



Restaurants

Inside: Umbria Gourmet Pizzeria

Gourmet doesn't mean there's no room for mac and chesse on their 'zas

By Sarah Fleener

If you're jonesin' for Italian, but you're a little tight on cash, and you'd like more than the spaghetti and meatball standard, then **Umbria Gourmet Pizzeria** is the place to go.

While they do an outstanding job with the classics (we'll get to that later), we have to start with Umbria's mac & cheese pizza (because this is the dish that drove us to try Umbria in the first place).

In this signature item, Kraft Mac & Cheese is coated in a creamy blend of alfredo and marinara and then piled high onto a hand tossed crust. This is layered up with cheddar and mozzarella and then baked into a chewy, rich, soul-satisfyingly gooey 'za. The Metromix recommendation on this unique pie is to order it with smoked bacon (and make sure you get your own 10-incher because you are NOT going to want to share).

While the mac and cheese is the most unheard of item on the pizza menu, there are a lot of other specialties that aren't run-of-the-mill. The pot roast pizza, the chicken fajita pizza, the pesto king and the Thai shrimp pizza all give the **California Pizza Kitchens** a run for their hybrid-pizza money.

We gave the more tame, but still intriguing, "Roma" a try (and with broccoli, artichoke hearts, and garlic it really hit the spot).

The name Umbria comes from a land-locked section of Italy that is influenced by all culinary regions of the country. You'll find rustic baked pastas (like the creamy lasagna—made with creamy béchamel cheese instead of stomach hardening mozzarella) calzones stuffed with spaghetti and meatballs, a few Grecian influenced salads and appetizers and final course classics like Tiramisu, crème brulee cheesecake and gelato (which changes flavors with the seasons).

The Umbria Cucinas feel like a mom and pop place, and to a point, they are. But that hasn't stopped the franchise from growing all over the Metro area. Check them out in: **Plymouth, Eagan, Bloomington, Eden Prairie, Blaine, Woodbury** and **Shakopee**.

Umbria has a pretty great online presence so check out their **check out their menu** and place your **place your order online**.

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Your Type: ANPL

THE HEARTIER PARTIER

You've never understood the whole "less is more" thing—more is, quite obviously, more! And it's nice to have more, because you can share it, and once you've got more people sharing more—you've got a party! Oh yeah, and why not put macaroni and cheese on a pizza? This isn't communist China.

Your Pizza: Umbria

Minnesota is legendary for our snow and ice, but if anyone else in the country actually paid attention, they'd know that what we really should be legendary for is eccentricity—what else do Charles Lindbergh, Prince, the Cohen Brothers, Garrison Keillor, Bob Dylan, Diablo Cody, Jesse Ventura, Charles Schulz, Michelle Bachmann, and Al Franken have in common? We're tournament-level eccentric around here. We even have a pizza culture that's so eccentric that it makes Los Angeles's pastrami-wrapped hot dogs look tame. You didn't know this? Then pilot your SUV out to the booming homegrown chainlet Umbria, with locations in Plymouth, Eagan, Bloomington, Eden Prairie, Blaine, Woodbury, and Shakopee (and 20 more before the year 2020, I bet). Once at Umbria, prepare to have your mind blown: mac-and-cheese pizza. Bacon double-cheeseburger pizza (with dill pickles). Pot-roast pizza. Shockingly enough, these off-the-wall, unnervingly inventive Umbria pizzas are really good. The thick layer of mashed potatoes on the pot-roast pizza, for example, makes it taste like a Greek boureki or even an open Cornish pasty, while the straight-from-the-box orange pasta on the mac-and-cheese pizza tastes creamy and comforting, and, again, not unlike a classic Greek casserole. Needless to say, the place serves plenty of other more traditional pizzas—like one layered with gyro meat, which shines when dunked into a side of their zesty yogurt tzatziki sauce. Okay, they go more traditional than that. However, once you try a few Umbria pizzas you quickly learn that these are eccentric pizzas in a uniquely Minnesota way: They're hotdish, cooked in an edible container. Ever wondered where Minnesota hotdish culture went in the age of women in the workforce? It went to Umbria for pizza. *Umbria, Multiple locations, umbriapizza.com*

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Pizza Perfect

Thick or thin? Wedges or squares? Marinara or tzatziki? The question isn't who has the best pizza—it's who has the pizza that best fits your personality.

BY DARA MOSKOWITZ GRUMDAHL



TERRY BRENNAN

Are you sick of trying to pick a pizza place—and having the nine people you're hanging out with offer nine different favorites?

Of course you are. You're a Minnesotan.

Some think Minnesota Nice is the quality of helpfulness that arose from people living together through unforgiving winters, but we all know it's really the frosty détente that has evolved from 4 million people stuck together around some lakes trying not to tell one another: "Your favorite pizza is beneath contempt."

It's true. I know this because I spent the best years of my life trying to figure out what's the best pizza in the Twin Cities.

It all started when I was a cub reporter, fresh out of college, sitting in on my first big newsroom meeting. It was for our "Best of the Twin Cities" issue, and the crucial question was this: Who would write the blurb for "best pizza"? Certainly not the young cub reporter fresh out of college. I listened to the editors debate—not just the choices for pizza but the choices for writer—with a seriousness they usually reserved for discussions of state politics or police brutality. After all, anyone could write about the best lesbian bar—that was elementary journalism. You found five lesbians with active nightlives, asked them what they thought, and typed up the answer. But best pizza? For that you needed judgment, taste, maturity, and a thick skin. It was that serious!

When I became the paper's regular restaurant critic, the awesome responsibility of finding the best pizza fell to me—and I, too, took it that seriously. I'd spend weeks visiting potential winners, eating with great attention, taking careful notes, and

meditating in a dark room while I waited for the finger of divine inspiration to guide my pen. I took enormous satisfaction from finding the “right” answer every year, from seeing the prize logo reproduced in the winner’s advertising or on their menus. All those deliberations and research had paid off! The right and true winner had won! On its merits!

That lasted about five years. Visiting the usual suspects time after time—Pizza Lucé, Punch, Fat Lorenzo’s, Red’s Savoy, Broders’, Pizza Nea, and Cossetta—I eventually found the certainty of youth replaced by the equanimity of experience. Over the years, I built such a sense of what these pizzas were that I began to recognize them in both their good and bad forms. There were times when the pizza from Pizza Nea was dry, and other times it was exquisite. There were times when Cossetta veered into too much cheese, and other times when they too were exceptional. I soon concluded I might as well have been picking best religion. *While some like the Russian Orthodox Church and others will always prefer being Jewish, this year I’m giving the prize for best religion to...the Anglicans! Congratulations, Anglicans, here’s your plaque. Buddhists, Hindus, and Catholics, good luck next year!*

Partly it seemed to me that picking the best pizza was like picking the best religion because readers took it that seriously. The Neapolitan purists, for instance, find all pizzas that are not Punch, Arezzo, or Pizza Nea to be beneath contempt, while the New York—pizza stalwarts believe Broders’, the new Black Sheep, and Soho are the one true path. Then there are the partisans of the Minnesota classic pizza—the devotees of Red’s Savoy, the Fireside, Beek’s, and so on—who often believe that the Neapolitan purists and New York—pizza folks are effete, noxious snobs and should be run out of town on a pole.

The great pizza schisms don’t end with those groups. There are also those committed to the insane smorgasbord pizzas epitomized by Dinkytown’s Mesa and our homegrown mini-chain, Umbria. There are those who know and love the Cities’ secret great pizzas, those at Zelo, Bacio, and Ciao Bella, which have crisp crusts and premium ingredients, but also have the benefit of being served at establishments with great wine lists, nice salads, steaks, and a reservation policy. And if we’re talking about restaurants, why not consider Al Vento and Rinata? Why not choose pizzas at chef-driven independent restaurants? For that matter, why not pick the pizza from wind-powered, superhero costumed, hemp-loving Galactic Pizza?

All of these are defensible choices. Any could be your favorite if it aligned with what was in your heart, whether it be an attachment to your childhood, a love for the environment, an appreciation for great service, a zest for adventure, or an intellectual commitment to European essentialism. In fact, it’s not the pizzas that are so different, really—it’s that the people eating them are.

Eureka!

And that, more or less, is how the world’s first Pizza Personality Type Indicator™ was born.

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