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Delectable New Dishes At Basil Brick Oven Pizza

By Georgina Young-Ellis



Basil Brick Oven Pizza, at 28-17 Astoria Boulevard, has been known for its awe-inspiring pizza, pasta and panini since it opened in June of 2011. Recently, they've expanded both in size and menu and I was among those invited to sample the new offerings. The first thing about the restaurant that attracts the eye, after walking past the clean, uncomplicated bar area in the front, is a window adorned with fresh herbs – that looks onto the sparkling kitchen. Beyond, the back dining area beckons, with its high ceilings, warm brick walls and woodwork, reclaimed from the building that was there before. The space exudes an informal yet elegant vibe, a result of the decorating skills of Cathy Giannola, wife of one of the proprietors, Vito Giannola. For indeed, Basil is a family affair, owned by the Giannola family and Chef Daniele Barbos, obviously savvy, yet conscientious businessmen. They care deeply about the neighborhood, the Giannola family having run a beauty salon next door and a gas station across the street for several decades, as well as owning more than one apartment building in the area, one of which recently won an award from the Queens Chamber of Commerce.

Their love of community reflects in how they run Basil, with a great desire to please the customer and minute attention to detail. To that end, they partnered with chef Daniele, originally from Piemonte, Italy, to concoct the most delectable and authentic brick oven pizzas—40 varieties and counting: everything from the Regina Margherita with imported buffalo mozzarella, parmigiano reggiano, extra virgin olive oil, and basil, to the Boschaiola with homemade fresh mozzarella, a dash of heavy cream, sausage, asparagus, mushrooms, parmigiano reggiano, truffle oil, and basil, each just \$13.00. Chef Daniele's new menu includes an impressive array of novel delicacies, all affordably priced. Though the new dishes won't be listed on the menu until the end of February, you can be sure the waitstaff will tell you about them as specials. On the evening of February 6, I was there with a group of food critics and bloggers to try it all. We were first served octopus, sliced paper thin, on a bed of lemon juice-infused arugula, so fresh, I couldn't stop eating it. We also chose as appetizers light-as-air fried calamari with julienned vegetables, juicy clams in a white wine sauce that I simply wanted to dive into, and unforgettable pinwheels of the homemade mozzarella, prosciutto, and arugula. Next came the pastas—first, a green lasagna, one of the most exquisite dishes my tastebuds have ever had the privilege to enjoy, made with green noodles, pesto, fresh mozzarella, bechamel sauce, and potato. Others we tried included a lobster ravioli with a light, creamy shrimp tomato sauce, and a pesto gnocchi. There was a risotto made with radicchio, mascarpone, and speck, a more delicate dried ham than prosciutto, and another called “mare e monte” (sea and mountain) with portobello mushrooms, asparagus, and seafood, both with unusual but delicious combinations of flavors. By this time I was almost too full to move, but Barbos had more delights in store, which included a grilled pork with crisp apples and bacon, rack of lamb, crispy crust on the outside and tender flavorful meat inside, and a super moist salmon, crusted with a bacon topping. I couldn't manage even one bite of dessert, but my husband nearly swooned over the tiramisu.



The waitstaff was extremely attentive and informed. Our waitress, Anna, took the time to chat with us in Italian, but was ready to answer every question and attend to our every need in an instant.

We also had the pleasure of being joined, about halfway through our meal, by Joe Giannola and his nephew, Vito. From them, we learned how dedicated the family is to building businesses that maintain Astoria's character, and offering the kind of living experience that makes tenants feel like they're part of a close-knit community. As a matter of fact, one of the Giannola family's buildings, currently under construction, will look out over Basil's back patio, (to be opened





August) complete with open-air fireplace, which promises to be a warm and inviting spot where tenants can come directly from their apartment, down to have a bite to eat.

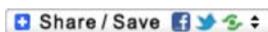
Basil Brick Oven Pizza (www.basilbrickoven.com) is already a favorite of Astorians, as well as of diners from all over New York, who come to enjoy delicious, inventive, Italian dishes, in a wonderful atmosphere, at an affordable price. Now, they'll have even more reasons to seek out this little gem. Drop by and say hello. You'll be rewarded with great food and the feeling of being part of la famiglia.

BASIL BRICK OVEN PIZZA BASIL CAFÉ AND GELATERIA

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