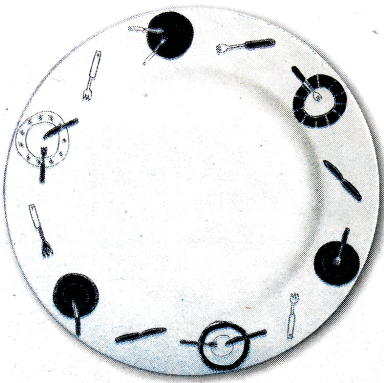


# Pasatiempo

## RESTAURANT REVIEW

Rob DeWalt | The New Mexican

### Local dough boys make good



#### Pizza Centro

7 Avenida Vista Grande, Agora Shopping Center,  
Eldorado, 466-3161

11:30 a.m.-8 p.m. Wednesdays-Mondays, closed Tuesdays

#### Pizza Centro

418 Cerrillos Road, Design Center, Santa Fe, 988-8825  
11 a.m.-8:30 p.m. Tuesdays-Sundays, closed Mondays

Both locations:

Counter service

Dine-in & takeout available

Handicapped-accessible

Free on-site parking

No alcohol

Noise level: moderate, accented by the sweet hum  
of hood vents and pizza ovens

Local checks & cash only

(credit-card service available soon)



#### The Short Order

**Pizza Centro**, Santa Fe's newest locally owned pizza joint has dual locations: one in Eldorado's Agora Shopping Center and the other in the Design Center on Cerrillos Road in Santa Fe. Both offer great pizza with a nod to East Coast pie traditions, presenting a crisp crust, flavorful sauce, and numerous topping options for veg heads and meat lovers alike. Salads could use some attention, as could the serving temperature of pies eaten in-house. Recommended: the Chelsea meat-a-palooza, the Alphabet City veggie pizza, and the standard cheese-and-sauce pie.



Ratings range from 0 to 4 chiles.  
This reflects the reviewer's experience with regard  
to food and drink, atmosphere, service, and value.

The newest kid on Santa Fe's pizza scene is Pizza Centro, the brainchild of Jason Aufrichtig — owner of Counter Culture café — and his brother Nathan. This summer the brothers opened Pizza Centro in Eldorado's Agora Shopping Center, and a few weeks ago they opened a second location in Santa Fe's Design Center, in a unit formerly occupied by Carlos' Gospel Café.

Both outlets, which advertise New York-style pizza, are primarily set up for takeout, although they offer tables for dining in. Add-on toppings, build-your-own pizzas, calzones, salads, and by-the-slice options complement 10 specialty pizzas on a chalkboard menu, and the Santa Fe eatery sports a small drive-up window. The Eldorado location is smaller, with tables situated near the entrance. In colder months, dining in means sitting near an entrance with no breezeway. If you plan on sitting down to eat between now and last frost, bring a coat.

A sure sign of securing a decent meal at any restaurant is when a chef or restaurant owner you trust arrives to order food for his or her family. On my Eldorado visit, a chef from one of Santa Fe's favorite chile dispensaries showed up with his wife and children to order a pizza to go. Our small Alphabet City pie — piled generously with flash-fried eggplant, button mushrooms, fresh spinach, artichoke hearts, sun-dried tomatoes, garlic, roasted red peppers, whole-milk mozzarella, slightly sweet marinara sauce, and balsamic glaze — was pizza perfection, save for its tepid temperature. A distinctly chewy crust with medium char and sweet marinara sauce signaled a homage to New Jersey-style pie rather than to New York's traditionally crispier, savorier, slightly spicier affectations. In landlocked New Mexico, it reeked magnificently of East Coast flair. Delicious, too, was a small cheese-and-sauce pie, which, by virtue of its lighter volume and lack of moisture-retaining toppings, hewed closer to a genuine New York pizza. However, it arrived lukewarm, too.

The Caesar salad was a head-scratcher. I appreciated the tangy dressing, redolent of garlic, lemon, and bits of briny anchovy served alongside chopped romaine lettuce. But I didn't care for the cold, stale wads of cooked pizza dough that stood in for traditional croutons. And finding the browned, woody stem of a lettuce head alongside a wedge of lemon affixed with a grower's adhesive sticker told me that salads here could use some closer attention.

Santa Fe's Pizza Centro location offers more seating without the chill, and oddly enough, my visit there for takeout coincided with a sit-down meal for yet another trusted Santa Fe restaurant personality and his family. I ordered a small Chelsea pie loaded with sausage, house-made meatballs, bacon, onions, green peppers, marinara, and whole-milk mozzarella. My vegetarian mate fancied a calzone stuffed with fresh

spinach, sauce, mozzarella, and ricotta cheese. We split a marvelous Greek salad with baby greens, feta cheese, kalamata olives, tomato, cucumber, onion, green pepper, red-wine vinaigrette, and no adhesive stickers, served in a biodegradable takeout container. And this time, the bread served with the salad tasted fresh.

Because we had lollygagged at a nearby watering hole while waiting for our order, we arrived back at Pizza Centro to an owner who was concerned that the quality of his product might be compromised. "It's been sitting here for a while," he said with a raised eyebrow, "so it might be soggy when you get it home. Put it in a preheated 350 degree oven for a few minutes to get the crisp back on it." We did, and then we swooned. Piping-hot, crisp, and every bite a delicious triumph, this is what good pizza and calzone are all about.

Some pizza purists insist that an extremely hot fire (around 900 degrees Fahrenheit) fashioned from coal or wood is a requirement for producing a decent crust with good char. Phooey. What may be true for blowhards who want to brag about their familiarity with the nooks and crannies of New York City or the *pizzaiolo* they shared a drink with in Naples has no bearing on the average American pizza eater. Pizza Centro uses conveyor ovens tuned to about 530 degrees Fahrenheit, and they manage to finesse a perfectly fine crust from it. Regional variations should be celebrated in the region they hail from. Until a severe continental shift finds Santa Fe sharing shorefront property with Atlantic City, let's celebrate what we have and leave the nitpicking to folks who seem happier when complaining about what they left behind when they moved here. ◀

### Check, please

#### Lunch for two,

##### Pizza Centro, Eldorado location:

Small Alphabet City pizza .....	\$17.00
Small cheese pizza .....	\$12.00
Caesar salad .....	\$ 7.50
TOTAL .....	\$36.50
(before tax and tip)	

#### Takeout dinner for two,

##### Pizza Centro, Santa Fe location:

Small Chelsea pizza .....	\$17.00
Spinach calzone .....	\$ 9.00
Greek salad .....	\$ 7.75
TOTAL \$ .....	\$33.75
(before tax and tip)	