

## eat &amp; drink



I Feel Like Bacon Love  
pizza at Parlor Pizza Bar

# SUPERSIZE IT

## ALREADY PIZZA-HEAVY WEST LOOP BLOCK GETS MASSIVE PIZZERIA PARLOR

By Michael Nigrant | FOR REDEYE

Eventually, the club kids become restaurant owners. Jerry Kleiner parlayed his experiences at Cairo and Shelter into Marche and Carnivale. DineAmic, the group behind former late-night lounge Stone Lotus, opened Italian resto Siena Tavern and is working on a steakhouse called Prime & Provisions. And now, The LGN Group (which brought you once-bumping River North hangouts RiNo and Manor) is making a bid for culinary stardom with a West Loop pizzeria called Parlor. "At some point, clubs weren't a challenge," LGN managing partner Michael Bisbee said of his shift from clubs to restaurants. "You can only provide so much Ketel One, Cheetos and Miller Lite. People move on

after a couple years," he said. "We had great success at RiNo and Manor, but you put a lot more detail into creating a restaurant." I stopped in recently to see if the Parlor crew could parlay nightlife sizzle into culinary supremacy by putting pizza before panache and breadsticks before bottle service.

### The crust

The pies at Parlor are good, but not great, and it's the dough that holds them back. Bisbee said the dough undergoes a 24-hour cold rise or proof, which should be enough to develop the right kind of interior chew and puffy edge that is the hallmark of a stellar Neapolitan-style pizza. While the crust has a pleasant smokiness imparted by the fancy

oak-burning Pavesi ovens from Modena, Italy, the edges are deflated, and the center is a little too airy and thick for this style of pizza. This is surprising, considering three members of the LGN crew, including Bisbee, trained at Roberta's in Brooklyn, one of the best Neapolitan-style pizza makers in the country.

### The toppings

Parlor excels in its topping selection and punny naming conventions. Combos that didn't sound great to me on paper—such as the Sgt. Pepper (\$12) made with truffle oil, marinara and pepperoni—are actually damn good. The funk of the truffle adds a nice top note to the sweet and peppery

marinara. Same goes for the Hawaii Pic-O (\$14) featuring spicy pineapple, prosciutto, coconut cheese (coconut cream replaces some of the milk in the cheese-making process) and green onion. While it smelled like someone spilled a pina coloda on a pizza, the pungent sweetness really cut through the salty Italian ham and sharp green onion. The worst-named pie, I Feel Like Bacon Love (\$12), featuring curls of Nueske's bacon, shaved rounds of yukon gold potato, ribbons of scallion and a blanket of white cheddar, tasted like the Dressed Baked Potato from Outback Steakhouse. From someone who is well-acquainted with the menu at the home of the Bloomin' Onion, I assure you that this is appreciation and not indictment.





### The sauce

Many of Parlor's pies have no sauce at all, but those that feature the tomato sauce made with San Marzano tomatoes benefit from its nice mellow, sweet body and peppery bite.

### Other stuff

On weekends, a modified brunch menu featuring fewer pizzas and more breakfast-skewing items such as chilaquiles (\$10) and corned beef hash (\$9) is served from 10:30 a.m. to 4 p.m. One of the brunch features is a gigantic build-your-own-bloody-mary bar featuring the best and widest selections of ingredients I've ever seen. The servers deliver you a plastic souvenir tumbler filled with your choice of a shot of Tito's (\$9), Ketel One (\$10) or Grey Goose (\$11) vodka and then direct you to a salad bar of sorts, which features more pickles than the Vlasic factory, an epic charcuterie platter, a selection of candied bacon and beef jerky, plus the usual condiments such as worcestershire sauce, limes and horseradish. Bloody mary mix choices include Zing Zang and McClure's; both are good, but the McClure's has a unique pickle brine and chili kick. If you're between paychecks, this is an awesome cocktail-that's-sort-of-a-meal deal.

There is also a whole loaf of beer-infused bread stuffed with—brace yourself—mozzarella, shallots, scallion cream, parmesan, pepperoni, cherry peppers and enough garlic to kill all the vampires in all of the popular undead novels. As a nod to Little Caesars' Crazy Bread, it's called Craziest Bread (\$10). The loaf was crusty, spicy and gooey; it's so good that it almost justifies that nonsensical but time-honored tradition of ordering cheese-covered bread before a meal of pizza, which is essentially another helping of cheese-covered bread.

### The service

Though Parlor is not a corporate franchise like, say, TGI Fridays, it is huge. The massive wood-burning ovens, towering shelves hold-

ing logs, the curated assortment of desserts on the take-out counter and the flashing neon pizza sign make it feel more like a theme park than a restaurant. My server and food runners seemed distracted, annoyed and hurried, and did very little to bring the giant experience down to a personal level. They dropped pizzas off in no particular order without explaining which pies they delivered and didn't ask anyone at my table if we wanted refills or new drinks when our glasses ran dry.

Also, on weekends, be warned that Parlor seems to treat its brunch menu like McDonald's handles breakfast. I checked out the menu beforehand and was salivating at the thought of ordering the Claw and Order lobster pizza (\$16), which was not on the brunch menu. Though I placed my order at 3:38 p.m. and the menu would change over at 4 p.m., the server said they could make no exceptions and couldn't cook a pizza for me from the dinner menu.

### The scene

Befitting the team that launched fist-pumping Manor and RiNo, Parlor is pretty brotastic. There's a rooftop deck (not yet in service, but projected to open next spring) featuring a freight shipping container that will operate as a full-service bar, and an expansive patio stuffed with campground-chic picnic tables and the obligatory tangle of exposed bulb string lights. Inside, it's all chocolate-colored tufted leather banquettes, timber trusses and columns and almost as many TVs as Best Buy.

### The bottom line

Parlor is a great place to catch a game, do brunch or people-watch on a magnificent patio over decent pizza and killer bloody marys. If you're looking for breathtaking Neapolitan pies with exceptional chew and puffy blistered edges, you're better off seeking them up the street at SoHo House's Pizza East or Nellcote.

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