

Where Pizza Is Just a Slice of a Northern Italian Flavor Cornucopia – Review of Basil Brick Oven Pizza

August 23, 2013 By [admin 1 Comment](#)

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Astorians are favorably served when it comes to solid brick oven pizza. Places like [Tufino's](#), [Trattoria l'Incontro](#) among a few others see honorably to that. However for those seeking a fine brick oven dining experience that also encompasses fine authentic regional dishes and does not entail any long term injuries on the wallet, Basil is just the place.



To the uninitiated, Basil Brick Oven Pizza is a place where one might expect to have a solid pizza dining experience. I was firmly disabused of this notion thanks to [Bradley Hawks](#) of [Amuse Bouche](#) and a very fun dinner that he organized for Astoria-based foodie community and beyond, several months ago. In fact the non-pizza items on the menu were so extensive that I was so full that I had to bow out before the pizzas even arrived.

Utterly wowed by Chef Daniele's creations, I left knowing that I'd be making a return visit for the pizza. I made good on that this summer, and I wasn't disappointed. Overwhelmed by the selection—the pizza menu alone has over 50 varieties of topping combinations, from the classical to the outlandish—I decided to go for the “Basil” pizza, since the herb lent it name to the restaurant.

The crust was crisp and well done. It did not have the char and tenderness that some Neapolitan [pizzaioli](#) pride themselves in, it was a solid crust and held up to the weight of the toppings very well. The basil topping consisted in the ingredients that comprise a traditional Genovese pesto sauce: basil, pine nuts, potatoes (always present in an authentic plate of spaghetti al pesto) olive oil, garlic and grated [Parmigiano Reggiano](#) coupled with generous, but not overwhelming slices of melted mozzarella. The fresh flavors and the quality of the ingredients were emphasized by the first rate extra virgin olive oil drizzled upon the crust. The flavor was intense and added a little pinch to every bite.



Sogliola al Forno

My dining companion ordered the Sogliola al Forno (filet of sole in white wine sauce, lemon, capers and black olives). Predictably lean and indisputably fresh, the sole was

perfectly cooked and the black olives lent an interesting counter point to the subtle acidity of the lemon-wine-caper sauce . The portion was generous and thoughtfully paired with white fingerling potatoes and grilled vegetables.

To the rest of Chef Daniele's menu, after having sampled a wide swath of appetizers, salads, primi of pastas and risottos and a number of entrees and experiencing various levels of enjoyment and no disappointments, I will limit myself to spotlighting my favorites here.

Chef Daniele is from [Piedmont](#) and takes great pride in showcasing ingredients typical of cuisine of the northern end of the Italian peninsula and featuring them in ways that best accentuate the distinctive characteristics of items such as [speck](#), [radicchio](#) and [gorgonzola](#).



Sliced Octopus Salad

A dish that scored the highest points for me for plating, presentation, originality and flavor is the sliced octopus salad. Thin strata of bound octopus, sliced horizontally are stacked tall and then tastefully garnished with fresh microgreens, slices of grape tomatoes and halved lemons. Lightly drizzled in olive oil, salt, pepper and green herbs it is a light fresh appetizer that is festive and pleasing in every way.



Vongole alla Basil

The Vongole alla Basil is a light and delectable appetizer. The dish features little neck clams sautéed with zucchini in a white wine broth with mint and garlic. Served with thin slices of oregano focaccia which is great both on its own or for sopping up the delicious broth.



Homemade Beef Meatballs

Also as satisfying as it is visual appealing are Chef Daniele's Homemade Meatballs. The dense and hearty sphere of beef are elegantly coated in melted mozzarella and served atop a fresh red tomato sauce and shredded basil.



Risotto con Radicchio, Speck e Mascarpone

The Risotto con Radicchio, Speck e Mascarpone is an outstanding dish that really highlights ingredients from Tirol and Piedmont. A toothsome, yet creamy Arborio rice flavored with the deep, rich aromatic flavors of porcini mushrooms, shreds of speck lend it a smoky saltiness and strips of radicchio bestow subtle notes of bitterness and texture.



Basil Lasagna

Chef Daniele's Lasagna is another rewarding departure from the lasagna that is typically featured on menus here in the U.S., which are based on Southern Italian variations of lasagna, which is primarily comprised of lasagna noodles, ground beef, grated mozzarella and tomato sauce. The first distinguishing feature of Basil's lasagna is that there is no trace

of tomato sauce in them, save from the decorative streak that is placed on the side of the dish for chromatic effect. Basil's lasagna rather consists of alternating layers of lasagna noodles, potato slices and pesto sauce. It is topped with a thick layer of melted mozzarella and is in addition to being filling, also delicious. While it may never displace red sauce lasagna for many, it is a genuine Italian culinary contender.

There's a lot to love about Basil: Portions generous, prices are modest and range in the low \$10s for salads and antipasti, the \$10-\$15 range for pizzas, from the \$15 or less to the low \$20s (for risotti), most entrees are in the low \$20 range.

There is also a nice selections of Italian wines which which to pair the dishes that are also available by the glass. A variety of Northern and Southern Italian as well as American desserts are available on the menu.

The decor is rustic and up-to-date with exposed brick walls and lantern-style chandeliers.

Service is cheerful and eager to please.

Basil is not a joyous addition to the rich and varied Astoria culinary landscape, but an authentic casual and contemporary Northern Italian restaurant, which truly fills a void in Queens.



- See more at: <http://www.thegothampalate.com/2013/08/review-of-basil-brick-oven-pizza/#sthash.rK6JKYI4.dpuf>