

Cindy Barnard, CCB Creative  
 Freelance Marketing Consultant for Pizzarino  
 cindy@ccbcreative.com; 978-378-0650

### *Friends Bring the Old World Tradition of Pizza to Old Port*

For an authentic Neapolitan pizza, it starts with the flour, and in this case it is an exclusive mixture blended for Pizzarino, a new pizzeria in Portland, Maine. The next steps are the preparation and maturation.

"It takes two days, we work our dough twice," said Mauro Stoppani, the chef at Pizzarino and one of the owners.

For Stoppani the proper preparation of the dough is everything and needs to reach the right pH level. "In this way, he said, "the gluten softens and matures and gives you a pizza crust that is highly digestible." He said this flour makes the ideal pizza, which will be baked in Pizzarino's wood fired brick oven.

Stoppani's friend, Enrico Barbiero, encouraged him to join together in Portland to open a pizza restaurant reminiscent of the pizzerias you would find on many corners in their hometown of Milan. The two friends grew up there and have known each other since high school.

Barbiero and his wife own a well-known Italian restaurant in Portland called Paciarino. They moved to Portland in 2008 and opened Paciarino.

Stoppani comes from three generations of food preparation and food purveyors. In the 70s, his family purchased Peck in Milan, a famous food and wine shop known throughout Europe, and started in 1883 by Franz Peck.

So when the two friends found the perfect location for their pizzeria in the Old Port district of Portland, their new pizzeria venture began. And this location, 505 Fore St. in Portland, just happens to be on the same street and only a few steps away from Paciarino. While supporting each other in the two businesses, Barbiero will continue to manage Paciarino, and Stoppani will manage Pizzarino to offer his Neapolitan pizza.

Stoppani said that in addition to the perfect crust the other two important components to traditional pizza making are the wood fired brick oven and the toppings.

During the renovations to the restaurant, the oven was central to the new kitchen. The handcrafted oven is made of brick and stone, which are refractory materials that accumulate heat and distributes it evenly. Add in the low dome shape of the oven, which reduces space, and you produce a high intense even heat that allows for quicker cook times and locks in the flavors of the ingredients that are essential to a quality pizza.

In addition to traditional cooking methods true to Italian pizzerias, you'll also find ingredients the owners have imported from Italy like spicy salami, prosciutto cotto, tuna, anchovies, capers, and marinated artichokes and mushrooms. The fresh mozzarella is locally purchased each day.



Handcrafted for Pizzarino, the wood oven creates a high intense heat for quicker cook times, locking in the flavors of the food.

PHOTO COURTESY PIZZARINO

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On the menu at Pizzarino you'll find traditional pizzas just as you would in Italy, but the menu would not be complete without the Marinara and Margherita. The Marinara pizza is made very simply with tomato sauce, garlic, and extra virgin olive oil. For this pizza, it is all about the flavor of the tomato. The Margherita is fresh mozzarella, tomato sauce, extra virgin olive oil, and basil.

Another distinction you'll discover at Pizzarino is that you cut your own pizza, which is an individual portion. "Unless maybe you get a pizza to share," Stoppani said with a chuckle, "but, yes, the pizza is your meal you order for yourself and cut yourself."

"Of course," he said, "it is no problem if you request to have it cut before serving."

Stoppani said that he was happy to have a guest say to him, "Tonight I ate the same pizza I ate in Florence and I ate in Venice."

Also on the menu at Pizzarino is gnocchi and risotto. And there's a reason that the owners chose to serve these two particular Italian dishes in addition to pizza.

As youth on a skiing trip they prepared their first meals together.

For the first two nights, they ate pasta, gnocchi and risotto. Afterwards they were too full to move. Stoppani laughed and said that dancing was out of the question those nights. The third night they ate out at a pizzeria and loved it. But this time they knew something was different because they didn't feel so stuffed afterward. They enjoyed the evening even more because it started with a meal that was digestible.

This ski trip played a role in their philosophy about food preparation; that eating a meal should not drain you of energy.

For them, what is important to Italian cooking is the quality, the proportions, and the science. So this philosophy plays out not only in the preparation of their pizza, but also in how they have developed their own unique way to prepare gnocchi and risotto.

Stoppani said that preparing food is about how to eat a flavorful, balanced meal that is healthy and maintains your energy. For him it is also important to maintain good health for competitive swimming. Three years ago he participated in the World Class Master's Championship in Italy.



Pizzarino's dining room is a modern decor with warm tones.

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By the door to the restaurant you'll find Stoppani's certification as a pizza maker, indicating the completion of a highly specialized course in pizza making. He knows that locals have many options for pizza in the area. His aim is to follow a set of specific standards. These standards for dough making, as well as for the ingredients, are exacting to insure the preservation and promotion of what has become a 300 year tradition of making Neapolitan pizza.

While the owners take their pizza seriously, they want their guests to simply enjoy and to experience a bit of Italy in a casual, relaxed, and fun venue.

Pizzarino is now open for lunch and dinner. The dining area serves about 50 people and is a simple, cozy space with a modern decor employing warm tones of green, blush, and ivory that recall a bit of a classic pizzeria design incorporating the colors of the Italian flag.

In the cocktail lounge, local and Italian beers are served. Wine and spirits are also available. The specialty cocktail is an Italian favorite, the Aperol Spritz prepared with Prosecco, Aperol, and soda. Mimosas, another Italian favorite, is also featured.

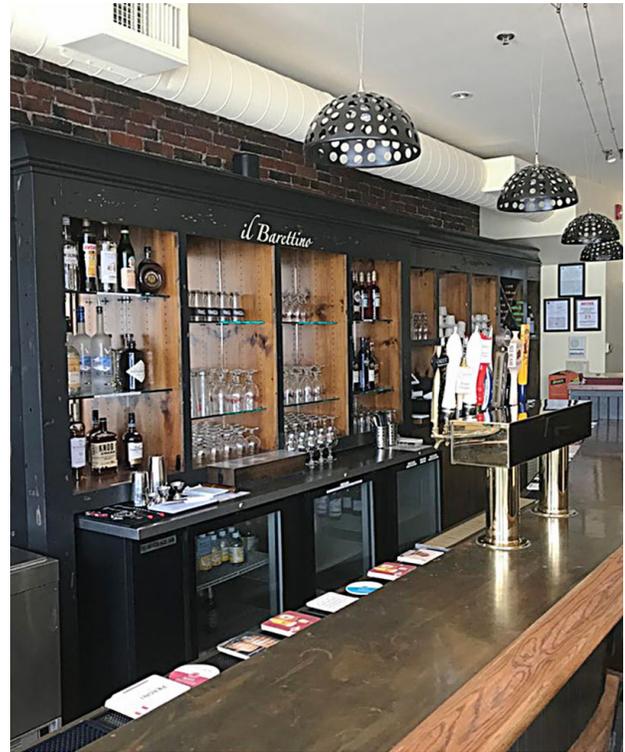
The dinner menu is available in the lounge which seats about 20 people and is a comfortable atmosphere with exposed brick walls and wood panels. It is an inviting space for a group to have a drink and/or eat, either at the bar with an antique copper countertop or at one of the high top tables. Guests in the lounge can watch televised local sports, and of course, when in season, international soccer.

Stoppani said he is adapting to his new city. And while the work is all day every day, especially now starting out, he and Barbiero are loving the new atmosphere in their restaurant and bringing a little bit of home to Portland.

"I love the sea" said Stoppani, "one of my dreams is to live in a seaside town."

"So, Barbiero replied, "you are in your perfect place."

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Enjoy your favorite beverage in Pizzarino's lounge with an antique coppertop bar. PHOTO COURTESY PIZZARINO