

SANTA FE

## REPORTER

WEEKLY NEWS AND CULTURE

## FOOD

## HOLE IN THE WALL

Pizza Centro offers a literal window to New York.

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New York pizza has never been particularly special to me.

Sure, I like a nice, thin crust charred enough to bubble at the edges, but pulled from the oven soon enough to keep some moisture below the sauce. I like straightforward marinara and fresh buffalo mozzarella for toppings. But die-hard New Yorkers mistrust me because I think the Two Boots franchise makes a better pie than most in the Big Apple—and

Two Boots has a cornmeal crust (like Santa Fe favorite Backroad Pizza) and a host of creative toppings, so it can't be authentic New York pizza.

I like folding up my pie until it's the easy-to-eat bastard love child of a sandwich and a quesadilla as much as the next guy, but New York pizza is just the shadow of classic Neapolitan pizza in my book, and it doesn't interest me as a distinct geo-cultural cuisine. What I like about pizza in New York is that it's available on almost every block and, consequently, there's enough competition to ensure that it's generally quite good.

Nathan and Jason Aufrichtig's Pizza Centro opened at the Agora Center in Eldorado earlier this year, giving Santa Fe's suburbanites the ability to argue the relative merits of New York "style" pizza. A second location opened last week in the Design Center, thus dropping pie with East Coast pretensions into the heart of the city.

For the record, a plain slice is a perfectly-sized platter of marinara and whole milk mozzarella, big enough to verge on unwieldy but ultimately tamable so that holding the thing with one hand feels like pizza whispering and smells like victory. The crust holds enough rigidity that, when folded, it maintains structural integrity as it arcs out from the hand. Only at the tip, where the slice narrows to a fine point, does it begin to bend down like a generous, beckoning fount, a narrow canyon of sultry, baptismal cheese and progressive, saucy texture. If one must get all New Yorky about one's slice, Pizza Centro meets the challenge as well as any pizzeria in Santa Fe.

More interesting is that Pizza Centro's homage to New York has taken the shape of several specialty

pizzas named after neighborhoods. For example, there's a Brighton Beach, a Chelsea, a Chinatown and a Times Square. Each day, Pizza Centro offers plain slices (\$2.50), pepperoni slices (\$2.95) and a slice from its rotating roster of specialty pizza (\$3.95). Every slice I've tried has come from the oven with a perfect crust. The two whole specialty pizzas I've tried were a touch underdone, but wild with flavor and toppings. The Hell's Kitchen is a fiery mess of sausage, green chile and jalapeño subdued minimally by roasted red pepper, flash-fried eggplant and feta cheese. The Village is a more subtle affair, with gorgonzola riffing off of tomato, red pepper, eggplant and prosciutto with a balsamic glaze. One prays to Little Italy that Pizza Centro is reducing its own balsamic, but it's hard to tell for sure. Either way, the balsamic adds the perfect touch of tart sweetness. It's pretty ballsy to call the thick, Canadian-bacon-ish slabs that adorn The Village "prosciutto," but it doesn't hurt the eating experience.



When you're picking up pies from Pizza Centro, you're doing a back-alley deal, New York style.

"Hand-tossed" pizzas with mix-and-match ingredients priced according to "standard" and "primo" categories start at \$12 and up, depending on size and toppings. (Note: When I asked the cook on duty if she was hand-tossing pies, she said, "I just make them from a ball," which sounds more like hand-rolling.)

Among the most charming and convenient aspects of Pizza Centro at the Design Center is the drive (or walk or cycle) -up window in the alley on the Center's north side. The most New York thing about Pizza Centro may be that you can get it through a literal hole in the wall.

## PIZZA CENTRO

Open  
11 am-8:30 pm  
Tuesday-Sunday  
418 Cerrillos  
Road (in Design  
Center)  
988-8825

Open  
11:30 am-8 pm  
Wednesday-  
Monday

7 Avenida Vista  
Grande  
(in Agora Center)  
466-3161

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