



NAPOLETANA PIZZA -- THE OVEN



Hot, Hot, Hot! I'm told there are over one thousand wood-fired ovens in Naples. I believe it, there seems to be a wood-fired pizzeria on every corner. Even more amazing is that almost all are baking essentially the same pizza and all of them are busy. During my trip I ate in 33 pizzerias all over Naples. All were very, very good; a couple were especially good.

What do people love about Neapolitan pizza? It's fast, it's flavorful, it's fresh, it's fragrant, and it's fantastic! The quality of the dough, tomatoes, cheese and intensity of the ovens create a slightly charred rustic experience that is hard to get over. It is awesome!

Is wood-fired a critical element? Citizens of Naples think so. Cook times average 60-90 seconds, with most closer to 60 seconds. This speed equates to around a 750°F-floor temperature. Probably the most important Pizzaiolo's oven technique is that every pizza is spun 180 degrees and then lifted 4-6 inches off the oven floor within the last 10-15 seconds. This elevates the pizza into the smoky part of the oven dome, creating the potential to influence flavor profile. This spin and move off the floor is critical to a balanced bake. Left only on the intense floor these pizzas would surely burn before the tops are colored nicely.

- A** Wood Species
- B** Fire Management
- C** Fire Location
- D** Pizza Placement
- E** Pizza Station

INSTRUCTIONS

Wood Species (A)

- 75 % Oak for coaling and open flame
- 25 % Sawdust or light species for fire starting and intense open flame.



Image 1a

Fire Management (B)

At the end of night a metal door is put in front of the oven opening, For start of day the night door comes off the fly ash is removed and fire started on existing coals (Image 1a) with sawdust and small pieces of dry wood. Larger pieces of oak are then added (Image 1b). It takes about 90 minutes to establish a good coal bed and saturate the oven . *During busy hours the open flame licks about half way across the dome. Anytime the oak fire lags behind, sawdust or small pieces dry light wood are added to maintain the balance of air and floor temperature.



Image 1b

Fire Location (C)

Most fires are located against the left-hand wall of the oven and take up about a third of their ovens floor space (Image 2).



Image 2

Pizza Station (D)

Most stations feature 3 main positions, the Pizzaiolo opens the pizza, moves them to the saucing station, after which they're loaded onto a wood peel, released onto the volcano's floor and then spit out seconds later (Image 3).

*Each and every one of these positions qualify as artisan in my mind but only the main person carries the Pizzaiolo title. This procession unwavering for generations.



Image 3

Pizza Placement (E)

Pizzas are normally built, loaded into the oven and baked in-groups of threes or fours (Image 4a and 4b).

Of course pizza 1 is ready to spin, lift and finish first, then pizza 2, as 2 comes out of the oven pizza 4 is spun back into position 1, 3 is finished and then number 4, all of these pizzas were elevated off the floor for a few seconds (Image 4c and 4d).

This sequence takes less than 2 minutes from the time the first pizza hits the oven floor. About this time four more pizzas are ready to bake. The finished pizzas all look the same, a nice little scorch across 20-30% of the slightly thicker than a credit card bottom and a beautiful airy 1 inch thick outer crust full of tiny bubbles and occasional blisters (Image 4c).

Hopefully, Neapolitana Pizza is no longer a mystery. Those that are willing and follow through with this simple, fresh idea will be rewarded with a masterpiece of their own that transcends time itself. This piece is meant only as a starting place. If you are looking for your own Naples learning experience I can highly recommend Enzo Coccia, Caputo Flour and Orlando Distributors.

THE FINAL PRIZE



Image 4a

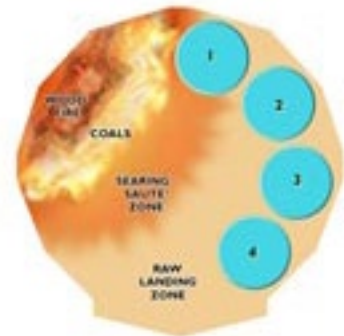


Image 4b



Image 4c

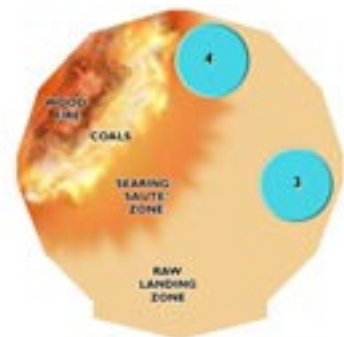


Image 4d