

The Brothers Barbata

The steakhouse owners mark a half-century on Ventura Boulevard—45 years in Woodland Hills.

■ TIDBITS

BY JUAN HOVEY
SPECIAL TO THE TIMES

The brothers Sam and Chuck Barbata, owners of Barbata's Steak House in Woodland Hills, know the restaurant scene in the San Fernando Valley like few others—because they've been part of it longer than all but a few others.

"We've been on Ventura Boulevard for 50 years—five years in Sherman Oaks and 45 years here in Woodland Hills," says Sam Barbata with a laugh, "and no, our father didn't bring us to California after the war. We brought him to California—from Colorado, where he ran a restaurant for 65 years."

Sam's brother Chuck Barbata, now 72, shipped out to the war in the Pacific from California; he served 4½ years in the Navy. Sam, now 78, joined the Air Force, flying no fewer than 54 missions as a flight engineer in a B-17 bomber over both North Africa and Europe.

When World War II ended, the mild weather of Southern California beckoned—along with the prospects of serving good food to the people crowding into the San Fernando Valley to buy houses and raise their families.

Like so many other long-established restaurants in the Valley, Barbata's Steak House is a family affair. Chuck Barbata's son Greg is chef; Randy Barbata, son of another brother, John, tends bar and waits tables.

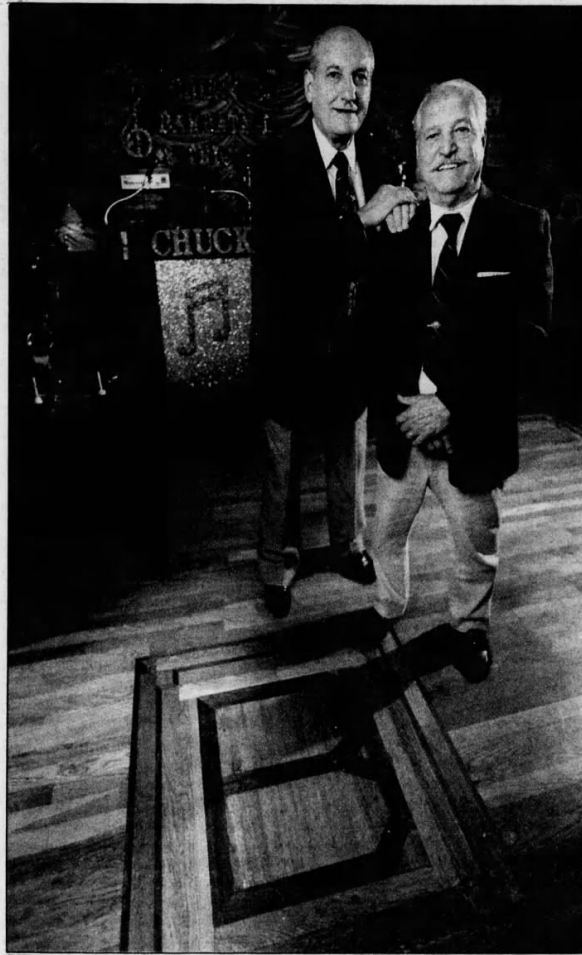
Chuck Barbata blows the sax in a quartet that performs on weekends, playing big-band dance music from the '30s and '40s.

The restaurant serves its specialty steaks, prime rib and seafood from a menu that changes very little as the years pass. You can get a sirloin for \$18.95, a New York steak for \$20.95 and a filet for \$22.95.

The seafood dishes include deep-fried shrimp, trout amandine, sand dabs, Australian whitefish, a halibut steak, oysters, scallops and lobster, at prices ranging from \$13.95 to \$19.95 (more for the lobster, depending on market prices).

Barbata's Steak House is open for lunch Tuesdays through Fridays, for dinners Tuesdays through Saturdays, at 20001 Ventura Blvd., Woodland Hills, (818) 340-5914.

Look for Andrew and Christiane Higgs—owners of another fixture on the



RICHARD DERK / Los Angeles Times

PARTNERS: Chuck, left, and Sam Barbata on the dance floor of their steakhouse in Woodland Hills where Chuck Barbata plays in a quartet on weekends.

Valley restaurant scene, Le Petit Chateau in North Hollywood—to host a wine-tasting dinner in the next month or two. It will be the first wine-tasting event at Le Petit Chateau in some years.

Like the Barbatas, the Higgs have been around long enough to know that in the restaurant business you don't fuss with a winning formula.

Le Petit Chateau opened 35 years ago, and Christiane—who comes from Toulouse, in the south of France—took a one-third ownership interest in the place when she came to Southern California in 1971.

Andrew Higgs came to America from Toronto in 1983, armed with a degree in hotel and restaurant management. He and Christiane married and became sole owners of Le Petit Chateau 10 years ago.

The decor reflects Christiane's eye for antiques, which mostly come from the south of France. The restaurant's menu reflects a deep respect for another great tradition from that region, where the bright, warm summers and abundant agriculture give rise to a style of cooking that sets a premium on the expert handling of fresh ingredients—la

cuisine Provençal.

The hors d'oeuvres include a classic pâté, escargot, shrimp sautéed in garlic and brandy, and mushroom caps in butter, herbs and garlic.

Among the entrees: veal scallops with fresh lemon butter, braised sirloin tips with mushrooms and a Marsala sauce, a filet with mushrooms and a bordelaise sauce, steak tartare, beef Wellington, and a grand chateaubriand for two.

Among the seafood dishes: broiled Australian lobster, lobster Newburg, and the classic provincial dish coquille St. Jacques—scallops gratineed in wine, herbs and garlic.

Prices range from \$18 to \$23, as a rule; the chateaubriand goes for \$52.

The Higgs don't yet have a firm date for their wine-tasting dinner, which will feature Fetzer wines, but if it goes well, they may schedule more. Le Petit Chateau is at 4615 S. Lankershim Blvd., North Hollywood, (818) 769-1812.

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