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YVONNE ALBINOWSKI

Eric Behrmann and Demetra Zografakis of Smithtown design their custom pie at Piecraft in Island Park.

DIY pizza

BY ERICA MARCUS

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There's hardly a pizza trend that Long Island hasn't embraced — Neapolitan, Sicilian, bar pie, coal oven, wood oven, chicken Parm, mac-and-cheese — we even invented grandma pie. But now a new contender is challenging the local pizzeria establishment.

Call it fast-casual pizza or DIY pie, these venues all have the same setup, familiar from Chipotle Mexican Grill: You face an associate across a counter who is directed to assemble your pie. First, choose a crust and then, as you progress down the line, sauce, cheese and toppings. Create your own pie, or go with one of the shop's already composed options. Once finished, the 11-inch pie goes into a very hot oven and is ready in less than five minutes. Even with unlimited toppings, no pie is more than \$10.

The first LI outpost of these Brave

New Pizzerias was Blaze Pizza, which opened in West Babylon in July 2014. Now there are three national chains on L.I.: Blaze (three locations), PizzaRev (four) and Pizza Studio (one), plus a homegrown player, Piecraft.

Chris Dolan, who owns Piecraft in Island Park with Thomas Corning, conceded that Long Island has an entrenched pizza culture. "I grew up in Long Beach, and three days didn't go by when I didn't have a slice from Gino's," he said. But he and Corning, seasoned restaurateurs whose ventures included Café Laguna in Long Beach and Olive Oil's in Point Lookout, were nevertheless drawn to the concept, founded on the West Coast.

"In a traditional restaurant," he said, "if a family of eight comes in, all these wheels need to work in unison. It takes a lot of work and a lot of skill to have everyone seated and served." But when the partners looked at Chipotle, they saw a way to serve fresh food quickly,

Go down the line and pick out your own toppings

with much lower labor costs.

At Piecraft, dough and sauce are made, vegetables prepped every morning before opening. "And the college kids can assemble the pies in front of the customers."

Fast-casual pizzerias would not work without a mechanical means of shaping the dough. Dolan noted that hand-stretching pizza dough takes a great deal of skill — and commands a higher wage. And so all of these places have machines that press pre-portioned dough into uniformly thin rounds.

With one location in Island Park and another slated to open in Wantagh in October, Piecraft is the outlier DIY pizza outlet; the others are chain franchises.

Mike Tochluk and his partners at PizzaRev are bullish on its future here, and plan to add at least four more locations to their four existing ones. "We know there's a lot of competition here," he said, "but we believe that Long Islanders will respond to this new way of doing it."

PIECRAFT

4585 Austin Blvd., Island Park, 516-889-2168

Price of pie: \$6.50 for regular (whole-wheat) crust; \$1 additional for spicy-firecracker crust; \$3 additional for gluten-free. Each regular topping is 99 cents, and after three there is no additional charge. "Gourmet" toppings such as grilled shrimp and Prosciutto di Parma are \$1.99 to \$2.99. "Craft-y Specialty" pies are \$7.99 to \$12.99. **Drinks:** Beer and wine, tequila and vodka cocktails, soft drinks **Also:** Soups, wings, meatballs, salads, quinoa bowls and milk shakes

Founded in 2015 by Long Islanders Chris Dolan and Thomas Corning, Piecraft has a pizza-plus menu (wings, meatballs, quinoa bowls) largely driven by health trends. With its limited bar and gastropub decor, it feels more like a restaurant. Toppings include burrata, pesto, Gorgonzola and shaved Parmesan. Piecraft also has a separate preparation area and oven for gluten-free pies.



HERE AND ON THE COVER Blaze Pizza lets the customers do the pickin'. Above, pizza crafter Arnold Flores of Brentwood at work.

BLAZE PIZZA

■ 1047 NY-27A, West Babylon, 631-620-3326
■ Westfield South Shore, 1701 Sunrise Hwy., Bay Shore, 631-666-1100
■ 213 Broadway Mall, Hicksville, 516-433-5400

Price of pie: \$8.25 for unlimited toppings and "signature" pies; \$5.45 for "simple" (cheese, sauce) pies; \$2 additional for thicker crust; \$3 additional for gluten-free crust **Drinks:** Beer and wine, soft drinks **Also:** Salads and s'more pies (like moon pies)

Founded in 2011 and based in Pasadena, California, this high-profile chain boasts LeBron James as a franchise partner and, in 2015, was characterized as "the next Chipotle" by Bloomberg Business News. With a simple tomato sauce and well-developed crust, the pies here most closely achieve what you might find in a Naples-style pizzeria. "Signature" pies include Red Vine, which has fresh mozzarella, tomato sauce, cherry tomatoes, Parmesan, basil and olive oil drizzle, and White Top, which has cream sauce, mozzarella, bacon, garlic, oregano and arugula.



Mohammed Islam, left, of Queens and Chris Veras of the Bronx confer with Pizza Studio's Vanessa Ramirez.

PIZZA STUDIO

911 Broadhollow Rd., Suite 110, Farmingdale, 631-777-8088

Price of pie: \$7.99 for unlimited toppings or "Studio Masterpieces;" \$2 additional for gluten-free crust

Drinks: Soft drinks

Also: Salads and cookies

Founded in 2013 and based in Calabasas, California, Pizza Studio offers a modest decor, quick service and an unparalleled variety of crusts — traditional, rosemary herb, whole grain and flaxseed, firecracker, gluten free.

Among dozens of toppings are banana peppers, caramelized onions, sweet chicken sausage and Old Bay seasoning. "Studio Masterpiece" pies include The Beast with pepperoni, bacon, meatball, smoked ham and spicy pork sausage.



Liam Connors prepares a pizza with a thin crust, red sauce, Italian cheese, crumbled Italian sausage, pepperoni and bacon for Javell Mathieu at PizzaRev.

PIZZAREV

■ 408 Jericho Tpke., Syosset, 516-921-1777
■ 1088 The Arches Circle, Deer Park, 631-232-2229
■ 694 Motor Pkwy., Hauppauge, 631-388-5336
■ 2034 Green Acres Rd., W Space #0030, Valley Stream, 516-599-0555

Price of pie: \$8.25 for unlimited toppings; \$5.99 to \$8.25 for "Our Way" pizzas; \$2 additional for gluten-free crust

Drinks: Beer and wine, soft drinks

Also: Craft your own salads and dessert pizza

Founded in 2013 and based in Westlake, California, PizzaRev outlets have an industrial-barn-chic feel that may remind you of Chipotle. The thin crust is very thin; traditionalists may want to opt for the double crust. Among toppings: Canadian bacon, vegan sausage, pineapple and fennel seeds. "Our Way" pies include pulled pork with fried onions and jalapeños.