

Basil Brick Oven: Good Pizza in an Unexpected Part of Astoria

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[Photos: [Adam Kuban](#)]

Basil Brick Oven Pizza makes what some folks might call Neapolitan pizza, but pizzaiolo and co-owner **Daniel Barbois**, a native of [Piedmont, Italy](#), would dispute that. The pizzas here look like their Naples-based counterparts, Mr. Barbois, says, but the crust is more crisp, the edges a little more flat, the cheese a bit more generous.



Basil is not in the most obvious of locations for someone to open a restaurant in this neighborhood. Tucked away on Astoria Boulevard a couple blocks west of the elevated train and just south of the Triboro Bridge* on ramp, it's far from Astoria's new happening restaurants on Broadway.

Basil pizzaiolo and co-owner Daniel Barbois readies a pizza for delivery.

Barbois says he chose the location because his business partner owns the building. And it might have been just what the area needed. By all appearances Basil does brisk business. On my visits there, take-out and delivery service was booming, even while the small dining room was modestly filled. (The 12-seat space is packed on weekends, Barbois told me.)

The oven is wood-fired ..., a rare thing in Astoria. Despite the neighborhood's Italian history and the fact that [people here know how to eat](#), the whole wood-oven-pizza trend seems to have skipped Queens completely. ([I know of only one other WFO pizza joint in Astoria.](#)) I'm happy to see Basil forging a path here.



The pizzas are small, individual-size with a modest rise around the edge. That's by design. Barbois says he uses only a small amount of yeast in the dough, and I saw the pizzamakers there giving burgeoning [pizza bubbles](#) a sharp whack with the edge of the peel.

The robust sauce is just sweet enough and well balanced, a savory mixture of canned San Marzano tomatoes and some tomato paste, which Barbois says he uses to tamp down on the overall acidity.

The fresh mozzarella, made in-house from curd delivered daily, is creamy, just a touch salty, and applied fairly generously — though still a bit more restrained than you'd see on a classic New York-style pizza. (Basil also offers buffalo mozzarella on its Margherita Regina and other pies; it is even creamier, and a tad tangy.)



The crust is thin and much more crisp than a Neapolitan-style pizza, but it's still tender, if a bit dry (use the olive oil on the table to dress the pizza bones). Barbois makes it a day ahead, allowing it an overnight room-temperature fermentation period. I thought it could use a little more flavor, although it was not inedibly bland.



There are 40 pizzas on the menu. Yes, 40. It covers all basics (marinara, Margherita, the Quattro Brothers, Formaggi, and Stagioni, etc.) and tread some new ground, like the **Pizzucca** (\$12, above), which has a pumpkin-walnut sauce whose sweetness is balanced by the pancetta and Parmigiano-reggiano. It's sort of the perfect fall pizza—and one of Basil's most popular, Barbois says. His Piedmontese roots show, he says, in the namesake Basil pizza, which uses pesto for the sauce; a good number of the pies also feature the basil-based concoction.



Barbois seems to have created a neighborhood place here. The staff is amiable, and prices are reasonable. The most expensive pizza is \$14. Within the next few weeks, Barbois will be expanding next door, where he'll open a bar and café that will serve a wider range of Italian food as well as breakfast.

Yes, at first it's a bit unexpected to see a place like this on this stretch, but then again, it looks like it's quickly become part of the fabric here. ... And I'm happy it's a 10-minute walk from my own home, which means I'll be forging a path there often.

Basil Brick Oven Pizza

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* No, I will not call it the RFK.

About the author: [Adam Kuban](#) is the founder of Slice, where he has been blogging about pizza since 2003. You can follow him as [@akuban](#) on Twitter.