

## Love At FIRST Bite



Bocado's roasted poblano sandwich

Dig in to 5 of our favorite dishes:

### FRUTTI DI MARE/PACCI RISTORANTE

This savory stew of mussels, clams, shrimp and calamari satisfies the soul. Tender yet retaining a toothsome bite, the seafood is cooked to perfection. Lobster broth lends complexity while basil provides a sweet, fresh edge. Heavenly. 866 W. Peachtree St. NW, 678-412-2402, [www.pacciatlanta.com](http://www.pacciatlanta.com).

### LAMB SHANK/TRUVA

Braised in a tangy mint-coriander sauce and served on a bed of savory roasted eggplant, this is a personal favorite. Slow cooking at a low temperature after a quick sear yields meat that is fall-off-the-bone tender. Melded flavors are sweet yet smoky, complex yet comforting, sedate yet spry. 60 Andrew Young International Blvd. NE, 404-577-8788, [www.truvaatlanta.com](http://www.truvaatlanta.com).

### MUSHROOM RISOTTO/SOTTO SOTTO

First appearing on the fall menu, the mushroom risotto has since become a menu staple thanks to consumer demand. (Read: Folks got angry when it disappeared.) A seasonal mix of 'shrooms gets stirred into slow-cooking carnaroli rice and liquid concoctions. The result: Each creamy bite is a savory, earthy seduction. 313 N. Highland Ave., 404-523-6678, [www.sottosottorestaurant.com](http://www.sottosottorestaurant.com).

### ROASTED POBLANO SANDWICH/BOCADO

The menu description (roasted poblano, pimento cheese, bacon, fried green tomato and spicy sauce) belies the complex satisfaction this combination delivers. Flavorful without packing too much heat, the sandwich is at once provocative, addictive and gratifying. 887 Howell Mill Rd., 404-815-1399; [www.bocadoatlanta.com](http://www.bocadoatlanta.com).

### SAVORY CHEESECAKE/PARISH FOOD & GOODS

The flavor of the savory cheesecake changes daily. But whether you're served roasted garlic and chive, crawfish and chicken sausage, or some other combination, prepare to tumble head over heels when the first forkful hits your taste buds. 240 N. Highland Ave. NE, 404-681-4434, [www.parishatl.com](http://www.parishatl.com).

# Atlanta's Pizza Renaissance

A funny thing happened when the economy tanked. The number of top-quality pizza offerings across Atlanta rose. Whether it was coincidence or cause and effect, we'll take it. And we'll enjoy every big cheesy bite.

"I think every pizza is different," says Chef Riccardo Ullio, owner of **Fritti**. In the past 10 years Fritti has employed six different pizzaiolos (pizza chefs). Currently at the helm is Massimo Andreozzi who, like his predecessors, hails from Naples, Italy. One constant is using quality ingredients like Caputo 00 flour and San Marzano tomatoes. Fritti is one of only 50 U.S. restaurants certified by the Verace Pizza Napoletana Americas as serving authentic Neapolitan-style pizza.

While some chefs may be born pizza-makers, others are drawn to it. Jeff Varasano first gained fame at age 14 by setting the U.S. Rubik's Cube record (24.67 seconds). But when the former New Yorker moved to Atlanta in 1998 he missed the pizza he'd grown up taking for granted. His solution was an engineering approach—during his 10-year quest to create the perfect pie he experimented with ingredients, techniques and even studied thermodynamics. He posted his findings online, but pressure to open a restaurant mounted and **Varasano's Pizzeria** opened last spring. "It took me six years of pretty concerted effort to make my first good pizza," he says.

As the public grows increasingly food-savvy, "consumers themselves are demanding higher quality product and I think that's fantastic," says Chef Michael Bologna, owner of **Vingenzo's** in Woodstock. "There is a drive toward more traditional style pizza rather than American style."

What most distinguishes different pizza styles? "The dough itself," says Bologna, who

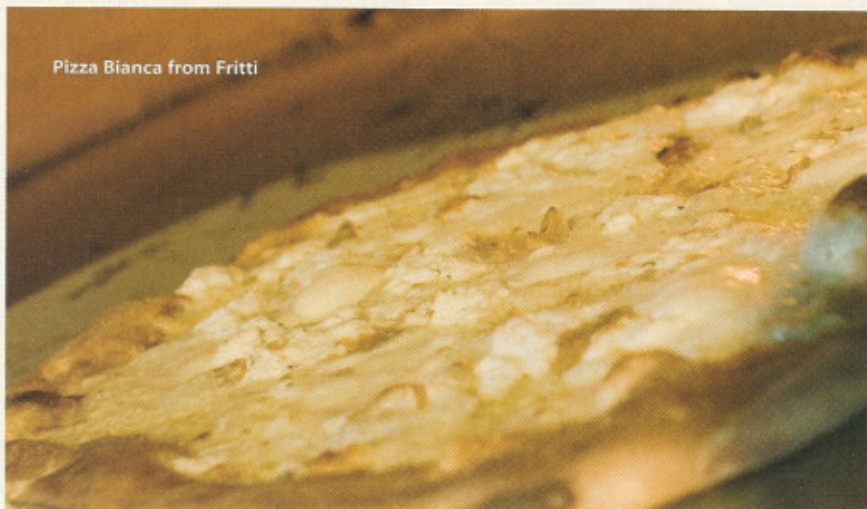
imports Italian water for his dough and pulls fresh mozzarella by hand. "Italian is very lean and very thin. The American style, whether Chicago deep dish or New York hand tossed, is thicker. Neapolitan pizzas are about balance of dough to sauce to toppings. A thin crust doesn't do well when you do a lot of toppings because there's nothing to hold it."

"Some people love loads of ingredients on top of pizza," says Chef Nick Oltarsh of **Max's Coal Oven Pizzeria**. "But a thin crust can't support a lot of weight." To protect his crusts, Oltarsh first puts down a layer of cheese and then adds a light smear of sauce. A hot oven is another essential element. "Our oven temperature is 1,000 degrees," says Oltarsh of his genuine coal-burning oven, the only one in Georgia. "Coal burns super hot. What happens is when the dough hits the oven it gets an initial spring in the dough that produces a wonderful soft chew on the inside and light crackle on the outside."

Across Atlanta, the top-selling pizza is a classic margharita—a simple yet ethereal blend of tomato, mozzarella and basil. But creative combos draw fans as well. Fritti, for example, has 25 different versions on its menu. "One of our best-selling pizzas is topped with gorgonzola, pineapple and balsamic vinegar," says Ullio.

Pizza may also be the ultimate social food. "Flatbreads are great finger foods and easy to share," says Chef Bennett Hollberg of **The Ritz-Carlton Atlanta**, where the Lumen lobby bar menu offers eight different pizza options. "We created Lumen with guests in mind who want to spend time together socially over drinks and share two or three small plates."

After all, in good and tough times, there's nothing like spending time with family and friends over a slice of pizza.



Pizza Bianca from Fritti