

NIALL TONER

The Italian fast-food favourite has a bad reputation but chefs claim it can be healthier than you think — especially if you make your own

Giuseppe Crupi is part chef, part cultural ambassador and part cabaret act. Sporting a T-shirt with the confident assertion, "Come as a mortal, leave as a pizzaiolo", the Calabrian guides a collection of 30 or so amateur cooks, including this one, through the process of making pizza from scratch.

We get down and dirty with "00" flour, preparing four different pizzas. First, it's a margherita with tomato sauce, mozzarella and basil. Then a calzone, or folded pizza with various fillings, followed by a pizza bianco (white with no tomato sauce) and, finally, a treccia or plaited pizza, all made under the entertaining and expert guidance of Crupi.

The performance takes place in an industrial estate off the Old Naas Road in west Dublin, tucked in behind the McDonald's at the Kylemore Luas stop. Inside you'll find a professional kitchen stocked with mouthwatering, artisan edibles, the perfect location for Crupi's weekend classes on the fundamentals of Italian home cooking.

The 37-year-old runs workshops on everything from fresh pastas and accompanying sauces to preparing an Italian three-course family meal. On this Saturday, though, it was all about pizza, and "Mama" even got a look in.

"There are many, many recipes and, of course, here is the best," Crupi jokes, only half-kidding as it turns out. "The recipe for treccia is actually from the grandmother of my sister's mother-in-law," he admits.

The fact that there is a demand for lessons in the art of preparing the Italian topped bread is testament to the pizza renaissance



PICKING UP THE PIZZAS



on a new book that features healthy versions of take-away meals and when he recently asked the public to vote for recipes, pizza topped the poll.

The modern Irish pizza-eater, it would seem, wants a more health-conscious, minimalist approach to their favourite slice. And where gourmet pizza is concerned, less is definitely more.

"You don't want to have too many ingredients," says Crupi. "The flavour of the bread is very subtle, so the idea is not to overpower it. Mozzarella is used because it's not a strong-tasting cheese, and a very simple tomato sauce works best with nothing added except a little salt and grated parmesan cheese."

You won't find any pineapple,

chicken or sweetcorn in Paulie's, a popular pizzeria on Grand Canal Street in Dublin 4, owned by brothers Paul and Barry McNerney. Here, the margherita is the bestseller on the menu and it's made according to strict rules similar to those applied in wine-making. Only the ingredients and cooking methods approved by the Associazione Verace Pizza Napoletana in Italy are used.

Paulie's has been open for almost three years. "Our premises is around the corner from Juniors, our delicatessen on Bath Avenue," says Barry. "When it became available to rent we decided we better open something before anybody else did."

"There was nobody doing proper Neapolitan pizza in a proper oven in Dublin, so we brought one in from Palermo and

we only ever use wood to fire it. It reaches temperatures of 450C."

The brothers even brought over a consultant from Naples to help them at first, and it was he who put an embargo on the use of pineapple, sweetcorn or chicken, explaining that anyone who asked for these ingredients in a pizzeria in Naples would be escorted off the premises. "We must be doing something right as we get a lot of Italians eating here regularly now," says Barry.

Ireland's other new pizzerias are also building a reputation among foodies and critics. They include Da Mimmo in North Strand, Dublin 3; Bellagio in Terenure, Dublin 6; Novocento, on

Continued on page 22 >>

SHARP SHOOTER

John Farrell maintains his reputation with his update of Dillinger's

P24



21

Crupi runs a pizza class, inset below

Crupi's treccia

Treccia, or plaited pizza, is pizza dough filled and folded into a braid and sometimes shaped into a ring or other configuration.

What you will need

For the dough
500g/1lb 2oz "00" flour
25g/1oz fresh yeast
300ml/10½fl oz water
5g/¼oz sugar
10g/½oz salt
35g/1¼oz extra-virgin olive oil

For the topping
10 slices of pancetta
Mozzarella cheese
Fresh basil
Extra-virgin olive oil
Finely sliced mushrooms

How to prepare

Place the flour in a mound. Melt the yeast in the water and add the sugar.

Combine the flour, water, salt and extra-virgin olive oil.

Knead by hand until you have a smooth and elastic dough and then place it in a bowl and cover with a wet cloth. Let the dough sit in a warm place (room temperature) until it doubles in size, about two hours.

Split the dough into balls of 200g/7oz each, place these in a bowl and cover with a wet cloth. Let them sit in a warm place for a further hour.

Take a ball of dough and flatten it with your hands on a floured work surface. Starting at the centre and working outwards, stretch the dough with a floured rolling pin.

Turn and stretch the dough until it reaches the desired rectangular shape (long and not too wide).

Transfer it onto the oven tray and layer pancetta, mozzarella and the mushrooms to a couple of centimetres from the edge.

Cut the two sides with a knife, making strips in a fishbone shape, then plait them on top of the filling.

Bake the treccia in a preheated oven at 230C/gas mark 8 until the crust is browned and the cheese is golden, about 10-15 minutes.



>> Continued from page 21
Douglas Street in Cork; La Cucina in Limerick city; and Espresso on Parnell Street in Co Waterford, to name but a few.

An influx of newer Italian migrants such as Crupi, who came here 12 years ago, has also fuelled the demand for more authentic pizza, as have travel-seasoned palates.

When it established over a decade ago, Steps of Rome, on Dublin's Chatham Street, opened the minds of Dubliners to the wider possibilities of Italian street food. The Roman-style cafe serves pizza al taglio, a type cooked on large rectangular trays and served in slices, with toppings such as potato and rosemary.

If an expedition to west Dublin to learn about pizza sounds heroic, meet brothers James and Thom Elliot, two young Englishmen who took their quest up and down Italy. "We were chatting in the pub one evening in October 2011 about what we could do for a living besides the jobs we were in," says James. "The whole street food thing was beginning to happen at the time and we came up with the notion of putting a pizza oven on the back of a Piaggio Ape van and starting a street pizza business."

It proved cheaper for the London-based Elliots to fly to Italy, buy the van and drive it back themselves, so they decided to turn the trip into a full-blown pizza odyssey, one they say was a real eye-opener. "The Mel Brooks' quote springs to mind, where he says that 'pizza is like sex — even a bad one is good'," says James. "We thought pizza was just pizza, but we had no idea really. Then we got to Naples and tasted real Neapolitan pizza, and once you have tasted that you will never look back."

The brothers' trip bore more fruit than an education and the acquisition of their beloved Ape. They turned the story of the journey into into a book, *Pizza Pilgrims*, with a collection of the recipes they picked up along the way. The pair now tour music fes-

tivals and other events in their tiny van and plan to open a pizzeria in central London in July.

The Elliots even discovered that the deep-fried pizza of Scottish chipper cuisine isn't really a Scottish invention after all. In the Spanish quarter of Naples, "pizza fritta" has been a popular street food for generations.

Perhaps Crupi can explain why the Elliots discovered such a world of regional variation in Italian pizza.

"Italy is not really one country," he says. "It is made up of so many small regions, all of which had their own traditions and their own ways of making bread. And you get all these influences in the cooking, like down the



Paulie's pizza chef, Vladimir de Olivera Henrique, creates a Neapolitan-style pizza; below, *Pizza Pilgrims* book



James and Thom Elliot's frying-pan pizza

This is the best way to make Neapolitan pizza at home, unless you have a stone oven in your kitchen. The pan and grill

How to prepare
Make a well in the centre of the flour. Dissolve the yeast in the water and pour into the middle

it on a floured surface. Using your fingertips, press it out firmly, starting at the centre and working out to the edge.

To make the sauce, crush the tomatoes by hand so the seeds are not whizzed up by the blender, which makes it bitter. Add a pinch of salt and blitz

M
A
W
T

Our
to p
frier

S

to d
wond
will k
such:

We
their
Mona
the p
appr
dowr
durin
wher
lesso

So
the s
or th
not t
sma
teach
shov

O
one
"all
take
star
reci
wel

in a