

eat & drink

Graceland pizza



PIZZA & BEER 4-EVER

WRIGLEYVILLE PIZZA BAR HEATING & COOLING HAS ROCK 'N' ROLL FLAIR TO SPARE

By Michael Nagrant | FOR REDEYE

Adolfo Garcia and Carmen Rossi have a knack for merging great food, design and nightlife culture. At Hubbard Inn, they found a way to build a stellar late-night lounge with high-quality food to match. At Barn & Company, they created a clubby, rustic bar that also serves top-notch barbecue. Their newest partnership, Heating & Cooling, is a rock 'n' roll-meets-motorcycle culture design fantasy fueled by beer and gourmet pizza. As Garcia put it, "Our philosophy is to do everything with integrity, to respect the community and to evaluate what a place or space needs." He added, "The food has to be good. A lot of people think, you're in Wrigleyville, you don't even have to try, but we are serious about making pizza. We are seeking to create an experience that's timeless and appealing to everyone, rich or blue collar." I recently stopped in to see if Heating & Cooling would indeed be timeless or a flash in the pizza pan.

THE SCENE

It seems like almost every bar in Wrigleyville is either an Irish pub or a huge open-air bar relying on exposed wood timber and beer

logo-covered table tents for ambiance. Rossi and Garcia break that mold with a fantastically designed space. Touches inspired by Rossi, a vinyl-collecting fanatic, include a bar

with shelves made from the casings of hollowed out drum bodies, candid rock 'n' roll photography from legendary music photographer Paul Natkin and a choice quote from Guns N' Roses frontman Axl Rose painted on the wall that says, "I'm not God, but if I were God, 3/4 of you would be girls, and the rest would be pizza and beer." Garcia's passion for motorcycles, particularly cafe racer-style bikes of the '60s and '70s, is evident in framed motorcycle crankcases and carburetors picked up from a local cycle repair shop and shopping excursions around the Midwest. There's also a cool installation of vintage motorcycle helmets and a maze-like run of industrial plumbing fittings that terminate in custom ceiling light fixtures made from motorcycle head lamps. This might be the most interesting-looking space in Wrigleyville.

THE CRUST

The majesty of the space doesn't distract me from the fact that this is the most disappointing pizza crust I have had in months. I ordered four different pizzas and the base on all of them was dry, lightly colored—as if it hadn't been cooked long enough—and full of sandy cornmeal. It was barely puffy at the edges and chewing it was an exercise in boredom. I relish leftover pizza, but after trying one slice the next day at lunch, I threw the rest away. Executive chef Bob Zrenner told me the dough was double-proofed, given both a warm and cold rise. This type of treatment usually leads to a nice development of chewy, bread-y gluten and a puffy edge, but neither was very evident on the pies I tried. The one redeeming quality of the crust was a hint of sweetness, which Zrenner told me came from a touch of honey.



The bar at Heating & Cooling

THE TOPPINGS

What's fascinating about the crust failure is that Zrenner, a veteran of fine-dining destinations Tru and North Pond, knows how to cook. In total opposition to the crust, the balance and quality of pizza toppings was excellent. Featuring Barn & Company's silky, slow-smoked pulled pork, fresh sliced jalapeno and a smoky blend of gouda and mozzarella, the Graceland pizza (\$18 for a 14-inch pie, \$24 for 20-inch) is one of the better barbecue pizzas in Chicago. The Boss (\$18 for 14-inch, \$24 for 20-inch), topped with fried calamari, arugula and fiery giardiniera, was a satisfying mix of black pepper flavor and crispy crunch. The Get Him to the Greek (\$20 for 14-inch, \$26 for 20-inch) featuring knobs of juicy housemade merguez (lamb) sausage, crumbles of salty feta, translucent cucumber wafers, cooling tzatziki and sharp red onion reminded me of a great late-night gyro.

THE SAUCE

Tomato sauce serves as the base for the Greek and calamari pies, and because both pies are augmented by additional flavors—tzatziki on the former, and giardiniera on the latter—the red sauce blended well and added a nice acidic component to each. But on a basic cheese pie with nothing to hide behind, the sauce was pasty and cloying. The Carolina mustard sauce on the Graceland was a brilliant tangy and acidic departure from

traditional brown sugar- or molasses-based sweet sauces that cut through the heaviness of the smoke, cheese and pork on that pie.

THE DRINKS

The beer list, which features 70-plus bottles, cans and draft selections, is pretty deep. Cubby fans looking to drink like a Wrigleyville original will be happy with the hefty old-man lager selection that includes Stroh's, Hamm's, PBR, Old Style and Old Milwaukee (\$4-\$5). Beer nerds will dig the wide IPA selection and interesting outliers, such as malty Baba black lager from Salt Lake City's Uinta Brewing (\$5). I especially enjoyed a tallboy can of O-Gii Wit witbier (\$7) from Milwaukee Brewing, with its honey notes that paired well with the honey in the pizza crust.

THE BOTTOM LINE

If you're looking for a good can of beer or two before or after a Cubs game, Heating & Cooling's well-curated rock 'n' roll-meets-motorcycle space is a cool, inspired alternative to the generic warehouse-sized pubs that seem to line Clark Street. Until the pizza crust is tweaked, you may be better off either managing your expectations or eating elsewhere.

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