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# PIZZA



**NAPOLI!**

VS.

# QUEST



**ROMA!**

**TWO ITALIAN CITIES. ONE ICONIC DISH. THE BATTLE FOR ANYA VON BREMZEN EMBARKS ON A MISSION TO FIND THE AGE-OLD QUESTION ONCE AND FOR ALL.**

**SUPREMACY RAGES ON. FOOD CRITIC BEST PIZZA TOWN IN ITALY AND SETTLE THE GENTLEMEN, START YOUR OVENS.**

Antico Forno Roscioli's house specialty, topped here with sausage and spinach. Opposite: *Pizza marinara con alici*, a traditional Neapolitan pie with anchovies, at Pizzeria La Notizia.



# Italian Pizza Quest

(Continued from page 82)

breadly and beautifully alive in the mouth. His dough embraces such esoteric flours as Kamut and enkir, from the organic Piedmontese mill Mulino Marino. Its almost liquid consistency—less flour equals fluffier crust—requires an ingenious pizza-shaping method, manipulations evocative of making fresh mozzarella.

When Pizzarium opened in 2003, customers balked at the subversive crust and chef-y toppings. Today global gastronomists throng into Bonci's dime-size joint in Trionfale, recently remodeled with modern slate.

We're at Pizzarium ourselves, waiting for Bonci—and waiting, as usual. But time passes quickly when you're snagging piping hot squares topped with smoked ricotta and asparagus tips, then with pecorino, favas, and house-cured *guanciale*, then with tender nuggets of rabbit, grapes, and bitterish chicory. Not to

overlook "LSD" (licorice, sausage, dates).

"So sorry! Gabriele...he not coming!" bleats an assistant. "*Un disastro!* He drop his *telefonino* in the oven!"

Cell phones aside, Bonci has spawned a movement in Rome. Next day we're at **00100**, in hipster Testaccio. Named for Rome's former zip code—and the 00-type flour—this colorful cool-kid nook consists of a pair of marble half-counters and two benches outside under a graffitied wall. "Gabriele lends us his *lievito madre*," a server informs, handing us a slab of Bonciesque crust dressed with mozzarella and Stilton under drizzles of port reduction. "The starter's from a Puglian village," he adds. "From eleven generations!"

Stefano Callegari, the owner, is giving the yeasty Bonci a run as Rome's pizza prince. He also co-owns the pizzeria Sforno—terrific but way out in the sticks—and has just launched Tonda, in the leafy suburb of Montesacro. Besides pizza *al taglio*, 00100 is famous for its genius *trapizzine*: pizza bianca triangles filled with saucy Roman stews that deliciously seep into the dough's porous crannies. Today there's tomatoey tripe, and tongue in sharp *salsa verde*—iconic Testaccio *quinto quarto* (offal). And *baccalà* cooked in a rich foil of onions, raisins, and pine nuts.

Barry has an epiphany: everything tastes better on pizza.

We're still not done with Testaccio. Up along Piazza di Santa Maria Liberatrice, where *nonnas* promenade arm in arm and tattooed skateboarders threaten their peace, the classic pizzeria **Da Remo** awaits. If pizza *al taglio* is a lunchy snack, at night Romans dine on their own *tonda* (round) pizza variety. The crust? *Sottile* (thin) and *croccante* (crispy)—adjectives utterly reviled in Naples. Da Remo's wood-fired margherita is Twiggy to Napoli's Sophia Loren—wispy as a wafer with deliciously semi-burnt edges that crackle. Romans call this crust *scrocchiarella*. And they love it so much we wait almost an hour for our rickety sidewalk table—but who's complaining?

"ONE-CENTURY-OLD *LIEVITO MADRE*, EH? Eleven generations—eh, eh?" Giancarlo Casa is chuckling. Well, yes, even Bonci admits that at 100 years the dough starter destabilizes and needs the boost of much younger leavening.

Casa is no envious skeptic. Partners with Callegari at Sforno, he also owns the awesome **La Gatta Mangiona** ("eater-cat") in the residential Monteverde district, where kitty-themed artworks—by his father-in-law—hang above blue-checked

tablecloths. By 9 p.m. this pizzeria/trattoria is buzzing with youths in well-ironed T-shirts and ladies in big costume jewelry. To drink—a cult Baladin Almond 22 Faro beer? A minerally Slovenian white? The classic Roman pre-pizza fritters are exemplary here: pecorino-and-mint croquettes with tight, elegant bread-ing; *suppli* (cheesy rice balls) updated with saffron and asparagus. Our verdant pizza—pesto, ricotta, zucchini—shows off a Napo-Roman crust: Neapolitan puffiness and crisp Roman edges—the best of both worlds. "The chaff in our Abruzzo bread flour," Casa says, "imparts a developed acidity." Ditto the 24-to-48-hour marathon fermentation. Who said yeast has to be from only grandmas or trees?

*Belissssimaaa!*

A collective cheer goes up as our "pizza Igles" travels to table. Named for a famous Italian chef, Igles Corelli, it suggests the mythical *gargouillou* salad of French super-toque Michel Bras. Arranged on a base of baked candied tomatoes is a breathtaking bouquet of herbs, micro-lettuces, and edible petals—of pansies, forget-me-nots, and delicate garlic flowers. Pizza as framable art?

For pizza bianca as drug, we keep returning to **Antico Forno Roscioli**, off Campo dei Fiori. When I first got addicted to the crusty, salt-speckled stuff, the place resembled any other mom-and-pop bakery. Now it's gone spiffy with metal sculpture suspended over the sleek, dark marble counter. Using a natural yeast starter for his three-foot-long oblongs, master baker Pierluigi Roscioli also favors cool, long fermentation and a rest under an olive-oil glaze—to develop that upper-crust toastiness. The super-thin *rossa* shimmers with a red *pomodoro* sheen; pizza with basil and mozzarella clumps makes an ornamental herbal patch. But *bianca* is best.

*Whack whack!* go the blue-handled knives. *No, no!* regulars protest, wanting to wait for the next batch if the pizza has sat around for more than a nanosecond. This is anti-Neapolitan dough, crunch where you expect puff, resolving into a moist, profound chewiness that fills the mouth with something like the essence of pleasure. We buy our *bianca* and a garlicky slab of *porchetta* from the adjacent deli counter and eat our DIY panini under Campo dei Fiori's stern statue of Giordano Bruno, the priest/astronomer burned at the stake. Baking is science. And cosmology. In my dough delirium I'm pretty sure Giordano is nodding along. ✚

Anya von Bremzen is a **TOL** contributing editor.

## PIZZA GUIDE TO NAPLES AND ROME



### NAPLES

**Da Attilio** 17 Via Pignasecca; 39-081/552-0479; lunch for two \$50.

**Di Matteo** 94 Via dei Tribunali; 39-081/455-262; pizza for two \$14.

**Il Pizzaiolo del Presidente** 120-121 Via dei Tribunali; 39-081/210-903; pizza for two \$15.

**Pizzeria La Notizia** 94/A Via Michelangelo da Caravaggio; 39-081/1953-1937; dinner for two \$56.

**Pizzeria Gino Sorbillo** 32 Via dei Tribunali; 39-081/144-6643; lunch for two \$21.

### ROME

**00100** 88 Via Giovanni Branca; 39-06/4341-9624; *trapizzine* for two \$17.

**Antico Forno Roscioli** 34 Via dei Chiavari; 39-06/686-4045; snacks for two \$17.

**Da Remo** 44 Santa Maria della Liberatrice; 39-06/574-6270; dinner for two \$32.

**La Gatta Mangiona** 30-32 Via F. Ozanam; 39-06/534-6702; dinner for two \$50.

**Pizzarium** 43 Via della Meloria; 39-06/3974-5416; pizza for two \$21.

### LIVE Q&A WITH THE AUTHOR

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