

# A Look at the Brand-New Farina Pizza & Cucina Italiana

*By Marcia Gagliardi*

Last week I had a chance to tour and dine at the new **~FARINA PIZZA & CUCINA ITALIANA~**, the latest project from the Farina team at the corner of 18th Street and Valencia. There's a coffee counter open for service in the morning, along with some baked goods, like Italian cornetti. (I put in a request for sfogliatella, the Neapolitan pastry I will request on my deathbed.)

Both lunch and dinner are served, with the menu centered around classic Neapolitan pizzas, 11 in all. The stone pizza oven with black mosaic tile is a beaut (Black Beauty!), made by Antonio Langella—there are only two others like it in the U.S. (in the Bronx), while Japan has 40(!). It's made with sand from Vesuvius, which no doubt contributes to its fiery temp. My father and I were blown away with our pizzas, which came out in 45 seconds cooked evenly and beautifully. For those who dislike the char of Neapolitan pizzas cooked in wood-fired ovens, you'll enjoy this one.

The pizzaiolo, Gennaro Langella, has been well taught by his father Antonio, who has been making pizzas for 55 years (Gennaro is the fifth generation of pizza makers in his family). Father and son are working closely together this initial month while the pizzeria ramps up. The dough has great flavor (it's made with Caputo flour) and an amazing elasticity—you have to nab a seat at the counter so you can watch the crew prepare the pizzas. I had to try the D.O.C., with buffalo mozzarella, while my father had the Romano with really delicious anchovies (all pizzas are \$15). The sauce is made with tomatoes from La Fiammante, a brand that is only provided to Neapolitan pizzaioli and is not exported to the U.S.; due to Antonio's connections with the producer, Farina has access to the prized tomatoes.

You'll also need to try the montanara (\$5), a puffed-up ball of pizza dough fried in olive oil and finished in the oven, topped with cherry tomatoes, olive oil, basil, and a dollop of fior di latte mozzarella. Yeah, bring on the carbs. Chef Paolo Laboa of Farina up the street is putting his mark on the dishes outside of the pizzas, like a risotto with seafood (\$15) and manfredi pasta with lobster sauce (\$25). There's also a monster-size tronchetto (\$25) on the menu, filled with four kinds of cheese, prosciutto, arugula, and cherry tomatoes. Look for farinata soon as well (a Genovese specialty).

Desserts like a panna cotta and tiramisù are simple but beautifully made by co-pastry chefs Luca Cappelletti and Luca Rubicondo (both are fresh from Italy). Do

try the **pastiera napoletana**, a whole-wheat cake made with ricotta, egg, pastry cream, and orange zest (Antonio shared the recipe he learned as a young boy with the kitchen crew). All the wines are from San Marino (partner Luca Minna is an ambassador for the republic), and there is also a selection of artisan Italian bottled beers from Sardinia, Piedmont, and beyond (they're not cheap).

Architect-designer Brett Terpeluk has graced the city with another one of his killer spaces: the white exterior of the building has textured hex tiles and is a bit space-agey, while the interior is inviting and cheerful. I loved the Douglas fir planks painted sea foam green behind the coffee bar and under the counters, with the sleek, white, tufted swivel chairs. The kitchen area gleams with white subway tiles, and the eye-catching ceiling above the dining area is made of **undulating panels featuring faces** from the comic *Diabolik* in the 1960s (see if you can find your name up there) and mirrors (the panels feature custom LED lighting). The restaurant is full of gorgeous woodwork by Kyle Minor Design (it's all black acacia wood). Marble everywhere, check. There are a lot of hard surfaces, so the volume is definitely lively—along with some upbeat house music on the system.

When all is said and done, it's not a very big space: there is room for 35 inside, with only four wood communal tables (they seat six), plus the seven-seat counter overlooking the pizza oven and the side room with a smaller four-seat counter. Fortunately the pizzas cook quickly, so people will be in and out of there. Once the permit for outdoor seating goes through, there will be another 24 seats added under the heat lamps. Large windows look out from the dining room onto Valencia, which will be open on warm nights.

There's a **bottega** along the side of the dining room where you can buy artisan pastas, plus Farina's world-famous pesto. The counter will also serve as a takeout spot for pizzas as well. Yeah, just when we thought we were done with pizza in this town—and then we get this project that has everyone who walks by turning his head. No reservations, by the way.