

New Jersey

MONTHLY

Table Hopping with Rosie

A MANO, RIDGEWOOD

A Mano ("by hand" in Italian), located at 24 Franklin Avenue, Ridgewood, serves fresh made-from-scratch Neapolitan pizzas, salads, panini, and entrées using premium ingredients from Naples or sourced from local produce purveyors. Fresh mozzarella is made daily on the premises.

The pizza is chock full of flavor—crispy and charred along the edges and the bottom from the 1,000-degree wood-burning oven, where it cooks in less than two minutes. It's made with all-natural Caputo flour, known as the best flour for pizza and pasta, and San Marzano tomatoes. Twenty-plus varieties of pizza are available, and new flavors are regularly introduced, along with seasonal menu changes. We had the Margherita, made with mozzarella, tomatoes, Parmigiano-Reggiano, extra-virgin olive oil, and fresh basil, and the Ortolana ("greengrocer" in Italian), a vegetarian pie topped with mozzarella, tomatoes, zucchini, eggplant, artichokes, mushrooms, extra-virgin olive oil, and fresh basil. Both were scrumptious. On Sundays only, A Mano serves gluten-free pizza for an additional \$5 per pie. A whole-wheat variety is available daily for an additional \$3 per pie. The pizzas are about twelve inches in diameter and range in price for \$6.99 for the bambino (kid's pizza) to \$19.99 for the stuffed pizza with fresh ricotta, mozzarella, Neapolitan salami, tomatoes, Italian ham, mushrooms, extra-virgin olive oil, and basil.

A Mano is proud to be one of only three U.S. pizza restaurants (one is in Denver, the other in Chicago) to receive impressive certifications from both the Verace Pizza Napoletana Association and the Associazione Pizzaiuoli Napoletani, the recognized Italian authorities on traditional Neapolitan pizza.

Keeping it fresh and simple, using quality ingredients, and being authentic to the Neapolitan methods are the name of the game here. Along with the pizza, we had a Caprese salad with handmade mozzarella, tomatoes, basil, and EVOO. It was a perfect assemblage, as was the fresh arugula with grilled artichokes and shaved Parmigiano-Reggiano. For a heartier dish, any of the salads can be served atop Parmigiano-Reggiano focaccia. We were told that the meatballs, a special on our visit, are prepared in the traditional Neapolitan manner—but the recipe was a secret. In any case, these flavorful orbs were served with a house-made tomato sauce as a delicious appetizer to share. Other options are gnocchi, vegetable or meat lasagna with house-made thin pasta sheets, panini, calzones, and daily specials. If it's available, try the eggplant, which is not breaded but simply served with tomato sauce and a dusting of cheese.

There are thirteen enticing gelato flavors to choose from for dessert, all made on the premises. We found the strawberry to be intense with flavor. A whimsical and oh so delicious chocolate pizza has Nutella, the chocolate hazelnut spread, sandwiched between pizza dough.

A Mano includes two levels for dining, and all the furniture, kitchen supplies, and painted tiles that adorn the counters, tabletops, and bathrooms come from Italy. The wood-fired ovens were built in the restaurant by two Italian artisans. The kitchen is open, so be sure to check out the specials of the day lined up on the counter. Dramatic dark-red walls are decorated with black-and-white photos. The pictures of the pizzaioli (pizza makers) handling dough and making pizza will catch your eye. A newly hired manager and staff provide attentive service.

A Mano, which is BYO, is open Monday through Thursday from 11:30 AM to 10 PM, Friday and Saturday from 11:30 AM to 11 PM, and Sunday from noon to 10 PM. For reservations call 201-493-2000.



*Margherita pizza from A Mano, Ridgewood.
Photo courtesy of Lowell Saferstein.*