

## eat &amp; drink

Sizing up Roxie's by the Slice in Wicker Park

## SLICE &amp; DICE

Roxie's by the Slice  
1732 N. Milwaukee Ave.  
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By Michael Nigrant | FOR REDEYE

Brendan Sodikoff is the man with the golden touch. The owner of Hogsalt Hospitality led Chicago's modern doughnut revolution with Doughnut Vault. He reinvented the Chicago steakhouse at Bavette's. Given his track record, the fantasies of what magic he might conjure when he finally set his sights on pizza were almost unfathomable. With the launch of Roxie's by the Slice in Wicker Park last month, I no longer had to imagine.

### The scene

The interior of Roxie's looks like a Jersey pizza parlor, a speakeasy, a bodega and a metalworking warehouse all got swept up into a big tornado, with the best parts of each landing carefully curated on a triangle-shaped patch of asphalt in Wicker Park. The wall-mounted shelves holding supplies such as canned tomatoes, trays of deli paper and bags of flour are charming, until my eyes landed on a multi-pack of Pam cooking spray. Unlike cans of imported Italian tomatoes, Pam is never sexy and a little too real to ever really be cool. On the other hand, an old-school Frigidaire holding drinks including blood orange soda and Mexican Coke (\$3 for each) is as cool as it gets.

### The crust

The dough, which is hand-turned and slow-fermented over 24 hours, is as curated as the atmosphere. The goal here is a crisp bottom



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and a chewy, puffy edge, which is achieved when the dough is baked off in the restaurant's stone hearth-bottomed deck ovens. Cheese pies are baked once and then again after toppings are added to order. The second bake creates a superb and universal crispness; there is none of that Sbarro-like saggery going on here. While the size of the slices are inspired by the foldable ones you might find in Brooklyn or the Bronx, Sodikoff's goal was to create a pizza crust characteristic of "the great pizza shops worldwide," he said. The very best pizza crusts are full of airy bubbles, have a satisfying chew and are reminiscent of artisan-baked bread; the crust at Roxie's is halfway there. It's solid and the edge has a lot of those characteristics, but that crisp underbelly is almost too crisp and similar to a well-baked franchise pie.

### The sauce

Roxie's red sauce features milled tomatoes, garlic, basil, chili, salt and a few other seasonings. It adds nice acidity to the slice, but it also gets a little lost amid the dough, cheese and toppings. As for the white sauce (made with parmesan, garlic, chili, cream and ricotta), except for some garbiness, I would have sworn it wasn't there at all.

### The toppings

These slices are huge. One will probably fill you up; two will for sure if you're especially hungry. Slices start at \$4.50 for cheese, while extra toppings are \$1 extra apiece. The toppings list is short: pepperoni, prosciutto, sweet peppers, arugula, mushrooms, anchovies, sopressata and olives. Your best bet is to add no more than one or

two toppings, as each of the individual ingredients are strong on their own. The button mushrooms are rendered down into inky black half moons that are seasoned with fruity olive oil and woody thyme. The salty, garlicky pink curls of sopressata are sliced to order on a vintage-looking (it's new) hand-cranked manual slicer. The very best ingredient is a spicy tangy sweet cherry pepper that pairs well with the sopressata and lightens the otherwise rich pizza.

### The bottom line

The pizza is exactly what Sodikoff told me he was going for: "I love that we're not shooting for culinary individuality or some gastronomic statement," he said. "This spot is about a good slice of pizza made and served by good people." That said, it's a very good slice served in a great room to wind down a night of debauchery. If I was drinking in Wicker Park or Bucktown and didn't want a Big Star taco or Flash Taco burrito at the end of the night, I'd definitely reach for a slice of Roxie's (open 6 p.m.-2 a.m. Tuesday-Saturday). On the other hand, I don't find myself craving Roxie's slices in the way that I do the caramelized cheese-crusted Pequod's pizzas or artisan-style crusts at Spacca Napoli. If I'm planning ahead for my pizza, I'm going to those spots because those pies stir my soul in a way that Roxie's just doesn't. **REPORTERS VISIT RESTAURANTS UNANNOUNCED AND MEALS ARE PAID FOR BY REDEYE. REDEYE@TRIBUNE.COM | @REDEYEATRIBUNE**