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Food: Austinist Interviews Supper Underground Founder Hannah Calvert



Last fall, a friend referred us to a mysterious new website. The page at **Supper Underground** promised a multi-course meal at a secret location with a small group of guests. Intrigued, we signed up for the next dinner, and received a cryptic email with an address and time several days later. The September event was held at a tony Westlake Hills estate with a lovely back patio garden. Candles flickered on the porch, quiet indie-rock played in the background, about 25 rather outgoing and gregarious people arrived, and the clandestine dinner party went famously.

Now in their second year, Supper Underground partners **Hannah Calvert** and **Tasso Ziebarth** plan these stealthy events once a month in both private homes and at local restaurants, sometimes utilizing guest chefs and always changing up their locale. A mailing list of over 700 potential diners means that spots at the events are a tough ticket (a lottery has just been introduced for the limited spaces), but the chance to meet other Austin foodies and test one's social skills is obviously winning many fans. We recently spoke with Hannah Calvert about the club's origin, dealing with high demand, and what's in store for Supper Underground later this year.

What inspired you to start a secret supper club?

I first read about a similar operation in Portland, OR. I've always loved to host dinner parties and the idea of hosting them in unique and ever-changing locations, and opening them to guests who may not know each other, but who share a love of good food, struck me as something that would work well in Austin.

How did you promote the first event?

Honestly, I just told all the friends and contacts I could think of about my idea, tried to convince them it really would work, and hoped they'd show up (they did). People have been incredibly receptive and open to the concept - promoting it has never been a challenge.

Do you feel that the social component of the event is more important than the food and wine on offer?

Personally I am a very social person and I love the aspect of



watching new friendships, work contacts, or even love relationships blossom while our guests are enjoying their meal. I like the idea that every time we host Supper Underground, anything can happen - and people are definitely drawn to the unknown quality and mystery of it all. But we spend a huge amount of time working on the menu and take a lot of pride in the quality of the food we serve.



You do some events with 'corporate' partners like Whole Foods or Progress Coffee - are these events more lavish than the private home dinners?

It varies tremendously, but I wouldn't say there's a direct correlation. We have hosted at some lovely, upscale homes, and some of the local businesses we've partnered with have offered a more simple setting. We always aim to pick locations that are conducive to comfort and good conversation. And we love the opportunity to partner locally and share the spotlight with Austin-based businesses.

How do you decide on event menus? Are they seasonal, thematic, or just things you enjoy?

We work on our menus for weeks leading up to an event. We definitely try to incorporate seasonally available ingredients and our menus are sometimes thematic in terms of the origin of dishes, flavors, etc.

You now have a huge mailing list of Supper Underground fans, but the events are fairly small in scale. How do you handle disappointed potential patrons who can't get a seat?

We tell people to keep trying - our mailing is creeping closer to 700 people. We are incredibly grateful that Austin has shown so much interest in Supper Underground, but it is challenging to have to turn people away. We do our best to accommodate people and we hope our new system of using a "lottery" system to determine attendees, as opposed to "first come, first served" e-mail responses, will make it easier for a broader range of attendees to get in.

Do you personally ever have time to enjoy the food and company at a Supper Underground event?

We try to cook enough food for our staff to eat at some point in the evening. But our focus is definitely on meeting the needs of our guests and we always put them first.

What can we expect from Supper Underground in the second half of 2007?

We are really excited to be partnering with some fabulous local restaurants and businesses in the coming months, as well as hosting at some wonderful private homes. We'll continue to look for exciting locations (and we ALWAYS welcome suggestions) and we have some great menu ideas that we can't wait to serve. We mainly look forward to seeing even more new faces around the table at Supper Underground.

Thanks for talking with Austinist.

The next Supper Underground event will be held in mid-July at a mystery location.

[\[Supper Underground Official Site\]](#)

Images provided by Hannah Calvert.

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ooooh, this is very cool. i love this idea. thanks, t-thor!

[1] Posted by: [Bre](#) | [June 27, 2007 4:25 PM](#)

this post was so delectable that i wish i had gotten the scoop. what more can i say? classy dining makes life worth living!

[2] Posted by: [b](#) | [June 27, 2007 6:49 PM](#)

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