

MOUTH OF THE COLUMBIA

Coast Weekend's local
restaurant review

Amid guilty pleasure of cheesy overload, Pier 11 Pizza satisfies

Review and photos by
THE MOUTH OF THE COLUMBIA
MOUTH@COASTWEEKEND.COM
FACEBOOK.COM/MOUTHOFTHECOLUMBIA

Growing up it seemed like every summer vacation to visit family in New York ended with a pizza party. After a day at the beach or in the pool, as the oppressive heat and humidity retreated ever so slightly, aunts, uncles, cousins, parents and friends would gather in my grandparent's backyard. Pizzas were ordered — mostly plain cheese — and I was perplexed at how my East Coast relatives ate them, by folding the slices in half. I gave folding a try, but it just didn't stick.

There are arguments to be made, I suppose, for folding. According to my very informal poll of friends who fold, the No. 1 answer is: "So I can get twice as much food in my mouth." The second reason is that a folded slice is easier to eat on the go, and for saggy slices that's hard to argue. But I don't need to cram more pizza in each bite because that would mean I'm having fewer bites of pizza. And I want more bites of pizza. The most bites of pizza.

Whichever way you eat it, the basics of New York-style pizza are beyond debate: They're thin crusts, loaded with cheese — big, cheap and easy. Some go further, highlighting New York water as a critical part of the dough-making process. (The same goes for New York bagels; in pursuit of

"real" New York bagels, bakers sometimes ship water in from the Big Apple. I hear they do this at Astoria's new Table 360 Bakery & Bistro.)

The quintessential characteristics of New York pie — thin, cheesy, basic — are the inspiration for Astoria's Pier 11 Pizza. And though they don't use New York water, Pier 11 does get their mozzarella from the Empire State.

"It's simple, like you get on the streets of New York," said owner Rich Ewing of what makes a Pier 11 pie. "Nothing fancy. No arugula, no quail eggs."

Pier 11 is a sister business of the Inferno Lounge, also run by Ewing. You can get Pier 11 pizza at the Inferno as well as the window inside the funky, wooden throwback Pier 11 Mall. As such, you don't have to be 21 to get a slice. There are a few tables for two inside the oddball Mall, but it's not the ideal place to dine besides during a quick lunch. The waterfront tables at Inferno are another story. And while the mall

window shuts a few hours earlier, pizza is available at Inferno until closing time (around midnight on weekends).

It's a bare bones, essential model. Slices are available in Cheese (\$3), Pepperoni (\$3.50) and Primo (\$4). From there you can build your own, starting with a \$3 cheese base; veggies are 50 cents each, meats 75 cents. And while it may not quite rise — or, rather, sink — to the levels of New York City



Custom pie: pepperoni, bell peppers, onions



Pier 11 Pizza's window

pizza price wars, the daily Happy Hour deal, two bucks for a slice of cheese from 4 to 6 p.m., is nothing to sneeze at.

Like slices, whole pies offer three pre-designed options: Cheese (\$20), Pepperoni (\$25) and Primo (\$30, which includes pepperoni, sausage, mushrooms, onions). After that you're building your own from a bedrock list of toppings (remember: no quail eggs). Veggies are \$1.50, meats \$5. At those rates, building a busy pie could get expensive fast. (While slices are

ready in a few minutes, pies take a while, a good 30 minutes or more.)

When considering price — and certainly I've kvetched plenty in these pages about pizzas costing \$30-plus — whole pies at Pier 11, at 20-inches, are well bigger than average. Three or four hungry eaters will likely have leftovers. (Cross your fingers that you can wedge the box into your fridge and still shut the door.)

For thin crust, Pier 11's is quite filling. Cheese is piled on thick as the dough is thin. Under this

PIER 11 PIZZA

Rating: ★ ★ ★

77 11th St. Suite G
Astoria, Ore.
97103

503-741-3401

Hours: 4 to 8 p.m. Tuesday to Thursday; noon to 8 p.m. Friday and Saturday; 4-8 p.m. Sunday. (Available later in Inferno Lounge bar)

Price: \$ — cheap, large

Service: Whole pies can take awhile

Vegetarian / Vegan Options: As long as you eat cheese, you can find something

Drinks: Bottled soda, water (full bar inside Inferno)

KEY TO STAR RATING SYSTEM

- ★ Poor
- ★★ Below average
- ★★★ Worth returning
- ★★★★ Very good
- ★★★★★ Excellent, best in region

weight, slices are floppy. (At one point, on the go, I had little choice and resorted to the fold.) The edges, though, are crispy. Made in-house, the unsweetened sauce has a nice bit of herby oregano, and the olive oil is apparent.

Nothing at Pier 11 is going to surprise you, though. It's meant to replicate the wheel, not reinvent it. To that end, like a lot of pizza in New York, there can be seas of shimmering grease. Of course, no one comes to pizza for their health. However guilty the pleasure amid such cheesy overload, Pier 11's is nothing if not satisfying.

Which is such a remarkable upgrade from what masqueraded as "pizza" when the Inferno Lounge opened in 2015. Alongside plenty of other more robust options, Inferno offered an "Ultra Thin Crust Pizza" that used flour tortillas as crust. These pretend pies were a bad joke, an affront to pizza itself. Pier 11, though, is properly reverent.

Whether you decide to fold it, well, that's up to you. **CW**