

Appetite
Mama Mia!

The pies of five pizza parlors are put to the taste test
by MB Partlow

I'm sitting here surrounded by grease-splotched menus with scribbled notes, hoping with equal intensity for Tums and inspiration. The giant mound of pizza boxes has been dismantled and quietly tucked into a handy trashcan. This morning's paper has got a blob of pizza sauce in the middle of the front page. And a single, folded cloth napkin in the middle of the dining room table is all that bears testament to the pizza orgy that took place last night.

If you've ever wondered if the Indy's food writers suffer for you, we do. Last night we sat down and sampled pizzas from five different establishments, just so we could tell you about the good, the bad and the unbearable. This means that at some point in the evening, we all had five slices of pizza on our plates while I tried frantically to take notes on everyone's comments about toppings, sauces and crusts. And despite the good points that we found, one friend sadly remarked, "I still miss New York pizza, for the crust and the cheese."

Going to extremes — Extreme Pizza gets the nod from our tasters
Photo By Sunnie Sacks

Let's start at the bottom and work up. Our least favorite was the pizza from Marilyn's in Manitou. It only comes in one size (a small 10"), and the crust displeased most of our tasters. I liked the fact that it was thin and crispy, holding up to its travels across town well, but I had to agree with the others that it lacked any discernible flavor. One taster said it took her back to the pizza you got in junior high school, but later upgraded it to airport pizza.

Play by Play Pizza and Sports has taken over the spot where Verrazanno's used to be. We wish they had kept the Verrazanno's recipes. All in all, though, this pizza is better than we expected, given the smoky, sports-bar interior of the place. On the minus side, the crust was rather wimpy and the sauce was virtually nonexistent -- a faint red smear under the toppings. On the plus side, the cheese was abundant and well melted, and the toppings were plentiful and fresh. Topping choices are pretty standard, and prices range from \$9.99 for a 14" pie to \$14.99 for a 19" pie.

Savelli's, also located in Manitou, was skimpy with the toppings, and the mushrooms seemed overcooked (probably the result of the mushrooms being cut in very, very small bits, and hence unable to withstand the heat of baking). But we all agreed that the sauce was very good, with a nice fresh flavor, and the cheese was properly done as well. (The larger menu of pastas, entrees and sandwiches here also intrigued us.) Pizzas range from \$5.25 for a 10" pizza to \$12.25 for an 18" super-size pie, both of these with cheese only. Extra toppings -- from pepperoni to pineapple -- range from 95¢ to \$1.85 each. Some toppings, such as artichoke hearts, sun-dried tomatoes and barbecue chicken, count as two toppings.

One of our favorites came from Extreme Pizza, located extremely far north on Academy. One secret to their success is the "take and bake" option; if you don't live anywhere near there, or even if you do, you can bake the pizza once you get home. Couldn't be easier, and it's certainly fresher than toting a rapidly cooling cardboard box across town. Here you'll find pizzas just loaded with fresh toppings, and very, very good pepperoni. Extreme offers several varieties of pizza with names like Everest (meat, meat and more meat) and Mr. Pesto Head (pesto sauce, new potatoes, onions, feta, fresh basil, oregano and mozzarella). Or design your own by choosing from four sauces (tomato, pesto, black bean and salsa, and hummus), eight cheeses (including feta, goat and soy), seven meats, 14 vegetables, and fresh spices (plus pineapple and mandarin oranges). It boggles the mind. Price-wise, you'll pay \$3.44 for an 8" with cheese, and \$11.95 for an 18" with cheese. Extra toppings are 65¢ to \$2.50, and some choices (like pesto and artichoke hearts) equal two toppings.

Our favorite pizza took us by surprise. Pikes Pizza, located on Delmonico, was easily the prettiest pizza, and the taste equaled the beauty. It was loaded with shredded green peppers and onions, the sauce was spicy and chunky, and their spicy sausage was absolutely a terrific foil. This was the pizza we kept coming back to, taking bite after bite, saying, "Is it the sausage that's spicy? Or is it the sauce? Wait, let me try it again." And, surprisingly for a nonchain shop, Pikes Pizza has the widest selection of toppings for designing your own pizza -- seven sauces, ranging from Sweet Baby Ray's barbecue sauce to Alfredo/bleu cheese to pesto; twelve meat selections, including homemade Italian sausage, homemade meatballs, prosciutto and smoked turkey breast. The vegetables weigh in with 20 choices, including three kinds of onion and everything you ever thought you could do to a pepper. There are six cheese choices, including soy, and for some reason tofu chunks are included in this category. Prices range from \$4.50 for an 8" cheese pie to \$10.35 for a 16" cheese pie. Toppings will cost from 55¢ to \$2.95.

So during the Thanksgiving weekend, when you can't stand the thought of one more turkey sandwich, you can now make an informed decision about where to get pizza. But please, don't bring any to my house. I still have all the leftovers.