

## PizzArte –A Showcase for Neapolitan Cuisine and Contemporary Art

BY RICHARD J. SCHOLEM

Italian restaurants rule. There are few blocks in Manhattan without one or more of them. But there are Italian restaurants and *Italian restaurants*. They range from pasta-and-pizza storefronts to high-end haute cuisine spots to standard Italian-American, marinara, Bolognese, cannoli,



tiramisu eateries. Then there is that rarest entry: an Italian-Italian restaurant, one that could well be in Italy. That's exactly what PizzArte, an authentic Neapolitan restaurant on West 55th Street is. Take a bite, close your eyes and it's easy to think you're in Naples, where its owners and much of its staff hail from. The language of the wait-staff and kitchen crew is Italian.

While the restaurant's name is reasonably accurate—it is part art gallery and does feature pizza—it's much more than that. It offers a substantial list of appetizers (octopus, baked eggplant, Neapolitan meatballs, etc.), salads (spinach, golden beets, goat cheese, mango, pistachio nuts among others), pastas and soup (Neapolitan mixed vegetable soup, pasta alla Genovese, a codfish-based Paccheri al Baccala), five desserts, plus a list of about a dozen pizzas.

PizzArte is a narrow storefront that's bigger than it looks. This two-story spot sports a sleek, sharp marble bar, a brick

wood-burning oven, and a few seats downstairs and many more, including a communal table overlooking 55th Street, upstairs. Top-lighted lunar moonscape art lines the upstairs walls while abstract pieces are displayed on the main floor. Snappy, black-clad waiters complete the hip, modern Manhattan milieu.

Although PizzArte's image is trendy, its food is traditional. Those pizzas are ringed by high, puffy outer crusts, replete with superior ingredients like ripe San Marzano tomatoes. (The Nero'd Avula Sicilian red wine is an appropriate, if pricey, accompaniment.)

Of the starters, try the rustic Neapolitan meatballs with Italian pine nuts and raisins; the feathery fried calamari and shrimp in a tangy lemon sauce; the traditional Neapolitan mixed-vegetable soup with its large, fresh, diverse veggies and soothing broth; and the substantial baby octopus. We also tried the fish (salmon) and meat (thinly sliced chicken) specials of the day, and the pasta alla Genovese—flat pasta folded over and covered with a rich, slow-cooked onion-and-meat sauce.

The five sweet finales are a fitting, satisfying cap for the culinary festivities: fluffy tiramisu, intense flourless chocolate and almond cake, a rum-soaked baba, and a trio of gelato and sorbets (mixed berry, chocolate and vanilla).

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Take a bite, close your eyes, and you're in Naples.

69 W. 55th St., 212-247-3936; [pizzarteny.com](http://pizzarteny.com)