



BEST PIZZA 2011

1,000 PIZZAS,
500 RESTAURANTS,
50 FAVORITES:
THE BEST OF THE BEST
(OF THE BEST)

EDITED BY JASON SHEEHAN & JANINE WHITE

THE GREAT

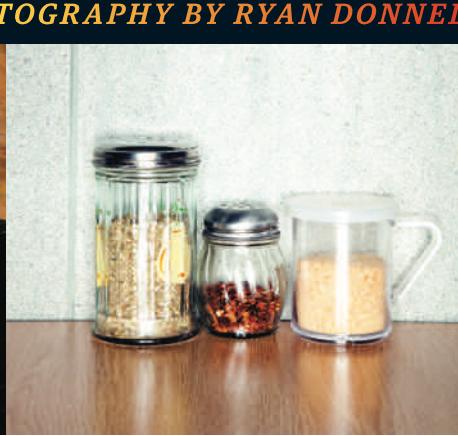


THE PIZZA OVEN
AT STELLA



PIZZA QUEST

PHOTOGRAPHY BY RYAN DONNELL





BEST PIZZA 2011

NOT ENOUGH FOR YOU?

True pizza fanatics can check out our full list of 500 pizza restaurants, from joints to bistros and everything in between (including multiple locations), all reviewed online at phillymag.com.

The idea

sounded so simple. Why not do a *real* survey of the pizza available in Philadelphia? Why not call out the best pizzas by name—but only after we knew which were truly the best by eating, well, all of them? Or at least all that we reasonably could—damning the expense, all reasonable restraint and the wise concerns of our tailors and loved ones. Judging food is such a subjective thing, but this one time, we'd get as close to the truth as we could by doing something that no one had tried before: simply eating until we popped.

That was the idea. What you hold in your hands is the result: an account of the 50 best pizzas (in five different categories) to be had anywhere from the shadow of the Limerick Power Plant to the wilds of South Jersey. By the time we were finished, we'd visited 500 pizza places and eaten more than a thousand pizzas. We'd covered two states and more neighborhoods than can be counted. And while you'd think that all those pies would've turned us off forever from the charms of the brick-oven masterpiece or the street-corner slice, you'd be wrong. After taking a breath, pausing to look over our good works and resting a bit in the sure knowledge of a job well and completely done, you know what we all kinda wanted more than anything?

JUST ONE MORE SLICE.





UNCLE NICK'S
HAND-TOSSED PIZZA



TREVI



PIZZA
PALACE

THE CRUST

LAZOS PIZZA & GRILL

873 North
26th Street,
215-236-2300

Whether it's being used as a vehicle for the transport of plain old sauce and mozzarella or carrying a precious cargo of feta, spinach and tomatoes between the plate and your gaping piehole, Lazos's crust is some of the best we've had: fluffy and light around the rim, thin and crispy on the bottom. It also comes off tasting like the *freshest*—as though it'd been made by magical pizza elves just moments before being ordered. Yeah, you heard us right: pizza elves.

CACIA'S BAKERY

2081 Route 70,
Cherry Hill,
856-424-4474,
caciabakery.com

One bite of this Sicilian-style pizza and there's no doubt that it comes from a bakery, not just another pie shop. And if, for some reason, the crust doesn't convince you (because, what, you've had your tongue removed?), the fact that you have to wind your way past rows of cannoli and sfogliatelle to get to the case where they keep the savory square slices ought to do it. With a soft and crunchy crust just thick enough to take center stage without hogging the spotlight, Cacia's could get away with using lesser toppings than they do and we wouldn't hold it against them. That they *don't* is the reason that, after eating more pizza than anyone ever should, we continue to crave this stuff.



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ACROPOLIS PIZZA

2335 West Marshall Road, Lansdowne, 610-626-2343

Why do we love the Greeks? Yeah, those ancient ruins are pretty cool. And sure, they invented democracy, feta cheese and the catapult. But really, these days it's mostly for what happens to pizza when those crazy Greeks throw it in a pan and fire up the ovens. And this hole-in-the-wall Lansdowne joint is as good as it gets when it comes to Greek-style crusts—which manage to be crisp without getting crumbly and are so flavorful that you might be tempted to skip the cheese, the sauce and all the other toppings completely. (Hint: Don't.)

PIZZA PALACE

602 Lancaster Avenue, Bryn Mawr, 610-527-2229

This comfy little Main Line shop is home to the Marilyn Monroe of pizzas—a gorgeous, zaftig sort of pie with mondo toppings, cheese for days, and a crust that thickens at the edges for an unapologetically bready bite (which, strangely, is exactly what people used to say about Marilyn). This is Greek pizza at its best, so for the sake of continuity, you should absolutely try the Greek specialty—a white pie piled with mozzarella, biting garlic, mushrooms, green peppers, onions, tomatoes, spinach and, of course, feta. It is utterly satisfying—and gratifying—on all fronts. Again, just like Ms. Monroe.



BRAVO PIZZA

24 East Lancaster Avenue, Paoli, 610-647-5122, bravopizzapaoli.com

Even the first bite of a slice from Bravo (and we're talking from the point here, so don't be one of those weirdos who eats from the crust first) elicits an audible crunch, no matter how laden with sauce, gooey cheese and chosen toppings it may be. The vegetable enthusiasts among us are partial to the white, mounded up with piles of fresh broccoli, tomatoes and plump, ricotta-filled tortellini, but no matter which pie you pick, that crunch is proof not only of Bravo's wicked dough-charring skills, but also that all the Greek pizzas and thick-crusted and Sicilian pies can go screw, because a masterfully-handled brick oven really is best.

CONESTOGA STYLE PIZZA

905 Conestoga Road, Bryn Mawr, 610-527-1241

Die-hard thin-crusters, prepare to have your tiny minds blown: Conestoga's thick, hearty, Greek-style pie is a game-changer. The artists/owners at this dated parlor are taciturn as they slather zippy sauce and toss fistfuls of cheese onto rolled-out dough in deep little pans, but their work, fresh from the oven (no wood-firing required), speaks for itself. The crust is chewy but firm. Bubbling cheese holds generous toppings firmly in place atop the pie. And the Conestoga, is, in fact, so loaded down with all the works that any lesser crust would cave under the pressure. So listen, you New York purists. You want your pies stacked like a *Playboy* centerfold? A Greek crust is where it's at.

IANNELLI'S

1155 East Passyunk Avenue, 215-468-0720, iannellisbakery.net

It's no surprise that at this 101-year-old bakery, it's the pizza dough that rules. The spongy, square, subtly yeasty crusts on the cookie-sheet Sicilian tomato pies (served in various iterations, including straightforward cheese-less, garlicky sauce-less, pepperoni-and-mozz betrayals of the pie ideal, and the "Mabladonna" with spinach, sliced tomatoes, ricotta and garlic) taste like South Philly itself. But it's Iannelli's little-known call-ahead pizzas, with their recently perfected thin and crispy crusts (available in white or grainy, hearty whole wheat), that just might seal the family's success through the next century.

CACIA'S BAKERY

LAZOS PIZZA & GRILL





In Defense of Tomato Pie

Cold, red, thick, vital ...

TRIOS PIZZERIA & TRATTORIA

342 West Girard Avenue, 215-627-1000, newtriotrattoria.com

It's hip to be square when you're a pie from Trios. The thin, slightly crisp, boxy crust is a gleaming beacon of hope among the spongy, soggy, floppy, sad and mostly inedible floury disasters that call themselves crusts in the pizza deserts of NoLibs and Fishtown. But if you live in the 19123, count yourself lucky, because the Trios pie is one that only your pickiest out-of-town friends (read: New Yorkers) will quibble about.

PENNY'S PIZZA

68 West Ridge Pike, Limerick, 610-489-3636, gotcornmeal.com

Locals nearly rioted when this pizza speakeasy shut down a few years ago, and then greeted its reopening like the Rapture. Penny's keeps strange hours, so you'll have to show up Thursday through Sunday for its thin, crisp pies with perfect, pocked and cornmeal-dusted crusts. And don't expect anything fancy; this is just a couple kids and the ovens, delicious sweet-tart red sauce, and a white version with rich, creamy ricotta tucked beneath good mozzarella and sprinkled with salty, tasty sautéed garlic. Like all good speakeasies, you enter through a back door hidden from the street. Unlike most speakeasies, Penny's has a sign.

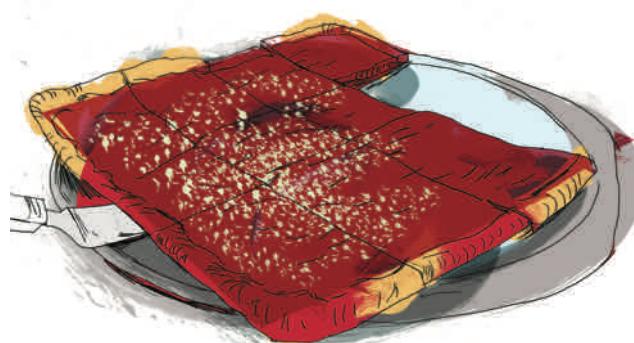
EARTH BREAD + BREWERY

7136 Germantown Avenue, 215-242-6666, earthbreadbrewery.com

If there's such a thing as delicate pizza, this is it: crust that's light but not wimpy, sauce with just the right understatedly sweet tang. But at Earth Bread, it's really about the neo-Mount Airy hippiedom (and beer), plus the earthy combinations of toppings (and the beer). The Mexican comes with chipotle oil, red and green peppers, blackened chicken, mozzarella, Asiago and pico de gallo, while the Traditional features tomato sauce, roasted onion, mozzarella, and a tomato vinaigrette that surprises with a snootful of basil on the first bite.

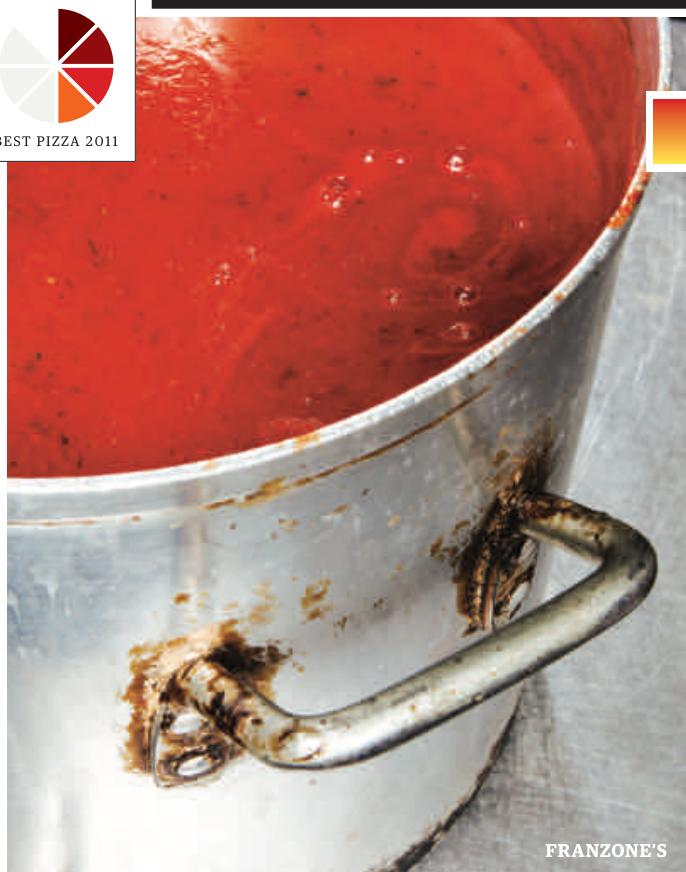
When assignments were handed down for this insane pizza undertaking, I was told there would

be no tomato pie included. Why? "Because it's not pizza!" barked my shortsighted colleague. If by that she meant that you don't feel like you ate a brick after consuming a slice and don't have to dab off the grease with a fistful of paper towels, then okay, it's not pizza. It's *better*. ¶ The composition is simple: a thick, rectangular, focaccia-like crust, sweet tomato sauce and a sprinkling of finely grated parmesan or pecorino—that's all. Instead of eating the pie hot out of the oven, it's best served at room temperature—a rule that some folks just can't get over. ¶ Tomato pie has been a staple at my family gatherings for decades. We come from Norristown, and it's big with the Italians in that area. The host serves it early, with the black olives and cheese-and-crackers course, as the slices are cut small and un-messily—perfect for eating while mingling. My cousin is partial to Norristown's Corropolese Bakery and Deli, whereas I go for Marchiano's Bakery in Roxborough. Another relative insists Conshohocken's Italian Bakery is the best. But we all agree that wherever it's from, it's not a party without it. —Victor Fiorillo





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THE SAUCE

MARZANO'S PIZZA AND STEAKS

320 East Lincoln Highway, Exton, 610-280-0333, marzanospizzaand-steaks.com

One could be forgiven for scraping the sauce off a Marzano's pizza and saving it for later: It would certainly make a delicious Sunday gravy ladled over pasta. But resist the urge, you savages, because this sauce is at its best in concert with the quality toppings and airy, bready crust. Marzano's red-top construction highlights the house's strongest element, so don't be afraid to stick with just sauce and cheese. Their sautéed vegetables and quality meats provide a nice accent, but be careful, as they can obscure the sauce and make the light-textured crust soggy.

FOSTER BOYS

226 East Lancaster Avenue, Downingtown, 610-269-6600, fosterboystpizza.com

It's dizzying to navigate all the pizza variations at Foster Boys. Setting aside the mathematical complexities of toppings choices, you can choose from regular, white, Sicilian or house-style, made with the sauce on top, focusing attention on that tangy, full-

bodied component. But the best option of all isn't even on the menu—there's just a handwritten sign at the counter describing the "Ultimate House-Style." It features a vibrant mix of four cheeses (including a punchy, sharp provolone) and, best of all, a few dollops of "Mom's spaghetti sauce." It's that dash of maternal magic that turns an already good pizza into something truly special.

TACCONELLI'S PIZZERIA

2604 East Somerset Street, 215-425-4983, tacconellispizzeria.com

The elder gods of heirloom, roma, plum and all things red and juicy have spoken and said that the sauce at this one-man, one-oven landmark in Port Richmond is the best you're going to find. Tomato fanatics will rejoice that what sits atop Tacconelli's so-fresh-you-have-to-call-ahead crust (they only make enough to fill daily orders) leans more toward two parts sauce to one part cheese than anything else. The red is sweet yet complex, and bold enough that it could easily hold its own on South Philly's streets despite the shop's Northeast location.

TREVI

21 East Glenside Avenue, 215-884-9100, trevibyob.com

This Glenside newcomer has big shoes to fill, being located in the old Rizzo's Pizzeria space—a (formerly) beloved institution in the area. But good news for the locals: TreVi fills those kicks just fine. Chef Joseph Burke hasn't opened another street-corner joint churning out assembly-line pies; he's dishing out crisp, thin-crust, wood-oven pizza with fresh, carefully curated ingredients. This loving



attention is most evident in the sauce: It's rich, with ample chunks of tomato and the ideal consistency—not too thin, not too thick, but Goldilocks-perfect and made without a hint of sweetness. The margherita pie bursts with the clean taste of tomato, reminding everyone who eats it that it's the pure, simple flavors that make a good pie great.

THE ORIGINALS

833 West Trenton Avenue, Morrisville, 215-295-5048

The name of this tiny, unassuming pizza joint is a bit misleading: It's not exactly *original*, after all. But the thick-crusted pies are comforting in their unoriginality and so mouthwateringly tasty that we don't care that they don't offer the fancy-pantsy stuff. Who needs smoked salmon, truffle oil, poached duck or shredded back issues of *Gourmet* magazine used as toppings when you've got a slice topped with sauce so tantalizingly sharp and flavorful we'd gladly drink it by the pint?

LITTLE ITALY PIZZA

901 South Street, 215-922-1440, littleitalypizza.com

Don't let the confusing South Street address (it's just north on 9th) or the relatively plain-Jane look of the place throw you. Little Italy is a top-notch pizza spot.

The crisp but chewy crust scores big where so many others fail so miserably, but it's the bright, sharp sauce here

that's the true standout—uniting several good elements into one excellent whole. A host of slices are offered, but our favorite is still the simple and satisfying margherita, which stands as an ideal example of why this pie became the standard by which so many are judged.

CHARLIE'S PIZZA

4300 Roosevelt Boulevard, 215-744-3249, charlies-pizzeria.com

In the lower Northeast—largely a vast and sucky desert when it comes to good pizza—Charlie's isn't a mirage. It's a cheesy, saucy oasis (near an otherwise singularly unimpressive strip mall) where anyone with a hankering for it can score an amazingly authentic-tasting round of the good stuff. The sauce on these red pies hits a perfect bull's-eye between tangy and saccharine, and is accented by just the right amount of stringy cheese, making for an ideal balance that will cause powerful cravings in those who've discovered Charlie's for themselves.

(CONTINUED ON PAGE 62)

TACCONELLI'S PIZZERIA





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THE TOPPINGS

DOCK STREET BREWING CO.

701 South 50th Street,
215-726-2337,
dockstreetbeer.com

their own. From the Fig Jam, with Gorgonzola and apple, to the onion-and-bacon-topped Flammekueche (a classic Alsatian-style pizza, and France's answer to the Italian pizza obsession), each pie defies expectations, proving that no pizza (or pizzeria) has to be boring, and that those that are just aren't trying hard enough.

While the beverages might get top billing, the unusual pizzas at Cedar Park's Dock Street Brewing Co. certainly deserve some recognition.

BAR SAVONA

100 Old Gulph Road, Gulph Mills, 610-520-1200, savonarestaurant.com

and operate a lot like Bar Savona. The best pizza on the short but obsessively curated list is the Marco Castro, offering sliced pancetta, San Marzano tomatoes, peppery arugula, razor-shaved red onion and lemon juice in perfect balance, on a crisp, thin crust that is the definition of modern rusticity.

If there were a resort for full-time pizza junkies, it would probably look

VIC & DEAN'S

409 West Wayne Avenue, Wayne, 610-225-0025, vicanddeans.com

The dilemma: Do you grab a fork and make a meal of the salty folds of prosciutto, generous cuts of still-crunchy roasted peppers, and perfectly fried eggplant, and then enjoy the sadly bereft (but still very tasty) plain

pizza left behind? Or do you lift a heavy slice to your mouth, risking maxillofacial and sartorial ruin, so that you might enjoy one lovely bite of all those flavors mixed together? Your technique is up to you.

OLCE PIZZA GRILL

3401 Skippack Pike, Cedars, 610-222-3839, olcepizza.com

This petite pizzeria with cheery polka-dot banquette and shiny wooden cabinets seats only 30 or so, but it is super kid-friendly and has delightful, thoughtfully crafted artisanal pies. The Goat special offers asparagus, goat cheese, sautéed garlic, chives and a sprinkle of hot red pepper.





GEORGE'S

503 West Lancaster Avenue, Wayne, 610-964-2588, georgesonthemainline.com

We know Perrier is French and all, but seriously, Dijon mustard on a pizza? Seemed pretentious. **III**-advised. Just plain weird. But a few bites in and we were ready to pull on a beret, light up a Gauloises and surrender to the first German we saw. Melted Gruyère, herb-marinated tomatoes and perfectly drizzled and portioned Dijon all came together in one groundbreaking pie.

DI BRUNO BROS.

1730 Chestnut Street, 215-665-9220, dbruno.com

At first, the fact that these pizzas come only as half-pies may seem troubling. But that's until you order and taste the prosciutto and fig pie with reduced balsamic vinegar. Even if you're exhausted by the over-reaching of certain modern pie joints, trust us: It's worth the risk to order this one.

VINCE'S PIZZERIA

1900 Grant Avenue, 215-464-8998

In a world vastly dominated by pepperoni as the go-to pizza topping for the dim and unimaginative, Vince's white-with-broccoli version is a vacation from the spicy, rubbery norm. A white broccoli pie may sound like the stuff of slices too simple to impress, but this back-to-basics combo will have even the most ardent of meat lovers rethinking their reflex topping loyalty.

TRIUMPH BREWING COMPANY

117 Chestnut Street, 215-625-0855, triumphbrewing.com

Our suggestion? Just pull on those fat pants and eat 'em all.

Who knew Triumph Brewing Company's pizza was as good as its beer? More to the point, who would've guessed that it would be all about the toppings at this Old City beer hall? While the crust on these personal pizzas is solid, the truly fresh ingredients make it hard to choose among the four specialty pies on offer.



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So NOT Pizza!



If the surrounding pages have shown you anything, it's that, despite all claims to the contrary, Philadelphia knows how to make a pizza. But because we are (apparently) a people perpetually unsatisfied with the simple things, Philadelphia also knows how to screw up a pizza better than anyone. For example ...

Breakfast Pizza:

Breakfast pizza (*left*) is a South Philly staple. In its simplest form, it's scrambled eggs and American cheese baked together on a sauceless pizza crust. More complicated versions include potatoes, sausage, bacon and god only knows what else. All of them should come with a shooter of Pepto on the side.

South Street Sushi:

Get a big-ass slice from Lorenzo and Sons Pizza, then run (don't walk) the 387 feet to Jim's Steaks down the street and get a cheese-steak. Wrap the hot slice, nori-style, around the sandwich (*center*), and what you have is a South Philly original—but totally not a pizza.

The Pizzazz:

Made best and most famously at Cacia's Bakery, the Pizzazz (*right*) is another sauceless pizza, made with tomato slices, American cheese and pickled banana peppers. A Pizzazz is basically just a few slices of salami shy of being a hoagie dressed in a pizza costume.

(CONTINUED FROM PAGE 59)

FRANZONE'S

501 DeKalb Street,
Bridgeport, 610-275-0114, kingofprussia.com/franzone

Everyone talks about sweet sauce versus savory sauce—about the sharpness of oregano, the vegetable sweetness of San Marzano tomatoes, and the differing preparation methods that result in sauces that, let's be honest, are never all *that* different from one another. They compete on a narrow slice of the spectrum. But not Franzone's. If you like a sweet sauce, this is the *only* place to go, because what they serve here is as unlike the sauce anywhere else in the region as a scallop is to a marshmallow. Honest to god, it tastes like the cooks at this fast-moving pizza machine just dump in sugar by the bucketful. And yet somehow it never tastes *too* sweet or *too* strange and, after a slice or three, becomes truly addictive.

LASCALA'S

615 Chestnut Street,
215-928-0900, lascalaphilly.com

It's no surprise that even with a menu full of delicious Italian-American dishes, it's the pizzas at this upscale Italian restaurant that keep showing up on customers' plates. Appropriate, too, that LaScala's lives in Philly's historic district, because the pies—though not topped with Ben Franklin's wig or shards of sautéed Liberty Bell—are classic Neapolitans with sauce just like Grandma's. Toppings from the short list include clams, bacon, eggplant and ricotta, but it's still the crushed-plum-tomato sauce that accounts for each pizza's rich flavor.

ANTHONY'S PIZZA AND ITALIAN RESTAURANT

127 West King Street,
Malvern, 610-647-7400, anthonyitalianrestaurant.com

"Now *this* is pizza." We honestly wonder how many times that phrase has been muttered in the dining room of this homey, family-run restaurant on downtown Malvern's main drag. Bite into a margherita, and beneath the perfect blobs of melted mozzarella, you'll taste a sauce that's slightly less sweet than you'd expect, with just a pinch more seasoning. It evokes visions of a small, stooped and feisty *nonna* stirring her magic into the pot bubbling on the stove in the back while yelling at one of her many sons to chop more garlic.





AT A TABLE

MAMA PALMA'S

2229 Spruce Street,
215-735-7357, mama-palmas.yolasite.com

When Mama Palma's (named for owner Renato Russo's mother) opened 15 years ago, it introduced gourmet pizza baked in an oak-fired brick oven to the Philadelphia pizza scene. Today, along with motherly classics like the margherita and clams-and-garlic pies, Mama Palma's also serves some of the city's most original (and least mom-ish) pizza combinations—everything from Peking duck with hoisin sauce, mushrooms, scallions and plum sauce to lump crab and asparagus with lemon and basil. For those so inclined, there are also low-fat and whole-wheat versions available, but seriously? Suck it up, you wuss, and eat your pizza the way Mom intended—covered in clams, asparagus and duck.

MARRA'S

1734 East
Passyunk Avenue,
215-463-9249,
marrasone.com

On a stretch of avenue now defined by its perfect one-to-one old-school-to-hipster ratio, the big, bubble-crusted, brick-oven pies at this 80-something-year-old Italian-American landmark

are one thing all the neighbors seem to agree on. The curmudgeon behind the counter will tell you, "Everybody knows that the most popular in a pizza place is the pepperoni pie," and there's good reason for that. But because we're difficult, we still prefer the classic margherita, with a bright San Marzano sauce, fresh mozzarella and basil leaves.

STELLA

420 South
2nd Street,
215-320-8000,
pizzeriastella.net

The red-and-white tiled pizza oven holds the place of honor at Stephen Starr's Stella—smack in the middle of the kitchen, which itself is smack in the middle of the floor. There is nowhere you can sit where you don't have a view of it, and it deserves this spotlight because it is from this oven that 13 of Philly's greatest pies emerge. Every pizza at Stella has its fans. From the simple charms of the margherita with buffalo mozz to the earthy funk of the egg-and-truffle tartufo, there's something here for everyone to fantasize about while stuck gnawing on some lesser pie gotten from a shop that doesn't care whether its pepperoni comes from Abruzzo or Cleveland and wouldn't know a ball of scamorza if it rolled up and started humping someone's leg.

JULES THIN CRUST

300 Sycamore Street,
Newtown,
215-579-0111,
julesthinrust.com

This airy BYO serves a deliciously grown-up version of pizza on rustic wooden slabs. Like a champagne flute or a stiletto, the paper-thin gourmet slices just *feel* sophisticated. And they look pretty, too—

like the kind of pies you could cut up and serve at a cocktail party without fear of being shunned by your foodie friends.





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MAMA
PALMA'S

Not only that, but maybe because Jules's pizza is all organic, maybe because they offer gluten-free pies, maybe because the slices are piled with refined toppings like fig jam and butternut squash, its elevated fare feels more like health food and less like the guilty, greasy pleasure it truly is.

OSTERIA

640 North
Broad Street,
215-763-0920,
osteriaphilly.com

Something we probably shouldn't tell you: The Parma at Osteria is the pizza we used as our perfect 10—the one against which all of the other 999 pizzas we ate would be judged. It is, quite simply, the best pizza in Philadelphia, and we'll fight anyone who says different. From the crisp-but-giving blistered crust and ideal mix of mozzarella and fontina cheeses to the dream-thin slips of prosciutto laid on top and verdant tangles of impossibly peppery arugula, there was nothing about this pie that wasn't the best we tasted, from Limerick to Jersey and back again.

BARBUZZO

110 South
13th Street,
215-546-9300,
barbuzzo.com

The best-kept secret at Barbuzzo might be the \$4 La Quercia prosciutto upgrade available on any pie on the board. The worst-kept secret? That

would be the Uovo—a rustic mess of brussels sprout leaves, house-cured guanciale, black truffle oil, house-stretched fior di latte, “secret” white sauce

and a single egg, cracked right in the center. This was the pie that launched a thousand photo spreads, and if not for the fact that Barbuzzo's menu changes all the time, we could easily name it among our absolute favorites. The problem? Thanks to that ever-changing board, we never know when something even *better* might come along.

ZAVINO

112 South
13th Street,
215-732-2400,
zavino.com

At the northwest corner of 13th and Sansom—the hot, radiating center of Philly's restaurant universe—Zavino has held court for almost two years now, delighting the Center City faithful with perfect thin-crust Neapolitan pies. Cooked in a 900-degree brick oven, it only takes a few minutes for each to emerge, the artisanal cheeses bubbling and the crust blistered and charred from the heat. Tangy crushed tomatoes brighten several of the pizzas here, and we like ours best topped with polpettini—pillowy veal meatballs stuffed with ricotta—and eaten while seated alfresco, watching the world go by.

JAKE'S & COOPER'S WINE BAR

4365 Main Street,
215-483-0444,
jakesrestaurant.com

Yeah, the name is stupid. But get past it. Ignore your confusion over the dueling monikers and the side-by-side (but differently ambianced) restaurant spaces (we suggest going left), and never mind the way the menu somewhat alarmingly heralds its “wood-burning” pizza. Just trust us and order the petite pies. They're perfect for one, but too good for slurs like “personal pan,” and once they make it to your table, you'll be rewarded for your patience by receiving the freshest of ingredients mounted atop the thinnest of crispy-thin crusts.

**FOR MORE BEST PIZZA WINNERS,
TURN TO PAGE 122**

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Best Pizza 2011

(CONTINUED FROM PAGE 64)

PICA'S RESTAURANT Pica's is, among other things, an old-school, sit-down restaurant (that also does some serious takeout business), a Delco institution with 70 years of history (even if it originally opened in West Philly), and yet another place where the sauce is so good it has to go on top of everything else and thereby be the star attraction at a place where everyone knows that the mess of eating an upside-down pie is totally worth it. **7803 West Chester Pike, Upper Darby, 610-789-7770, picas-restaurant.com.**

JG DOMESTIC This may seem like a strange inclusion for a few reasons. One: JG only offers one kind of pizza on its menu, usually only at lunch. Two: It isn't really a pizza at all, but a flatbread that kinda sorta tastes like a pizza. Sometimes. And three: That single flatbread changes often enough that the really good ones are usually gone before you can develop a true and lasting relationship with them. But the reason it made our list, despite all these marks against it? Because when this kitchen has a good pizza-like object on the board (like the truffle, black trumpet mushroom, prosciutto and egg version, or the local asparagus with ricotta and pancetta), it can easily stand up among the best pies in the entire city. **2929 Arch Street, 215-222-2363, jgdomestic.com.**

KENNETT Kennett's pizza selection may not be huge, but the kitchen nails every one of the five pizza choices on the menu. Most notable? The Porchetta, topped with slow-roasted pork, farmer's cheese and honey. Yes, the stuff that bees make. The ovens at Kennett are wood-fired, adding a unique, smoky flavor to the pies, and the kitchen's attention to all the little details sets it far apart from the riot of other, lesser pizza restaurants, slice joints and other pie-slinging establishments in the crowded Queen Village/South Street area. **848 South 2nd Street, 267-687-1426, kennettrestaurant.com.**

**ON A PAPER
PLATE**

JOHN'S PLACE Despite looking like your average Philly pizza dive, John's Place is one of the friendliest joints in the area. A plain slice comes served on a paper

plate, miraculously unstained by grease. The crust is thin and crisp, with sauce so fresh it'll make you wonder if John is growing his own tomatoes out back. And even more complicated pizza-world concoctions don't fall flat here. The Ratatouille pie (named after the rustic French vegetable dish, not the movie about the talking rat) comes loaded with veggies just as fresh as that sauce, including pieces of breaded and fried eggplant that add a nice crunch without loading on any extra grease. **1529 Spring Garden Street, 215-665-0972.**

LORENZO AND SONS PIZZA The simple, dependable charms that secured this family-run icon a spot on our list: slices so big they flop over the sides of the grease-speckled paper plates; a by-the-slice toppings selection consisting of just salt, pepper and powdered parmesan; a late-night, alcohol-soaked line that moves quickly no matter how far it snakes down South Street. And most importantly, it offers that most vital component for proper paper-plate dining: a full belly for less than three bucks. **305 South Street, 215-627-4110, lorenzoandsons.com.**

ROMA'S Yes, there are a few booths, but we recommend ordering your thin-crust slices to go (or your pie to pick up) from this no-frills Roxborough shop. The place gets bonus points for fast service and well-timed oven warm-ups on the slices. And if the wall of autographed photos is to be believed (and, for the record, we consider a wall of autographed photos to be an unimpeachable source of pizza data), Mayor Nutter and at least one Eagles cheerleader are fans, too. **6129 Ridge Avenue, 215-482-9022.**

RUSTICA Rustica is to pizza what the perfect partner is to a growing relationship. The morning after a drunken night out, you won't regret having tried it. You will find it even more enjoyable sober. And when you're ready, you won't be ashamed to introduce it to your mother. Give the Chicken Man specialty pie a whirl, and expect quality toppings on an unpretentious paper plate. And isn't that what everyone is looking for in a new (pizza) relationship? **903 North 2nd Street, 215-627-1393, rusticaphilly.com.**

UNCLE NICK'S HAND-TOSSED PIZZA You may remember this pizzeria's name from news reports earlier this year about a competitor releasing a bag of mice inside Uncle Nick's. Though we don't condone this sort of behavior, we can cer-

tainly understand the motive, since these pies put most others in the area to shame. Owner Harry Saritsoglou says the difference is that he hand-tosses each pizza to order, then (over)loads it with toppings. The prices don't hurt either, with a classic 18-inch pie selling for less than \$12. **9000 West Chester Pike, Upper Darby, 610-446-6000.**

LA ROSA Pizza crust should be, at its soul, really good bread, with a crisp exterior and a soft crumb. La Rosa's thick-crusted pies get that—and everything else—just right. Regulars and those in the know stand at the worn Formica counter cutting each sizeable slice topped with a well-balanced sauce and blistered cheese into bite-size morsels. But the whole rosemary and potato pie is, hands down, Philly's best argument for white pizza. **2106 South Broad Street, 215-271-5246.**

MACK'S BOARDWALK PIZZA It's both easy and impossible to miss Mack's near 10th and Oregon. From the outside, the beat-up brick shack looks more like a hubcap shop or the entrance to a meth lab than the home of the best Boardwalk-style pie this side of Wildwood. Nine bucks gets you a large thin-crust, with a light layer of cheese and a swirl of slightly sweet red sauce. Throw in two bucks for a traditional topping like homemade meatballs, and you'll practically smell the saltwater in the air as you dig in. **2700 South Hutchinson Street, 215-755-7553.**

BROTHER'S PIZZA Remember the good ol' days? The friends, the hangouts? Brother's Pizza was the place not only for the friends, but for the great pizza, too. As it turns out, not much has changed since those days. The pizza is still delicious, and whenever friends come back to town, all they want is to go back to Brother's. With many flavors and styles to choose from, the plain pizza is still at the top of our list, with a crust that's perfectly crispy, just the right amount of sauce, and cheese that'll stick in your memory for years. **184 North Pine Street, Langhorne, 215-757-1057, brotherspizzalanghorne.com.**

CHARLIE'S PIZZERIA Red-top slices of pizza cooling under glass. A lady behind the register who seems to know every customer by name. Two pizza ovens in constant, cycling use. A wall full of beer coolers. And a single pizza man who divides his time between shuffling the pies and watching Mexican game shows on the

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Best Pizza 2011

small, flour-shrouded TV hanging near the front door. There is absolutely nothing about this place to recommend to anyone—except for the fact that walking in here feels like stepping into the perfect neighborhood pizza shop, and that the pies that Charlie's produces (thin, crisp, chewy crusts; stretchy cheese; sauce that actually tastes like tomatoes; slices that are *just* greasy enough) should be used as object lessons for culinary students on day one of pizza-making class. **107 West Germantown Pike, Norristown, 610-275-1403.**

POPPY'S PIZZA Skip the chintzy salads and underwhelming chicken wings, and opt instead for the crispy pies and slices coming hot from the oven at this three-year-old shop. Whether you choose the Rustica (with grilled chicken, tomatoes, arugula, Gorgonzola and mozzarella), go all-veg with the Ortolana (fresh spinach, artichokes, olives, feta and tomatoes), or just stick with the plain cheese slice, you'll immediately notice that all the ingredients here are of higher quality than anyone else's in the area—a fact that directly correlates to the prices. **50 East Wynnewood Road, Wynnewood, 610-642-2500, poppispizza.com.**

LA VITA'S PIZZERIA Fair warning: Prepare for sensory overload when you step inside La Vita's. There are blinding, taxicab-yellow walls and a man behind the counter barking like an auctioneer—which, since La Vita's hawks its pies as “New York Style,” is perhaps meant to evoke the psychotic frenzy of a Big Apple pie joint. The chaos extends to the taste of the pies, too, since La Vita's offers toppings like chicken teriyaki and a combination of ground beef, bacon, barbecue and onion rings called “The Big Fat Bastard Special.” (Okay, not really.) But still, at its most dressed-down, this pizza is simply excellent, with flavorful tomato sauce sharpened by a spike of oregano and irresistibly gooey mozzarella over a crisp, paper-thin crust. **121 West Main Street, Moorestown, 856-235-0052, lavitaspizza.com.**

WRITTEN AND RESEARCHED BY:

Philadelphia magazine staff, freelancers, interns, loved ones, friends, strangers, and at least one random homeless guy on the street who told us where to find a good Greek pie in Newtown Square.

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