

Gourmet Pizza: The Culinary World's Hottest Trend Goes Kosher

New York...by Tamar Ross...One of the more notable trends in food nowadays is the upscaling of “ordinary” foods to gourmet. Pizza was certainly never thought of as anything but a quick bite on the cheap that could serve as a snack or meal. In many homes, Thursday night is routinely referred to as “pizza night,” because mom is probably preparing for Shabbat. Recently, however, pizza went gourmet as sophisticated restaurants started popping up all over New York—home of serious “foodies”—replete with menus and waiters bringing individual pies to the table, pies with features like thin Neapolitan crusts and Gruyère cheese. And, similar to many trends from the mainstream culinary world, gourmet pizza has officially migrated over to the kosher world.

Mike Gerschkovitch, the chef and proprietor of **Mike's Bistro** in New York City, recently branched out to dairy dining with Mike's Pizzeria and Italian Kitchen, a gourmet cafe on the Upper West Side. The restaurant serves slices with caramelized onion, fresh herbs, ricotta and goat cheese, with options for a gluten-free or focaccia crust. And Café Viva, an established pizza shop also on the Upper West Side of Manhattan with an outpost in the Village, has long been serving vegan pizza fare that regularly gets rave reviews, especially among those who, for health or other reasons, cannot consume gluten. Their pies are all made with either whole-wheat, spelt, or corn crust, with popular offerings such as their Santa Rosa pie, with roasted garlic and tofu, and their Naturale pie, with organic tomatoes and miso-marinated tofu. Café Viva has been heralded in the secular world for its variety of wheat-free items. Shoshi Arnow, a student at Stern College for Women in Midtown Manhattan, says, “Café Viva is great not only because the food is delicious, but it allows people with celiac and gluten intolerance to finally enjoy a kosher meal out, and one that doesn't sacrifice taste.” Craig Goldman, a 29-year old resident of the Upper West Side, dines at both Mike's Pizza and Café Viva regularly. “Both stores offer the familiar taste of pizza with a sophisticated touch,” says Goldman. “Kosher pizza is not what it used to be—it's much better.”

But it's in Crown Heights, the home of one of the first kosher pizza stores (called Chopsie's for those who may remember it), that has perhaps the most ambitious new store to hop on the gourmet pizza bandwagon. **Basil Pizza and Wine Bar** offers wood-oven baked pizzas including Bosc pear and blue cheese with arugula; parmesan and white asparagus; wild mushroom with truffle oil; and for the truly adventurous, hazelnut with banana and Sea salt.

If you're thinking that this establishment doesn't offer the usual pizzeria side dishes of plain fries and Israeli salad, you're right. Sides include basil fries with garlic-truffle mayo and crispy risotto balls with tomato coulis; salads such as watercress and pear and arugula, beet, and warm goat cheese. Adam Sanogueira, the sous chef, was trained in Italy and worked at several Michelin star restaurants there before returning to NY. As he puts it, “Basil is a great restaurant that just happens to be kosher.” Sanogueira explains that the staff's goal is to not just serve food that is excellent for kosher, but excellent in general, and to customers who have never before eaten kosher in their lives. “We've been drawing crowds from all over—New Jersey, the Five Towns , and even Manhattan .”

<http://www.kosherToday.com/news.asp#story212>