pentecostal church. Soon, it became a destination a half-hour from anywhere in Houston, Scott says.

Stacy, a Brownsville native, met Scott, who's from Atlanta, when both were living on St. John in the Caribbean. Their island romance blossomed back in America; they dated long-distance while Scott worked in Atlanta and she waited tables and cooked in Houston.

**From Kitchen Helper to Owner** Meanwhile, Stacy recalls, she "bothered" Brach, as he is called, until he gave her a job in his kitchen. He also sent her to a French château for an internship, where she learned the French way of cooking.

"Brach is old-school French-style in the kitchen," she says. "Everybody has their place. His attention to detail and simplicity is mind-boggling." She paid attention to the details. When Brach was ready to retire in July 2003, he sold Chez nous to the couple.

**Couture and Comfort** Uncomfortable in the baggy chef's wear that's mostly designed for men, Stacy created more shapely kitchen fashions, including skirts and pants, from more breathable fabric. Cooler, too, are her chef's tops in short sleeves, scoop necks, and three-quarter sleeves. Stacy founded La Cuisinière, her line of chef's clothing attire, using these designs and launched its Web site.

Other than the more attractive attire, little else will change in the kitchen. "We love what we do, and our customers speak volumes to us," Scott says. "It's a strict tradition we have, and there's lots of pressure on us to keep it up. This is our life. We live next door. Everything is wrapped up in this basket." ●

### Dining and Designs

Chez nous is located at 217 South Avenue G, Humble, TX 77338. For more information visit [www.cheznousfrenchrestaurant.com](http://www.cheznousfrenchrestaurant.com), or call (281) 446-6717.

To see Stacy's chef's wear visit [www.lacuisinierechefwear.com](http://www.lacuisinierechefwear.com), or call (832) 527-3172.