

Which one makes better pizza? It's a toss-up

Tossing dough like the pros: The Uptown Gals learned pizza-making techniques from the Smiley boys at Pizza De Roma.

Mimi: Last week Jessica and I earned to make pizza from the pros, son, Moe Smiley and his father, Joe Smiley, who own Pizza de Roma and Pizza de Napoli in West Palm Beach. Joe came to West Palm Beach by way of Trieste, Italy, and Clifton, N.J., and said he has been making pizza for as long as he can remember. The Smileys have owned the Dixie location for nine years and took over ownership of the Clematis location in 2005.

Joe said he loves pizza and will never get tired of eating it. Moe, who has been making pizzas at Pizza de Roma since he was 12 years old, said on a normal day they make about 250 pizzas, as well as calzones and pasta dishes, and on a busy Friday or Saturday they will make about 400 pizzas. We headed to Pizza de Roma on Dixie to make pizzas and learn the techniques that make their pizza so fresh.

Jessica: All the meals are handmade and the ingredients are fresh. We put on our aprons and got to work with the dough. First we dipped it in flour, then tried to stretch it. My pie seemed to take on some kind of egg shape with jagged points, obviously not how a pizza is supposed to be

shaped. The guys laughed watching me try to create the pie. One of them shook his head and told me it has to be in a circle. Circle, it has to be in a circle. That idea seemed to escape me but I guess it makes sense. Who wants to eat egg-shaped, pointy pizza?

Mimi: Moe showed us how to stretch the dough in a circular motion by pressing our fingertips around the outer part. He said this is where a hand-tossed, New York-style pizza gets its name.

I would have jumped right in, but after a little instruction I realized making the ideal pizza might put my fingers in a pickle. This was nothing like making English muffin pizzas in my college dorm room. I managed to get an adequate shaped crust and then watched Moe explain the remaining steps.

He took the stretched dough and tossed it around on his fists to stretch it out even more. He laid the dough on a large wooden paddle and spread tomato sauce on it starting from the center of the circle and working toward the edges, then adding cheese,

and more cheese, for a customer's order. I followed the same steps as Moe, although my pizza looked half as good as his did. I shaped the dough, added sauce and cheese and then onions and almost every meat they had available for a meat-lovers pizza, and stuck it in the oven. Moe told me to blow under it when I put it in the oven so it would slide off the giant wooden paddle easily.

Jessica: The stretching technique is not one of my strong points. I ripped holes in both the pies I stretched. One was salvageable, one was not. I really wanted to toss the dough into the air, but it probably would have landed on the floor, or on somebody's head. At least it landed in the oven after I slid it off the wooden paddle.

After the pizza, Moe also let me make a calzone. It was easier for me to make since it didn't require the dough stretching and circular formation as the pizza. We piled the ingredients in the middle and wrapped up the dough, like a pot pie or a burrito.

Mimi: Moe said he should remove the pizzas because the oven gets really hot. Joe showed us a scar on his arm where he was burned by the oven.

He placed each pizza on a metal pan and used a pizza cutter to make eight pieces of my 16-inch pie. Then it was time for a taste test. Joe tasted my meat lovers even though he said he was "full



THOMAS CORDY/Staff Photographer

Mimi and Jessica enjoy the fruits of their labor at Pizza de Roma.

from lunch," and later tried my pineapple and ham creation.

Jessica: The pizzas and calzone were piping hot coming out of the oven. The calzone was small when it went in but it was massive when it came out. Everything looked delicious. We had some of the guys sample our pizzas. I wanted to know which one they thought was better. Secret nods and winks let me know mine was the better pie.

Mimi can eat a pound of beef (as she proved at Cheeburger, Cheeburger in CityPlace last week), but I can make a good pepperoni pizza.

Mimi: I didn't get any nods or winks, but I don't need those to know I made good pizza. Tasting my own creation was enough for me.

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