

## The Connecticut Table

By Janelle Finch & John M. Columbus

# Pizzamania

Connecticut's top-notch pizza possibilities just seem to keep multiplying.

At da Capo, the pies are authentically Italian—with a few Greek refinements.

Spoiled though we are here in Pizza Heaven, there are always some top pie places around the state you probably haven't gotten to try yet, each with its own doughy twist. Here are a few great recent finds to tempt your taste buds. (All prices are for small pizzas, unless otherwise noted.)

**Pure Pizza** (Takeout & Catering), Berlin, 860/828-3759, [purepizzaberlin.com](http://purepizzaberlin.com)

Discreetly situated on Connecticut's other scenic highway, the Berlin Turnpike, Pure Pizza goes the distance to offer only top-notch ingredients—all-natural Savage Hill beef, hand-pinched homemade sausage, creamy Bindi Gelato and breads fresh daily from Arthur Avenue in the Bronx. Gourmet all the way, from apps to full dinners to the biggest pie we've ever seen come out of an oven—"Pure Party Pizza," 27 inches (oh, my) for 10 to 12 people, \$39.95. We counted 29 different toppings and were assured by owner Mario that they could accommodate any combo or request. Bountifully endowed specialty pies include fresh-shocked white clam, market price; Philly steak and cheese, \$14;

and a decadent Carne Abundanza (six different meats), also \$14. If Pure Pizza were closer to home, we'd probably never cook again.

**Fat Cat Pie Co.**, Norwalk, 866/FCAT-123

The strutting fat cat in the window—Felix the Cat meets R. Crumb—welcomes you into a warm, chic space of rich scents and softly pulsing reggae. Ultra-slim 13-inch pies are crisp yet chewy and range from \$9 for a plain red to \$12 for three or more additions. Thirteen "toppers" and seasonal specials lean toward the local, homemade and organic, and are applied with a light but deft hand for a lingering palate pleaser. We enjoyed a half broccoli rabe with FC's homemade savory sausage crumble and half sautéed mushrooms—a richly flavored and satisfying combo. Pie No. 2 was half tiny cubes of eggplant and half caramelized red onion with a sprinkling of a marvelously fragrant curry from the tableside spice rack adding an exotic nuance. Add FC's fabulous international wine list and choice beers, organic salads, artisanal cheeses and homemade bread for a healthy, hearty and worldly dining experience.

**Salerno's**, Stratford, 203/377-2436

Family-run since 1947 and dripping with ambience, Salerno's is casual, cozy and priced to bring you back again and again. A large pie with "The Works: sausage, meatball, pepperoni, bacon, onion, peppers (and anchovy ... if you wish)" is just \$20. Friendly service, hearty classic main dishes plus chewy pies generously laden with local ingredients (the mozzarella is made next door at Cuttruffello's Creamery) and fresh-daily sauce make Salerno's as inviting as mom's kitchen. We kept it simple, munching on a small, lusciously spicy pepperoni (\$8.75), and basking in the glow of the red neon Apizza sign just outside our window.

**Slice**, North Branford, 203/483-0048

Settle into a vintage Chevy-style upholstered booth and prepare for this Wooster Street alum now cranking out great pies at Slice, where they have the New Haven pie vibe down pat. A light and crispy crust is the base for some very innovative pies. Our fave the day we visited was the Buffalo—blue cheese sauce, mozz, Romano and fresh garlic topped with tender oven-baked chicken. That's some spicy pie for just \$9. We also indulged in the potentially addictive "Roasted Heart" white pie with roasted red peppers and artichoke hearts, \$9.25. Next visit we'll try the mashed red bliss potato pie and, if we still have room, the Slice D-O-G-G, a Hummel pup (made in East Haven) wrapped in a pizza-crust triangle with pickle, chips and "you name the dipping sauce."

**da Capo**, Litchfield, 860/482-6246

Befitting Litchfield, da Capo's landscaped grounds beckoned us to a spacious lodge, where a group of 20 can dine as comfortably as two. Sorely tempted by the menu's abundant non-pizza offerings, we stuck to our guns and concentrated on the alluring pies emerging from the enormous brick ovens. We tried a fair sampling, but followed the house suggestion not to overload them with more than three toppings—allowing for the delicate yet rich flavors to come forward. The pizzas (13-inch \$13, 17-inch \$15) are very thin but still have a chewy, layered quality with a crisp bottom that complements the fresh, cooked-right-on-the-pie toppings. While these pies are authentically Italian in every crisp and bubbly detail, there are a few enhancements that reveal da Capo's Greek roots. Chef Nick, who made his chops at the revered Patsy's in New York, uses only Kalamata extra virgin olive oil and fresh Greek oregano, adding a fruity fragrance to the experience—a savory but potent variation, so request a lighter touch if you like.