

food



I always thought if I ever opened a restaurant, it would be a pizza place in Cook Street Village. It would, of course, have awesome pizza—thin crust, simple ingredients and a good place to drink wine or local beer with friends. Well, now I don't have to: someone else beat me to it. And after spending an evening dining on traditional Neapolitan pizza, vino rosso and Nutella pie with my family, I'm more than happy to recommend Pizzeria Prima Strada.

Located in the new development across from Oxford Foods, the place is bustling and the combination of friendly staff, lively décor, open kitchen and a room full of pizza lovers gives it a feel-good atmosphere. You can even get a stool at the bar which offers a front-row seat to view the pizza cooks throwing your thin-crust pies into an 850° wood-burning oven in about three minutes.

The menu is short and sweet: three simple salads, one antipasti and half-a-dozen pizzas. We ordered the melanzana and tonno (\$7), which consisted of warm, freshly baked pizza bread and a small jar (lid and all) of eggplant *caponatina*—a thick, luscious mix of soft-roasted eggplant, peppers, mushrooms, onions and olives, topped with a layer of flaked cooked local tuna *conserva*. Our instructions were to take off the lid and turn it onto the plate and just dig in; it was rich and fabulous with the soft fresh bread. The attractive *insalata speciale* (\$7) provides fresh greens, lots of marinated cherry tomato halves and some hefty chunks of bocconcini cheese with a light balsamic vinaigrette. It was very fresh and simple, and even the kids were chowing down.

The pizzas here are admirably traditional and disarmingly simple, with only two having more than four ingredients. The classic margherita (\$12), for example,

Upper Crust

Pizzeria Prima Strada a tasty choice

By JAMES RUSSELL

is topped with tomato, basil and *fior di latte mozzarella* (from cows milk, as opposed to the traditional buffalo milk), while the napoletana (\$12) offers up tomato, garlic, anchovies and oregano. A little more elaborate, the funghi (\$13) was my first choice—and did not disappoint. Porcini mushroom cream (instead of tomato sauce) provides a rich smooth sensation and added fungi flavour, while roasted mushrooms and onions, fresh thyme and pecorino cheese tops it off. We added thinly shaved *prosciutto cotto* (cooked) from the evening's special for two bucks extra and it was and laid over the whole pizza like a bed sheet—an awesome combination. The salciccia picante (\$13) was equally delicious, with homemade, spicy fennel sausage and roasted bell peppers, along with tomato and cheese.

Something I didn't expect, but enjoyed immensely, was a less-than-crispy dough, due to the use of a lower-gluten pizzeria flour. A link on the Prima Strada website directs you to their blog, which provides some details regarding specifications for what a European Union-certified Neapolitan pizza must contain—type 00 flour (the finest), a crust less than two centimeters thick and 35 centimeters in diameter, and just the right amount of tomato sauce, placed in a swirling motion. Normally, I praise a pizza crust that is crispy and strong enough to stick straight out without sagging, but a traditionally perfect Pizza Napoletana boasts a crust that can be folded without breaking or cracking. The result is a unique, chewy softness that has a certain luxuriousness to it—easy to get used to.

Speaking of luxury, we had been wondering what the jars of Nutella were doing displayed alongside cans of Italissima tomatoes and bottles of red wine. Turns out that one of the desserts offered—alongside gelato and sorbetto—is something called Nutella pie (\$6.50). It took a while to get: I think the pizza oven is utilized to cook the dough, then it probably has to cool a bit before being sliced open, stuffed with the sinful chocolate hazelnut spread and sprinkled with icing sugar. Not exactly pie, but it was, needless to say, worth the wait—a yummy and playful way to end a great dinner at a fun, well-organized place with fabulous authentic pizza. *Buon Appetito!* **M**

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