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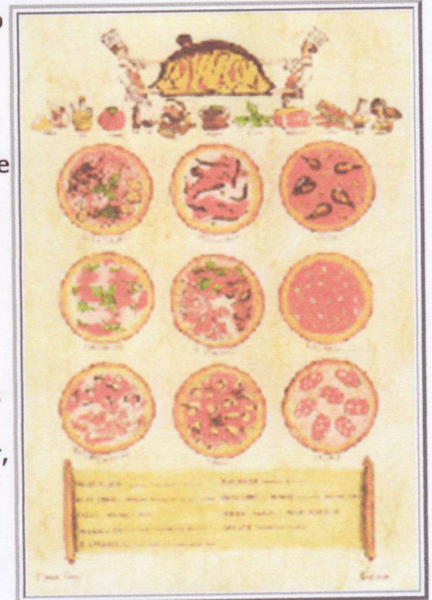
# THE PIZZA CONNECTION

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Naples, May 1, 2007

Think Italian cuisine and three dishes immediately come to mind: spaghetti, tomato, and pizza, yet none of them originated in Italy. Although pizza was almost certainly born more than 3,000 years ago in ancient Egypt, etymologists believe the term "pizza" is derived from an Old Italian word meaning "a point", which in turn led to the modern Italian word *pizzicare*, meaning "to pinch" or "to pluck." This word appears for the first time in a Neapolitan dialect — "*picea*" or "*piza*" — as early as the year 997 AD at Gaeta, a port between Rome and Naples, and refers, perhaps, to the manner in which the hot pie is plucked from the brick oven.

Pizza, made with flour, yeast, salt, and water, has obvious analogies in Greek, Turkish, and Middle Eastern pita and flat, seasoned yeast breads like Moroccan *Khboz Bishemar*, but it is definitely the single food most firmly associated with Italy and in particular with Naples. The first documented pizzas were eaten in ancient Pompeii and Herculaneum, where archaeologists have uncovered brick pizzas ovens. But it was pizza without mozzarella and tomatoes.



When the Lombards invaded the boot and settled between Rome and Naples after the fall of the Roman Empire, they brought buffaloes with them and produced the first mozzarellas from buffalo milk. Another 1,000 years — in 1552 to be exact — had to elapse before the first tomato would be seen in Europe, when, according to local legend, Neapolitan sailors brought the first seeds back from Peru.



Ancient pizza oven

Although the tomato was held in low esteem — it was believed to be poisonous — by most Europeans, the poor people of Naples, subsisting quite literally on their daily bread, added this new ingredient to their yeast dough and created the first simple pizza, which they purchased "*oggi a otto*," meaning that they promised to pay for it "within eight days from today", and ate with their hands as streetfood. By the seventeenth century it had achieved a notoriety among visitors who would go to poor neighborhoods, in particular the "*Quartieri Spagnoli*" or "Spanish Quarter" to taste this peasant dish made by "*pizzaioli*" (pizza makers), but it still remained a local dish. It was sold from open-air stands and street vendors.

Another *appassionato* was Ferdinand I (1751-1825), the conservative and reactionary King of Naples and of the Two Sicilies, who liked to go incognito to savor pizza in the Salita Santa Teresa. To give his bride the Austrian princess Marie Caroline, sister of Marie Antoniette, a taste, he invited the famous *pizzaiolo* Armando Testa to court. Testa's pizza was such a

success that the Marie Caroline built a special pizza oven at the summer palace of Capodimonte. The king wanted to honor Testa, but the only recognition he wanted was to be called *Monsù* like the French chefs at Court.

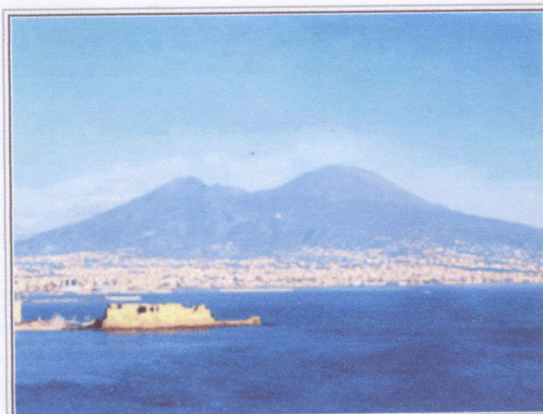
Also, it was not until the nineteenth century — about three hundred years after the tomato — that mozzarella cheese (still made from buffalo, not cow's, milk) became a standard pizza ingredient. Legend has it that the famous Neapolitan *pizzaiolo* Raffaele Esposito of the *Pizzeria di Pietro* (or maybe his wife Maria or Rosa Brandi, nicknamed Pasqualina) was the first to make the mozzarella, basil, and tomato pizza in honor of the visit to Naples on November 6, 1889 of Italy's Queen Margherita. Thinking that the commonly-used seasoning of bad-smelling garlic was unworthy of royalty, he replaced it with mozzarella. This dish, thereafter *pizza Margherita* or *tricolore* (after the three colors of the toppings and of the Italian flag), became very popular immediately. The other truly genuine, yet older (thus sometimes called "the queen mother"), Neapolitan pizza is called *marinara* either because it was the first food fisherman ate on return from their catch or because its toppings of oil, tomato, garlic, and oregano (thought by some to be an aphrodisiac) could be stowed on voyages so that sailors (*marinai*) of this seafaring city could make pizza away from home.



Queen Margherita

### From Naples to New York

Indeed, pizza remained a local delicacy until the concept crossed the Atlantic at the turn of the last century in the memories of immigrants from Naples who settled in the cities of along the eastern seaboard of the United States, especially New York City. The ingredients the immigrants found in their new country differed from those in the old. In New York there was no buffalo-milk mozzarella, so cow's-milk mozzarella was used; oregano, a stable southern Italian herb, was replaced in America by sweet majoram, and the flavor of American tomatoes, flour, even water was different. Here the pizza evolved into a large, wheel-like pie, perhaps eighteen inches or more in diameter, reflecting the abundance of the new country.



Bay of Naples

These first American pizzas may have been made at home, but the baker's brick oven, preferably fueled by wood, or *forno al legno*, best of all poplar, was and still is essential to making a true pizza. Not to mention, that, for the best results, the dough must always be hand-kneaded, allowed to "rest" overnight in a wooden trough, and then flattened by hand, never with a rolling-pin or by machine. Indeed a recent Italian law has spelled out six *regola d'arte* or rules for the making of a "pizza DOC" or *pizza napoletana verace*, in other words a genuine Neapolitan pizza: 1) the tomatoes must be San Marzano, 2) the mozzarella buffalo-milk, 3) the oil must be olive, 4) the salt natural not imitation, 5) the oven must be

domed, made of bricks, and wood-burning at between 420-80 degrees, and 6) the dough must be kneaded by hand with no rolling pins or blenders allowed.

To make sure these standards are enforced in 1984 the *Associazione Verace Pizza Napoletana* or The Association of the Authentic Neapolitan Pizza, Via S. Maria La Nova 49, tel. 081-4201205, was founded. Would-be *pizzaioli* can enroll in Italy's two *Accademie della pizza* in Brescia near Milan or in Caorle, half-way between Venice and Trieste, not in Naples, believe it or not!

The first licensed pizzeria in New York was opened by Gennaro Lombardi, a *pizzaiolo* from Naples, in 1895 on Spring Street, but others quickly followed in the Italian communities around the city. Still, pizza and pizzerias and, later, "pizza parlors" were little known outside

the large cities of the East until after World War II, when returning American G.I.s brought back a taste for the pizzas they had had in Naples during the Allies' occupation along with the assumption that pizza, like spaghetti and meatballs, was a typical Italian dish, instead of a regional one.

### National Statistics

In fact, until about twenty years ago it was next to impossible to find pizza on the menu north of Rome. Today, however, according to Burton Anderson, in his delightful *Treasures of the Italian Table* (William Morrow, 1994), Italians eat more than 2.5 billion pizzas a year, more than 45 per person, in over 38,000 pizzerie for a profit of over 6.3 billion dollars. Other statistics report that 82% of the population chose pizza as their favorite food; 61.8% go to a pizzeria every weekend; and 75% of these eat there, for the other 25% it's take-home. To accomplish this, according to CIA — *La Confederazione Italiana agricoltori* (The Federation of Italian Farmers), every year Italy's *pizzaioli* consume 7,500 tons of olive oil, 90,000 tons of mozzarella, 45,000 tons of tomatoes (*San Marzano*, *Pachino*, and *Ciliegiolo*), 135,000 tons of flour, and 300,000,000 basil leaves. As the accompanying beverage 50% choose beer, 30% mineral water or a soft drink, and 20% wine, usually white and fizzy.



Pizza Marinara

### Vicarious Pizza

Nearly four years ago, in February 2003, I published a short review here of a splendid book called *La Pizza: The True Story from Naples* by Italo-Swede Nikko Amandonico (Mitchell Beazley, 2001, now available in paperback). Since then Italian-speaking pizzaphiles and epicurean travelers can whet their appetites by purchasing Orietta Boncompagni Ludovisi's *Le migliori pizzerie d'Italia: Pizza supremo sfizio*, published by RAI, the Italian National Television, as well as *Pizzerie d'Italia*, published by the authoritative Gambero Rosso. Each guide is organized by region and by city. In separate chapters Gambero Rosso includes several noteworthy *pizzerie a taglio* or "pizza by the slice"

as well as the best *pizzerie* outside Italy. It cites two locations in Manhattan: *Pizza Fresca*, 31 East 20th Street, tel. 212-5980141 and *Una Pizza Napoletana*, 349 East 12th Street, tel. 212-4779950. None of these three books are among the 64,206 titles which include pizza available from [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com).

### In and Around Naples

Although the American promotion of pizza has resulted in its becoming an international favorite, from Tuscaloosa to Tokyo, nonetheless, Naples remains "the place" for a pizza. Some say it's all in the water which explains why the coffee in Naples is also considered the nation's best, but that's another story. Nevertheless, Naples's best pizzerias, mostly members of the *Associazione Verace Pizza Napoletana*, are 179-year-old *Port'Alba*, Via Port'Alba 18, tel. 081-459713, closed on Wednesday; Pasquale Parziale's *O Caffone*, Via Regina Margherita 76; *Bellini*, Via Santa Maria di Costantinopoli 80, tel. 081-459774, a favorite with students in spite of its surly waiters; the favorite of the famous Neapolitan comedians Totò, Eduardo De Filippo and Nino Taranto, family-run *Da Michele*, Via Sersale 1/3/5/7, tel. 081-5539024, closed Sunday, founded in 1870 by Michele Condurro and now run by his great-grandchildren, which serves only *pizza margherita* and *pizza marinara*; *Il Pizzaiolo del Presidente*, Via Tribunali 120-121, tel. 081-210903, where Clinton stopped for a snack of *margherita piegata in quattro* ("folded in four"), considered by the proprietor, Ernesto Cacialli, to be the only real pizza; and *Trionfo da Ciro*, Via Colletta 42/46, tel. 081-5539426, closed Sunday and lunchtime, with marble-topped tables and delicious "pizza lasagna". The owner of *Brandi*, Salita Sant'Anna di Palazzo 1, tel. 081-416928, closed Monday, near the San Carlo Opera House, is a descendant of Raffaele Esposito's wife, the inventor of the *margherita*, Pavarotti's favorite wheel; and Antonio Pace, the President of *Associazione Verace Pizza Napoletana* and owner of *Ciro a Santa Brigida*, Via Santa Brigida



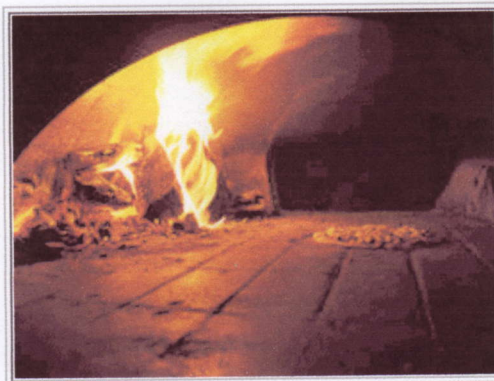
Ernesto Cacialli of Il Pizzaiolo del Presidente

71, tel. 081-5524072, claims one of his ancestors invented the "*quattro stagioni*" or "four seasons" with its four different toppings to please his family's different palates.

For mouth-watering pizzas outside but near Naples, go to Umberto Fornito's *Pizzeria Antica Frattese*, Vicolo II Durante 2, in Frattamaggiore, tel. 081-8348722; *Gigino, Pizza al metro*, Via Nicotera 10, in Vico Equense about 30 kilometers south on the breath-taking Amalfi Coast, where pizza is served by the meter at long trestle tables, or, on the terrace overlooking the Bay of Naples at The Hotel Santa Caterina in Amalfi itself. Elsewhere my choices are: *Pizza al Metro*'s Roman branch called *Gaudi*, Via Giovanelli 8/12; *Pizza Nuovo Mondo*, Via Amerigo Vespucci 9-17 also in Rome; Lombardi's, owned by the namesake grandson of the Big Apple's first *pizzaiolo*, 32 Spring Street, and *Tiramisu*, 1410 Third Avenue on the corner of 80th Street, both in Manhattan; and *Patsy's Pizzeria*, 19 Fulton Street, under the Brooklyn Bridge in Brooklyn, which has regularly been awarded first prize for the best pizza outside Naples by the Association of Neapolitan *pizzaioli*.



Pizzeria Port'Alba



However, the word from New York food critic Ed Levine, author of *Pizza: A Slice of Heaven*: the best pizza in the USA is not baked in the Big Apple, but in Phoenix, Arizona by Bronx-born Chris Bianco at his *Pizzeria Bianco* (623 E. Adams Street, Heritage Square, tel. 602-258-8300, Tuesday-Saturday 5-10 PM).

Pizza fans unite! February 9th is International Pizza Day and the Guinness Book of Records states that the largest pizza ever eaten — 100 feet plus one inch across and cut into 94,248 slices — was made in Havana, Florida in 1987.

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