

Diane's Blog
5.27.2009

To Toss or Not To Toss—That is the Question

Who wouldn't want to try their hand at tossing pizza dough? If handed a flat piece of dough and given a few simple instructions from Tony Gemignani, the nine-time-world pizza champion and the co-author on our cookbook **Pizza**, anyone could give it a whirl—it's addictively fun. Besides, with friends, family, and children joining in, does it really matter if the first few attempts land your pizza dough on the floor or the ceiling? Like throwing a Frisbee or pitching a ball, practice may not make perfect, but it surely will help. (Note to home cook: make lots of extra pizza dough if you plan to let first-time pizza tossers, adults and children alike, in on the fun when you throw a pizza party.)

Tossing pizza is for big pies—the New York and California-style pizzas—that use about a 15-ounce portion of dough to make a pie. In fact, did you know that, by law and tradition, a Neapolitan *pizzaiolo* never tosses pizza dough; it is only pressed and stretched? True Neapolitan pizzas are approximately 9 inches in diameter, using about 9 ounces of dough for each pie.

Honestly, I didn't begin to know all these rules, techniques, and traditions before I undertook the research for the pizza book. Then, after meeting Tony and Roberto, it wasn't just the dough spinning, but my head as well, trying to define, organize, and duplicate at home all the pizza-making lessons from these passionate *pizzaiolos*.

Tony taught me to toss; Roberto said he never tosses, only stretches the dough. Roberto said he only uses Italian "00" Caputo flour that is 100 percent hard wheat with 11.5 percent protein; Tony likes to use unbleached bread flour that is 13.5 percent protein. Roberto uses fresh cake yeast; Tony uses active dry yeast. Tony is famous for his Cholula spicy chicken pizza; not only would Roberto never put chicken on a pie, he adheres to strict Neapolitan traditions for what should top a pie.

The question—To toss or not to toss?—seems simple enough, but actually it comes down to style. If you wanna toss pizzas, head to the chapters in **Pizza** on making New York and California-style pizza. Use Tony's dough—a high-gluten flour perfect for tossing. But if you crave the slightly charred, thick rounded edge with a soft pleasant chew of a Neapolitan pizza crust, then watch me demonstrate Roberto's pizza dough in this week's featured video.

But here is what is truly amazing. Beyond the book and video, the devoted pizza enthusiast can study directly with either of these masters. Just pick a coast! Roberto teaches and certifies professional *pizzaiolos* in New York City at his restaurant, Kesté Pizza and Vino on Bleeker Street in the West Village. Tony is days from launching his new project on Stockton Street in San Francisco, with his pizzeria and school, Tony's Pizza Napoletana and Scuola Italiana Pizzaioli USA.

It's a toss up, and it's making my head spin. I can't wait to go back and visit both. All this writing about pizza has made me hungry. I was planning to grill lamb steaks for dinner, but please, will someone toss me a pie?