

# Twenty Years in the Game

*What's cooking at Joshua Creek Ranch*

BY MICHELE MCMURRY

Since 1990, discerning sportsmen have flocked to Joshua Creek Ranch in pursuit of the best wild game in the Texas Hill Country. The hunter's paradise, hugging an isolated stretch of the Guadalupe River outside Boerne, is well-reputed for its hospitable, country-luxe ambience and pheasant "cover" rivaling locales abroad.

And then there's the dining. One gourmet meal at the award-winning hunting and wing-shooting resort — the only Texas recipient of the prestigious Beretta Trident Designation for excellence in upland bird hunting — leaves one wondering if it's the chase of chukar or the demi-glacé du jour that keeps folks coming back.

Joshua Creek Ranch co-founders Joe and Ann Kercheville are now sending guests away with more than satiated palates and vacuum-sealed packets of freshly harvested game. Building on the family's first cookbook published in 2001 out of a cry for recipes, the updated, full-color "Hunter's Harvest" shares 20 years of family- and chef-inspired dishes for wild game enthusiasts to prepare in their own kitchens. Every recipe has been served at the Ranch at some time, whether during cocktail hour on the Kercheville's home patio, under a shady oak tree or in the lodge dining room.

"When Joshua Creek opened in 1990, it happened that we hired a fabulous cook who took my family recipes and added creations of her own that made a lasting impression with our guests," Ann Kercheville says. "Her menus, presentations and service set the standard, and guests' expectations followed."

Many chefs have since made their culinary mark, including present food service

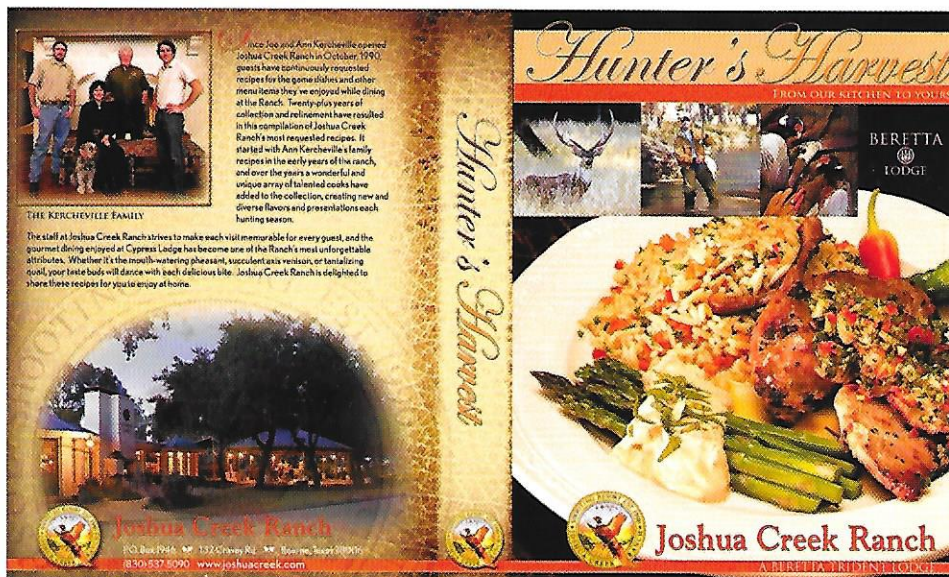


Photo: Courtesy Joshua Creek Ranch

manager Kay Read, the organizer behind "Hunter's Harvest." Venison with Green Pepper Sauce, Pheasant Tamales and frequently requested Wild Game Gumbo are among more than 100 innovative dishes refined over the years. Favorites from the Ranch's beginnings include the Kercheville's Fried Quail (encased in buttermilk pancake batter), the lunchtime Pheasant Pot and a versatile game appetizer they call "Poppers" that confirms the notion that anything wrapped in bacon is delish.

Many of the recipes marry Mexican and German influences indigenous to the Hill Country with easy-to-find ingredients and cooking techniques that best complement each species of game. The idea is to send guests home with a little culinary know-how to go with the game they've harvested.

"These are recipes that enable you to use all of the meat," Ann says. While pheasant breasts are used primarily for entrées, leg meat works well in pot pies, tamales and sausage, and shoulder is good for stews. "We're big into using everything;

it's out of respect to the game.

"Our dishes are not necessarily low-calorie," she adds. "We do like to use cream and butter." Flavor, however, wins over fat when the game is cooked correctly. Axis venison, with 1.9 grams of fat and 26 grams of protein per 4 ounces, retains its mild taste and tender texture when served at medium temperature. "One of the keys is not to overcook it. When the juices run clear, it's done."

The collection, a celebration of 20 years for Joshua Creek Ranch, also includes dishes selected by Youth Outdoor Adventure Program participants. The program gives 8- to 15-year-olds the opportunity to harvest and cook deer. "It teaches them the ethics of hunting," Ann says. Grilled Axis Venison, however, didn't make the list. Some of their "faves?" Garlic mashed potatoes, mac and cheese and, ahem, beef lasagna.

"Hunter's Harvest" is available at the Joshua Creek Ranch pro shop or online at [joshuacreek.com](http://joshuacreek.com).