

Ah'Pizz Crafts Artisan Pizza & Fine Food

A recent assignment to visit what I thought would be a simple neighborhood pizza place taught me a valuable lesson about the folly of making assumptions. Yes, Ah'Pizz is a neighborhood place, and yes, they do make pizza, but this wonderful little Montclair gem turned out to be a revelation.

Two hours after walking into the restaurant, I walked out with a new appreciation of the history and art of pizza making, along with tremendous admiration for owners Mike LaMorte and Chris DeLisio, who have graced downtown Montclair with their welcoming venue.

The focal point of this good-looking bi-level, brick-walled restaurant is the wood-burning pizza oven, crafted by Neapolitan artisans. Built to cook at a temperature of 1,000 degrees, it cooks each pizza in just 90 seconds. Pizzaiola (pizza maker) Robert Cino can be found here nightly, practicing the techniques he learned during an eight-month apprenticeship in Naples, under the tutelage of a Michelin Award-winning chef.

Every one of the outstanding pizzas here, from the simple and perfect Margherita, \$12, to the Pizze di Formaggio, (white pie), \$15, is a winner, but the \$18 Pizze di Montclair rates five stars. With its wood-fired porcini mushrooms and mixture of fine cheeses, drizzled with truffle oil and topped with cherry tomatoes and basil, this pizza nearly brought us to our feet shouting "bravo!" Can't decide between pizza and calzone? The solution is the clever and delectable Mezze Luna, \$18, a half-pizza, half-calzone hybrid.

If Ah'Pizz made nothing but perfect pizzas, it would still be a find, but the kitchen has many more delightful surprises up its culinary sleeve, including Goat Cheese Croquettes, \$10, crispy outside with a velvety goat cheese filling, with a light topping of imported balsamic vinegar. "Little round treasures!" raved my guest.

If the \$10 fried polenta topped with a gorgonzola sauce is on special, don't miss it. "We found the polenta has more interest with the gorgonzola than with a plain tomato sauce," Mike LaMorte explains. For a reasonable \$6, you can enjoy a volcano-shaped Rice Ball, filled with rice, peas, and chopped meat, topped with marinara, basil and fresh mozzarella. Another special featured pillowy Ricotta Gnocchi, \$17, with a light pesto sauce.

We finished off with an excellent tiramisu and a slice of lush cheesecake, said to be, for those with long memories, a duplicate of the iconic Clairmont Diner version.

Coming soon at Ah'Pizz will be a customize-your-own mozzarella bar, where diners can assemble their own anti-pasto, choosing from various meats, cheeses and breads. The owners are also expanding the menu to include more Italian favorites.

In their quest for perfection, LaMorte and DeLisio import many of their ingredients from Italy. Their mozzarella di bufala arrives weekly from Naples, as does special flour, not available in the U.S., which can withstand the high temperature in their oven.

Attention to detail, artisan pizza and terrific traditional Italian food make Ah'Pizz a "go-to" welcoming place in the heart of Montclair. ▲

Ah'Pizz

7 North Willow Street, Montclair
973-783-9200
www.AhPizz.com

Hours of operation:
Mon-Thu: 11am-10pm
Fri-Sat: 11am-11pm
Sun: 12pm-10pm

BYO