



BRAVAS BAR de TAPAS **Backgrounder**

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The minute a visitor steps into Bravas Bar de Tapas their spirits are lifted by the lively, vibrant feel of Spain's legendary tapas bars in the heart of California's wine country. "Bravas" translates to "spicy" or "wild", a fitting description for the atmosphere here.

The classic 1920's bungalow just a few blocks from the downtown Healdsburg Plaza is usually filled to the brim with happy diners sharing bites from small and large plates coming from the tiny kitchen. Bartenders are shaking up seasonal cocktails, signature Gin and Tonics (or *gintonics*, as they are called in Spain) and preparing pitchers of sangria. A thoughtful selection of local and Spanish wines is also on offer.

Bravas was awarded Michelin Bib Gourmand status in 2019, has been named by *USA Today* as one of the top Spanish restaurants in the USA and in 2015 *Travel + Leisure* named it one of the "Best Tapas Restaurant in the U.S." The restaurant repeatedly earns high marks for outdoor dining, as the roomy back patio is a highlight for diners who want to dine under the Sonoma County sky.

Inspired by a trip to Barcelona, husband and wife restaurateurs and James Beard Award semifinalists Mark and Terri Stark opened Bravas Bar de Tapas in November of 2012. The couple owns and operates seven thriving restaurants in Northern California's wine country. With Bravas, they wanted to bring the fun and flair of Spain's tapas bar lifestyle to the small town of Healdsburg.

The menu includes traditional Spanish tapas like Boquerones (Spanish white anchovies), Pan Tomate (tomato toast with Arbequina olive oil and sea salt), and Tortilla Española. Diners will also find modern tapas creations made with local ingredients like Monterey Calamari, Dungeness Crab-stuffed Piquillo Peppers, and Straus Family Organic Vanilla Soft Serve for dessert. Paella is a popular staple on the menu with an ever-changing mix of seasonal ingredients. During weekends in the warmer months, Bravas chefs make paella on the back patio in an impressive 3-foot pan over a wood fire. They announce that the dish is ready to be served by ringing a brass bell and crying "hey-yah, hey-yah, paella!" -- a tradition started by one of the restaurant's early paella masters.

Bravas Bar de Tapas was the first in Sonoma County to offer an authentic Spanish “Ham and Cheese Bar” – a manned station where skilled “Hamboners” slice to order paper-thin slivers of Spain’s incomparable Jamón Ibérico, along with a carefully selected variety of Spanish and local cheeses.

Mark and Terri have a fondness for bringing new life to older buildings, and Bravas is no exception. Once a private home, the building had been used as a restaurant for at least 20 years and was much in need of some TLC. The Starks kept the charm of the nearly 100 year-old bungalow while brightening up the dining rooms, updating the kitchen and separating it from the scullery, and restoring the beautiful old 15-foot long bar. Rehabilitating the unused and overgrown backyard was a massive undertaking. Now there is a spacious flagstone patio, covered heated deck and custom-built, covered outdoor bar with a style that is a modern interpretation of the clapboard main restaurant building.

Inside, diners have their choice of sitting at the lively tapas bar, in front of the fireplace, or in one of two cozy dining rooms. Diners enter the main dining room through beaded curtains to find walls adorned with vintage Fillmore posters, bringing a touch of the 60’s to the space.

Whether enjoying cocktails and tapas on the patio or sharing an order of “BFC” (Basque Fried Chicken) fireside, visitors will find a welcoming taste of Spain at Bravas.

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