



NEW YORK STYLE TIE DYE



DETROIT STYLE HAWAIIAN



BURRATA



MILKSHAKE



WINE AND A COCKTAIL

Driftless Pizza

By Danny Fairchild

There are images that are conjured when one talks about pizzerias. It could be memories from the olden days when pizzerias were also arcades. (Yes, I said “olden days.” The ‘80s are closer to World War II than they are to the present date, so they’re the olden days.) Or, perhaps the word “pizzeria” conjures auditory memories of the light, almost tinkling percussiveness of the barrel-shaped Parmesan and/or red pepper flake shakers as you dash as much as you damn well please onto a nice slice with group-negotiated toppings. If you like your pizza a bit more highbrow, maybe a pizzeria needs to be on point with its balsamic drizzle, caramelized onions, and non-traditional cheeses to deserve the name. And for sure you can’t help but picture unobtrusive stands to set your pizza so they don’t take up too much table surface area.

Folks... with Driftless Pizza now open, all those images of the platonic ideal

pizzeria and more are on instant recall. Plus! It’s important to note that Driftless does have gluten-free cauliflower crust AND vegan cheese options. And in addition to their pizza, ice cream treats and sandwiches will be available soon.

First off, let’s address the elephant in the room: How could the good people at Backpocket open a higher-end pizza joint right where a higher-end pizza joint just kind of fell flat on its face? Well... I don’t know a lot about what happened with the previous place, so I can’t assign blame. But I do know it wasn’t the public’s fault. You and me? It wasn’t our fault. We deserve a higher-end pizzeria that reminds us why we love pizzerias. The Tri-States are worthy of that. Moving on.

Let’s take that first image I evoked. The pizza arcade. Do you know what’s also in the Novelty Iron Works building down in the Millwork District? A friggin’ arcade. And it’s a GOOD arcade, too. Because it serves beer. It’s a beercade. Think of it as an old friend who moved away in middle school. And now that you’ve reconnected, it’s just like old times. Except now you’re both old enough to drink. That’s what it’s like. Pizza and arcade games. It’s like I’m having my eighth birthday at Pucci’s Pizza all over again. Except the pizza’s better. And Guitar Hero has been invented.

What was the second image I tried to evoke? Oh yeah! The Parmesan and red pepper flake shakers! Driftless Pizza has ‘em. I know, big wow eh? It IS kind of a big wow. Because you don’t usually see those at higher-end pizzerias. Certainly not like this with the dry-good shaker Parmesan you buy in the sprinkle canisters. That stuff is what Parmesan connoisseurs call “not real Parmesan.” Whatever. We don’t need to listen to them to know what tastes good.

As for the highbrow pizza offerings? Well... let’s just say you probably don’t NEED red pepper flakes on a pizza like their Figgy the White, which features “a garlic confit base topped with feta, prosciutto, caramelized onions, ricotta and a swirl of fig drizzle.” Boy howdy does it stand alone without them. But Driftless doesn’t make that decision for you. Because those canisters of sprinkle Parm and red pepper flakes I keep going on about represent more than just flavor. They represent possibilities.

Let’s get back on those pizzas, eh? That’s what you really care about, eh? Truth be told, I’m almost always underwhelmed by a higher-end pizzeria’s specialty pizzas. I’m a pick-your-topping kinda fella. I’ve weirdly been into mushroom and banana pepper lately.

But I was fully on board with ordering Driftless’s specialty pizzas anyway. Because if they can wrap me submissively around a pizza with ingredients an ‘80s pizzeria probably never even heard of... then we can sure as hell trust them with a classic pepperoni pizza.

Before I get into the specifics of these specialty pizzas we tried, let me preemptively answer a question you’re sure to have: What the hell is Detroit-style pizza? Driftless serves their pizzas as your choice of Detroit or New York style. I’m sure you have enough of a grasp on what New York-style pizza is. It’s done battle with Chicago style for decades. But Detroit style? Huh? Well let me answer your question with another question: Do you like the burnt cheesy parts of a pizza? Because if you do, I’m telling you right now that Detroit style is your favorite style of pizza. Detroit style is a deep-dish pizza, but not as deep as Chicago style. And it’s made in a rectangular pan. And there’s no margin between crust and cheese. By that, I mean the cheese is sprinkled over the entire thing to the point where it gathers around the edges and gets that burnt cheese goodness all around it. Driftless Pizza’s Detroit-style is even more miraculous as far as burnt cheese goes because the cheese looks

like it climbs up the pan to create little peaks of burnt cheese yummy-yum that you can just snap off and eat. Hell yeah.

Now! Let's get back to Figgy the White. A figgy pizza isn't groundbreaking. It's pretty common in these types of pizzerias and for good reason. If you want to stray from your traditional mozzarella cheese into things like goat cheese or (in Figgy the White's case) feta and ricotta, fig is a great flavor to marry those cheeses into flatbreads like pizza. A pizza with a white sauce instead of red doesn't scream pizza to me so it's rarely my choice, but I always like it when forced to eat it. But I loved Figgy the White.

But let's get even more whimsical with our pizza, shall we? My son joined us, and he chose the Tie Dye served New York style. He ordered it because he's been really into pesto lately. A 12-year-old into pesto. That's my boy. The Tie Dye is a pizza with "a tomato sauce base topped with our cheese blend and swirls of pesto and vodka sauce." That swirl is what gives the Tie Dye its name. That swirl also guarantees a wonderful distribution of those different sauces. If you have someone who refuses to stray from the traditional red sauce, the Tie Dye might just be their gateway drug into pesto et. al.

The Works! The Works is Driftless Pizza's answer to the combo pizza. It comes with "a tomato sauce base topped with our cheese blend and sausage, black olives, pepperoni, green peppers, mushrooms, and red onions." I don't usually like an entire grocery list of toppings on my pizza. I want to experience each topping, and with an entire "Twelve Days of Christmas" on my pizza, it's just sensory overload. The Works, however, doesn't eat like that. The flavors are well-balanced and well-married. I don't get to enjoy all the ingredients on their individual merits, but all the ingredients combine to form a cohesive flavor profile that stands on its own merits.

This last one is going to be a bit contentious. People on either side of the debate have strong, strong feelings about Hawaiian pizza. They'll tell you pineapple doesn't belong on pizza. My retort is, "It's sweet and salty in pizza form. Why can't you just be happy about that?" Driftless Pizza has a much more convincing retort in the form of their Hawaiitalian. No, they didn't ditch the pineapple. Keep dreaming. They embraced the pineapple by giving it a bit of a char and pairing it NOT with your common Canadian bacon, oh no. They up the game by pairing it with prosciutto. Hence the "italian" in Hawaiitalian. Oh, but wait! That lightly charred pineapple and that prosciutto have too much love for just the two of them. So they form a throuple with some wonderful caramelized onions. A friend of mine made a point

about caramelized onions that I think is a good one. A lot of places that serve caramelized onions don't know what a caramelized onion is. Driftless Pizza gets it.

As for the restrooms, well... I don't get it. Driftless Pizza, a brewery tap room, a beercafe, a comedy club, a sports bar, and I'm probably forgetting other things... ALL of them direct their customers to the same restrooms and somehow... SOMEHOW they still manage to keep it clean. I mean... I've been in the Novelty Iron Works building on a busy weekend, and MAYBE the garbage is a little too full, but I still have no trouble doing my dirty work there.

Driftless Pizza is the pizzeria the Tri-States deserves. And with all it has to offer, it's also the pizzeria the Tri-States wants, even if they don't know it yet. ■



Driftless Pizza
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DRIFTLLESSPIZZACO.COM
Hours: Daily: 11 AM-9 PM

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