

# Dall'Italia con Amore

dough must be kneaded by hand, must be a certain thickness, and must be smaller than a specified length in diameter, among others. What's more, "Neapolitan pizzas can only truly be cooked in Neapolitan ovens that are a certain size, temperature, et cetera," says Jeff Pond, executive chef and partner of Cambridge, Mass.-based Area Four. His preferred vessel, the wood-fired oven, makes all the difference in his final products. "Ovens have a huge impact on the pies they produce," he says. "For me, wood is the front-runner."

In the world of traditional Neapolitan pizza, there are three variations that are recognized: Pizza Marinara, which consists of tomato, garlic, oregano and extra virgin olive oil; Pizza Margherita, topped with tomato, fior di latte (cow's milk mozzarella), basil and extra virgin olive oil; and the aforementioned Pizza Margherita Extra, which replaces the cow's milk mozzarella with that of the water buffalo.

The Margherita Pizza's origin is one of steadfast interest. Made up of mozzarella, basil and tomatoes, it's no coincidence that the ingredient colors represent those of the Italian flag. The style was invented to honor Queen Margherita of Savoy when she visited Naples in the late 19th century.

Executive Chef Giuseppe Manco has been fascinated with this pizza style since he was a child enchanted by his grandmother pulling pies from her brick oven at their pastoral Naples farm. The simple dishes offered in Southern Italy are what inspire his culinary efforts at The Restaurant at Mr. C, the Cipriani family's dining establishment in the tucked-away hotel, Mr. C Beverly Hills.

Chef Manco favors ingre-

dients native to his homeland. "In Naples, the tomatoes from Mount Vesuvius are some of the best in the world," he says. About 50 miles northwest of Naples, Gaeta is an area that grows olives that create a flavor-enhancing olive oil. Chef Manco feels these simple ingredients can really create the perfect dish. "As a chef, it's fun to play around with something so simple to make that's still so delicious."

While Chef Manco understands how important it is to honor the classics—especially when it comes to the cuisine of a culture so devout to its own traditions—he can appreciate what it means to innovate dishes that a more adventurous generation of diners can enjoy.

At Area Four, Chef Pond does just that: his kitchen takes the classic sausage-and-roasted-pepper topping combination and instead pickle banana peppers. Likewise, the Not Pepperoni pizza features sopressata in lieu of pepperoni. "Classics are key because they please most people. For me, the trick is balancing the classics with the innovative," he says.

With a Food Network 2015 Best Pizza Ever and two years of Boston Magazine's Best of Boston accolades to boast, Area Four features two custom-built wood-fire ovens as the center of the establishment; rustic aesthetic that produces 90 percent of its menu items. These menu items, while spanning regional Italian classics, have adapted to appeal to the masses in its Kendall Square neighborhood.

"When the New Haven style of pies started, these guys were coming over from Italy, and all they were trying to do was recreate the pizzas they had at home. The thing is, they couldn't get wood, so they had to use coal, and now they have some-



thing completely different and unique," says Chef Pond. "It's really a solid example of adaptation, and a spirit we really get into here."

Austin-based Due Forni specializes in the different pies that span Italy. With the cuisine changing from region to region, the geographic and climactic differences affect each. Some are landlocked and mountainous while others are surrounded by sea. Additionally, some regions have Arab and Greek influences and others have French and Austrian.

Literally translated to mean two ovens, Due Forni features Roman and Neapolitan pizzas baked at two different temperatures in two different types of brick ovens. "By having two ovens at different temperatures, it allows me to create every dish possible," says Executive Chef Carlos Buscaglia. "One is 900 degrees, cooking traditional Neapolitan pizzas for 90 seconds, [while in the other] we cook pizza Romana style that's accomplished by baking at 500 degrees for three minutes."

Soon-to-open Novara is also putting regional twists on dishes

to appeal to the Milton, Mass., demographic. The modern Italian establishment that's located in the greater Boston area is headed up by Johnson & Wales alum, Executive Chef Tony DeRienzo, and is slated to open this fall. While Novara is named for a province in the Piedmont Region of Italy, the restaurant itself will feature dishes that span the country. Its pizza will focus primarily on varying textures and temperatures. "Our Burrata pizza has a crispy thin crust, warm mozzarella cheese and crunchy asparagus with a creamy burrata that we top it with after it comes out of the oven so there's temperature contrast," he says.

Flavorful pizza is undoubtedly the result of marrying mouthwatering components. Each is fundamental. Whether you're using the freshest ingredients available or choosing the oven that supplies your kitchen with the most lustrous glow, the by-product is a pizza that will shine. There's a continuing demand for authentic foods, and the proliferation of pizza creates a cultural touchstone all over the world. What started out as a peasants' dish has become Italy's golden child.

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