

# MOUTH OF THE COLUMBIA

Coast Weekend's local  
restaurant review

## Just killer pizza at Avenue Q

Review and photos by  
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**W**ith rigorous, laser-like mastery of the basics, Seaside's Avenue Q Pizza excels humbly.

For owner/operator Matt Kaffer — aka the “one man pizzeria” — the ethics of minimalism, reverence and austerity are all-encompassing. Avenue Q, which opened in mid-July, is almost Zen-like — a pizza monastery.

“I think simplicity is a big part of it,” said Kaffer of what makes a great pie. “And that’s something that a lot are missing.”

In pursuit of such sublimity, Avenue Q eschews distraction. There are no salads. No buffalo wings. No twisty-breads.

Just pizza. Killer pizza.

Kaffer approaches bread-sauce-cheese bliss after years of study and practice. He said he’s worked at something like eight or nine pizzerias over the years and distilled those varying styles and techniques into something all his own.

It starts with the crust. And no matter your preference, pizza is only as good as its crust. Avenue Q’s is essential and deliberate.

Kaffer employs a slow-fermentation process that hearkens back to early bread-making. Yeast is used, but not that much.

In paraphrasing influential food writer Michael Pollan, *The Guardian* summarized the science: “a long fermentation process allows bacteria to fully break down the carbohydrates and gluten in bread, making it easier to digest and releasing the nutrients within it, allowing our bodies to more easily absorb them.”

According to *The Guardian* (and Pollan), that’s a rarity these days. “Speeding up of the bread-making process for mass consumption has so radically altered what we know as bread in the last century that it’s



Clockwise from top: Canadian bacon pineapple, margherita, capocollo, pepperoni

no longer as easily digested.”

Slow-fermented breads are also lighter, airier, less-dense. The glycemic content is reduced. In short: They’re healthier, less bloating and, most important, they taste better.

As Kaffer put it, his is “more like hearth bread.” The wheat comes through.

You’ll notice slow-fermented and properly-cooked pizza by the “leopard spots” — that is, a few charred ovals contrasted against an otherwise light crust. Those spots indicate big airy pockets inside the dough, bubbles ensuring light,

pillowy, texture and a crisp edge.

And while hewing to old-country bread making serves Avenue Q’s crust, so, too, does restricting what goes on top of it. The tomato sauce is basic, sharp, unsweetened. Cheese is a combination of wet and dry mozzarellas.

Toppings are curbed in such a way that it’s actually possible to list them all here: pepperoni, sausage, Canadian bacon, capocollo, mushroom, red onion, black olive, basil, arugula and pineapple.

If you had to classify Avenue Q’s

pies beyond Kaffer’s own, classic Italian would be the most appropriate comparison. (New York-style is much floppier, overwhelmed by oceans of thick, greasy cheese. And, compared to Kaffer’s thin crust, Chicago-style might well be a savory cake.)

There are a few pre-made slices ready to go after a brief re-heat. They vary a bit but usually include something like Canadian bacon and pineapple (and with the unsweetened sauce, the sugars of the Canadian bacon and pineapple really sing); pepperoni (though I prefer the capocollo, a salty, rich, thin-sliced cured pork); and a few vegetarian riffs on margherita that you shouldn’t sleep on (finished after heating with fresh-cut basil and a drizzle of olive oil, the margherita

### AVENUE Q PIZZA

Rating: ★★ ★★

1575 S. Roosevelt Drive  
Seaside, Ore., 97138

503-739-7396

Hours: noon to 8 p.m.,  
Wednesday through Sunday

Price: \$ – terrific value

Service: humble, devoted

Vegetarian / Vegan Options:  
Margherita not to be overlooked

Drinks: soda, water

#### KEY TO STAR RATING SYSTEM

- ★ Below average
- ★★ Average
- ★★★ Good
- ★★★★ Excellent
- ★★★★★ Best in region

has entrancing depth).

Also fitting of Avenue Q’s uncomplicated aesthetics, all pies are 16 inches. (No small, medium, large). Slices — or, rather, one-quarter of a whole pie — are a great deal at just \$4. Whole pies run from \$13-18, which is also a strikingly fair price (not to mention a far cry from the offensive \$30-plus affronts that have become common in the region).

There are some limits to his restraints, though. And while I’ve never walked into a pizza joint then walked out for lack of BBQ’d chicken, white sauce, artichoke hearts, or pine nuts, there were times at Avenue Q I sure would have liked a beer to go along with my slice. (As I understand it, an application for a beer and wine permit is underway.)

And while I find an odd charm in the completely undecorated, almost barren interior, some may find it less than inviting. But don’t let the liquidation-sale furniture or the towering sign out front featuring long-bygone tenants (“Herb’s Burger’s”) fool you: Avenue Q isn’t flashy, but the pies are fabulous.

With more time and resources, there’s no reason to think Kaffer won’t perfect the environment, too. 