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New pizza styles

There's fresh terrain for the pizza aficionado to explore in Gotham. *TONY* investigates life beyond the New York slice.

By Mari Uyehara



Basil Brick Oven Pizza - Photograph: Jakob N. Layman

Northern Italian pizza at Basil Brick Oven Pizza

28-17 Astoria Blvd between 28th and 29th Sts, Astoria, Queens (718-204-1205)

The backstory: Since Naples-born Gennaro Lombardi opened America's first licensed pizzeria at 53 Spring Street in 1905, southern Italy has dominated New York City's pizzascape with its Sicilian squares (an Italian-American riff) and Neapolitan pies. But in the past few years, pie reps from northern Italy have started to edge their way onto the city's slice map. In 1994, traditional Roman varieties, the crispy rectangular lengths sold by the inch, surfaced at [Sullivan Street Bakery](#), which was later joined by [Campo de Fiori](#) (2010) and [Roma Pizza](#) (2011). Last June, a different kind of northern Italian pizza—round pies found all over the region—arrived in far-out Queens, thanks to Piedmont native Danile Barbos.

The specs: Northern Italian pizzas resemble Neapolitan-style versions, but Barbos says the two possess three major differences: Northern Italian pizzas are thinner since less dough is used, offer more varieties of toppings (he has 40 different pies on his menu), and cook for longer (three to four minutes versus a quick 60-second turn in the oven).

The result: On the Basil Brick Oven Pizza menu, you'll find familiar favorites, like the *Margherita* and *quattro formaggi*, along with more characteristically northern options, such as pies topped with pesto or cream sauce. We liked the *finocchiona*, slathered with tomato sauce, pools of creamy homemade mozzarella, fresh basil leaves and a double dose of fennel—slices of the sweet roasted vegetable and anisey coins of hot Italian sausage flavored with its seeds. These tender and crispy pizzas have a distinctively smoky flavor derived from the extra time in the oven with smoldering wood, and the generous layer of toppings is thicker than the crust itself, making austere Neapolitan versions seem downright stingy by comparison.