

First Taste: Frankie & Fanucci's in Hartsdale

May 22

I made it over to Frankie & Fanucci's for lunch yesterday. I was really surprised how much the space has changed since it was Lia's. It looks like something out of the turn-of-the-century, with marble counters, black and white mosaic tile and black leather booths. And the pizza? Thin crust, charred on the bottom, served a simple white plate:



The restaurant is in downtown Hartsdale.



Yesterday the doors were open to the street, which makes for a welcoming, neighborhood-y feel. The black banquette is a holdover from Lia's. Bare bulbs hang above it. I like the look. In the city, it's overdone but you don't see it much around here.



Owners Angelo Viscoso and Brad Nagy grew up in the boroughs, and the pizza capital of the world (to me, anyway) and these guys know what they're doing when it comes to wood-fired cooking.

The wood fired oven — which they keep at 800 degrees — is in the back of the restaurant. I was in the booth furthest away from it, and I was trying to be surreptitious with the camera, but if you look just above the point of the back of that second black booth in the middle of the photo, you can see the fire burning inside the oven.



The menu is short and to the point. (I'll scan it later.) Besides wood oven pizza, there are:

Four starters: meatball sliders, fresh mozz, wood oven clams and and antipasto plate

Five salads: Tuscan (mixed greens, cucumbers, tomatoes, red onions and balsamic); Caesar; Caprino (arugula, goat cheese, pistachios, raspberry vinaigrette); Pear & Gorgonzola; and Fresca (arugula, red onions, tomatoes, lemon dressing)

Five sandwiches (too many ingredients to list, but the names are Capri, Italiano, Pollo, Tuna and Meatball Parm)

Espressos and desserts.

The wine list is served as a wine label. Simple and to the point. See?



OK. Now to the pizza. There are two sizes: personal (10 inches for \$9.25) and large (16 inches for \$14.95). The toppings available are: Pepperoni, Sweet Italian Sausage, Meatball, Anchovy, Mushroom, Roasted Pepper, Caramelized Onion, red Onion, Olives, Sweet Roasted Garlic, Ricotta and Extra Cheese. Basil is not listed on the menu, but I asked and got it.

They also have five combinations on the menu: Spicy Sausage and Caramelized Onion; DiParma (mozzarella, arugula and prosciutto... no sauce); Amici (meatball, sausage, pepperoni and mozzarella); White Clam (garlic, olive oil, parmesan... no sauce); and Verdura (zucchini, mushrooms, caramelized onions, roasted peppers and mozzarella).

My first time at a restaurant, I like to order a plain or a margherita. That way I can really judge the texture. And this crust was absolutely perfect. Crispy and thin with no middle gloppiness and just the right amount of chew. Check out the bottom of the crust:



The taste? When I had a mouthful of cheese and basil, I was happy, but I just wished for a little more zing in the sauce. Which is why I ordered a pie with toppings: the spicy sausage and caramelized onion:



I had to get this one to go.... I was only one person for lunch and my colleagues promised to help, but couldn't leave the office. That meant I wasn't able to truly judge the crust on this one.... it had to travel before I could taste it. The toppings really punched up the flavor of the pie. The sausage was spicy, the onions were sweet, and I think the extra ingredients even brought something new to the sauce.

F&F has only been open a few weeks, so let's give them some time. But for now, I'm willing to say the crust is fabulous, it's a great neighborhood restaurant, and it's the closest thing we've got to a Brooklyn pizzeria right here in Westchester. I can't wait to try more.