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Try This At Home Series

June 9, 2020



That's Amore!

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Mitch: Flatbreads – and flat breads (Guilty. More than once.) – have been baked in homes since civilizations began harvesting grains. Even in an era defined by excessiveness, their popularity endures. Is it their simplicity or their ability not just to accommodate an endless variety of flavors and textures? And not just accommodate them, but accentuate and elevate them? We often speak of the blank canvas in the food world. Could any canvas be more blank? Yeah, I know, pie dough, puff pastry, short paste, filo... But, they're not pizza.

The pandemic has exposed, and perhaps, intensified our likes and dislikes. I love pizza fresh from the oven. The holy trinity of dough, sauce, and cheese soothes and excites me without ever approaching palate fatigue. Each bite of each pizza rewards and satisfies.

Observe people eating pizza. Whether it's a quick slice on the go or a candlelight dinner, we are fully engaged. Holding it, supporting it, gazing at it, folding it with purpose or spontaneity, we have more approaches and strategies for consuming pizza than we do for almost any other food. We are more demanding in our pizza expectations than with most other foods, and yet we are more forgiving with the same expectations.

While not as nuanced as pizzeria pizza, bakery and home pizza lessen my appreciation only slightly. I approach it with a baguette de tradition recipe and method, increasing the hydration to 78% (based on 11.5 – 12% protein flour). I'm able to bake pizza that at least placates or mollifies The Need. Baked with sauce from gently cooked tomatoes and just enough cheese to eat, not a cheese bomb that acts as heat shield and clogs arteries.

The deck ovens at Johnson & Wales have a maximum temperature of 572°F. My home oven maxes out at 550°. I'm not saying it's better, but I prefer focaccia or pan pizza from both ovens. I use 40g of olive oil and 1kg of dough per half sheet tray. I flip the dough in the tray during dimpling so both sides are coated with olive oil. I never thought about it, but I could brush 20g on the tray and 20g on the dough. Nah...flipping it is too much fun.

Baking it in the tray with olive oil sweetens and gently crisps the crust that contrasts with the texture and flavor of fermented grain. Energy coiled in the dough can't contain itself when provoked by the heat of a bold oven. The result is an uneven surface with a creamy, open, and elastic crumb.

Borrowing from Roman and al Taglio style pizza bakers, I sometimes parbake the dough in the tray. When it's time to eat, I top it and bake it directly on the stone without the tray. But when I have dough that I like this much, I don't want to dilute my appreciation with anything else, not even the other two-thirds of the trinity. Brushing it with olive oil directly from the oven and sprinkling it with fleur de sel and a fresh herb like rosemary occupies the first ten slots on my menu.

Enjoying pizza or focaccia fresh from the oven fulfills the eleventh commandment. However, reheating pizza is the twenty-eighth amendment.



Kristen: You might imagine I have strong opinions about pizza much like I do with bagels (see: Not Schleppling for Bagels). And until I went to college in Providence, RI with lots of out of state students, I definitely had strong pizza opinions. Anything that isn't New York Style, isn't really pizza. Deep dish? That's a casserole. I never heard of any others, so therefore, they didn't matter. Oh and there was frozen pizza which served its purpose occasionally in my childhood home as a cheap and fast dinner ready in less time than to go and pick up a pizza.

As my friend base grew, so did my interactions with other pizzas.

New Haven style. Huh? As in, Connecticut?

Thin, chewy, charcoal baked, and supremely greasy in all the right ways. Upon my first encounter, I couldn't stop thinking about it. Ate nearly a whole pie to myself the first time.

Chicago or deep dish style. A casserole, sorta, but also hearty and a crust that is uniquely strong, crunchy but short.

Bakery Pizza, a Rhode Island favorite. Room temperature, cheese underneath the sauce. Simple and soft. Easy to see why it would become a childhood favorite for many.

Friends I shared pizza with opened me up to different condiments and toppings as well. We experimented constantly with take out, leftovers or frozen pizzas. Kimchi? Yes. Sriracha? Definitely. Hot Honey? Why not.

I was lucky enough to attend study abroad in Florence, Italy which opened my eyes even more. Incredibly simple but well executed Neapolitan style. These pizzas proved the quality of every component was key and demanded equal attention. The fermentation of the dough, the flour used, the quality of the cheese, etc, etc.

We took a week-long trip to Sicily and there I discovered even more. French fries do belong on pizza but only the right kind of pizza. Thicker and more focaccia like, often room temperature. Kind of like that bakery pizza from Rhode Island. And don't forget the special cardboard pizza holder that folded back as you ate your slice. Pure genius.

Fast forward to moving to California. No good pizza. Well quickly I found out I was looking at this through the wrong lens. I was looking for New York Style in California and because of that I was missing all the great Neapolitan style, California style, and everything in between.

Brunch pizza, what? Runny egg yolk, and chili oil. Absolute home run.

New York inspired styles in California never quite make the mark and often just leave me missing the real deal. So we are certain to schedule regular trips back to the east coast. I mean to see family, of course!

California style has a wider range of toppings and lots of them on a single pizza. Often a softer-yeastier dough with less overall grease on the finished pizza. At home, I make this style often for a few reasons but primarily because it doesn't require a lot of forethought to have pizza for dinner.

Ever hear of Indian Cuisine Pizza? Truly a great marriage of food identities. The sauce is usually a curry base like Tikka Masala and then a range of matching toppings plus pizza cheese. As an Indian food lover, I was sold before I ever tasted it.

When reconnecting with a college friend in Austin, Texas she brought me to a Detroit style pizza shop. I had never heard of Detroit style before this. One bite in and my pizza life would never be the same. Now everytime I go to Austin, I make time to get a pie. It's the kind of pizza you can just tell that reheating it is going to be just as good as the freshly made version. Since my first encounter I have been known to spend sleepless nights reading comprehensive guides on how to perfect the golden brown cheese crust. And considered buying that special rectangular pan, multiple times. Detroit style is definitely on my radar now.

I am hungry for pizza of all shapes and sizes. What other kinds should I explore?

I use several different doughs when making pizza at home. The chart is below.

I don't have other doughs in my home repertoire but I am always looking for more! Please share your favorites.

Dough Type	<i>Fermentation/Formula Properties</i>	Baking	Results
California/ Quick Pizza	1 hour bulk, a little sugar, a lot of yeast, a small percentage of oil. Developed fully in the mixer	450F directly on preheated pizza stone	Puffy, thicker pizzas, doesn't get very thin. Works best for lots of heavy toppings.
Minimally mixed/ lazy baker pizza dough	Several hour fermentation with .5-1.5% yeast depending on timeline. Controlled with retarding. Strength built only through some intermittent folding and shaping.	500F Baked directly on preheated stone	Easy to execute pizza dough that gets the job done. But the key is realizing you want pizza several hours beforehand.
Neapolitan - esque	Slow cold rise, moderate amount of development in mixer. Healthy glug of high quality Olive Oil. Two day process, minimum.	550F Baking stone preheated for at least one hour, positioned just below the broiler. Mid way through baking pizza, switch to broiler mode to achieve charring.	Lactic flavor profile with good clean chew. Nice mixture of small and large air bubbles.
Deep Dish/ Chicago	Not much fermentation, includes the most fat and some cornmeal.	Alternate between moderate and high heat to ensure the pizza is caramelized but dried out enough. This will vary based on your fillings.	Crispy, more pie dough-like crust with crunch from cornmeal, stands up to all the fillings.

That's Amore Recipe

Ingredient	Weight	%
Bread Flour	2870g	100
Water	2239g	78
Instant yeast	6.4g	.225
Malt	14g	.5
Salt	57g	2
Total	5188.4	178.725

Method:

- Add flour and water to the mixing bowl.
- Mix on 1st speed just until the mass is hydrated.
- Cover bowl and leave for 30 minutes- 1 hour.
- Add salt, yeast, and malt; mix 4 minutes on 1st speed.
- Place dough in a deep, oiled container.
- Fermentation: One hour – fold at 20 minutes; fold at 40 minutes; fold at 60 minutes.
- Place the uncovered container in the refrigerator for 10 minutes.
- Bag the container and cover with a lid.
- Refrigerate up to 18-20 hours.
- Divide into desired weight for pizza or focaccia.
- Pizza: Shape round, brush with oil. Refrigerate overnight
- Focaccia: Gently dimple the dough periodically until it fits the tray.
 - Final proof: 45 – 60 minutes
 - Dimple directly before baking