

Blaze Pizza

Approaching Blaze Pizza from the Bay Shore Mall's parking lot, I marveled at the structure, which was unlike any other. Built with lots of stainless steel and reclaimed wood, the industrial design included corrugated metal panels and bright orange and grey colors. This chain has sleek, modern architecture with an urban feel to it. It is no wonder that the building was submitted for architectural awards. Even more special and inviting is the fireside patio, which offers comfortable seating for those who like dining under the umbrella table while watching the crowds go by.

The idea of being able to go to a restaurant and decide how to make your own individual pizza – and have it taste good – sounded like an exciting idea. You could customize a “signature pizza” from

the menu board, or create your own. Blaze makes create-your-own, ready-in-3-minute pizzas using super hot ovens. The thin-crust pizzas are about 11-inches each. The pies cook in just 180 seconds in a 3-ton oven, outfitted with a stone hearth and open flames on three sides. The recipe combines three styles of dough, fermented over 24-hours, and are made throughout the day at each restaurant.

1701 Sunrise Highway

Bay Shore, NY 11706

631-666-1100

Sunday - Friday: 11:00 a.m. to 10:00 p.m.

Saturday: 11:00 a.m. to 7:30 p.m.

Walking in, the smell was unmistakable: fresh dough; tomato sauce; and a multitude of herbs, spices, vegetables, and more. It didn't take long for my friend and I to figure out where to start. Aside from the menu on the wall, it was plain to see all the toppings of cheeses, meats, and vegetables behind the glass at the assembly line. I felt like a kid in a candy store.

There are as many as seven cheeses, eight proteins, 20 vegetables, and four sauces to choose from. No matter how many toppings you add – and you can go crazy – the pizza costs the same: \$7.95. I decided to go to town and asked for a variety of toppings. My friend did as well, with one exception: he put hot peppers on his pizza and chose the hot Italian sauce instead of the plain marinara. A word to the wise... the hot sauce is truly HOT!

Once we chose our toppings and sauce, the pizza went into the oven. It took longer to put on the fresh toppings than it did for these pizzas to bake. We decided to have a salad as well. There are half a dozen options if you're in the mood for a fresh, crisp side to your pizza. The prices range from \$3.95 for a Caesar salad with tomato, basil, beets, and goat cheese to a larger antipasto entrée for a reasonable price of \$6.95. They are freshly made and packaged, and are offered in a separate open refrigerator from which you can help yourself.

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We sat at a table by the window and decided to choose a drink from the menu. We each enjoyed a Blue Point Mosaic beer, which was smooth and refreshing at \$5.00. You also have a choice of soda, tea, lemonade, or bottled drinks at \$1.95 each, or small bottles of wine at \$5.00 each. I made sure not to miss the S'more Pie, which was a warm and delicious treat for \$2.00.

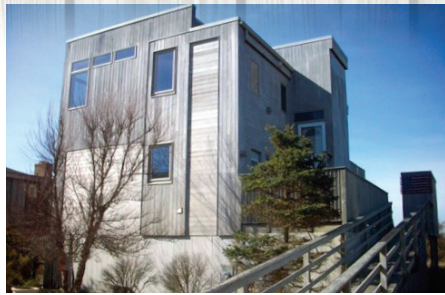
I was surprised when a waiter came to our table, since I thought it was just a help yourself kind of affair. I learned that this is called table touch service, where the waiter will take your plates and clean the table. This nice gentleman, named Eugene Cunningham, explained that he was the shift leader for our table. He promptly cleaned our table and asked if we had a satisfying experience. We had a quick talk with him and, in addition to loving his job at Blaze, he also has a family home in Saltaire on Fire Island.

After that pleasant meeting with Eugene, I decided to speak with the manager to thank her for such great hospitality. Monica Magnani has been with this Blaze for about seven months and was very informative. She explained that each employee shares some of the job duties. The people who put your personalized pie together are called "pizza olos." There are also "pizza smiths" who cook the pizza in 180 seconds. Monica seemed very dedicated to her position as manager and had a sweet and bubbly personality. I was happy to have met her. Her enthusiasm left me with a positive feeling about the success of Blaze in Bayshore. That is one chain that is left in good hands.

We came to learn that Blaze Pizza makes its own dough from scratch using a recipe developed by critically-acclaimed Executive Chef Brad Kent, a.k.a. "The Pizza Whisperer." The recipe requires a 24-hour fermentation period to produce Kent's signature light-as-air, crisp crust. The restaurant's menu of pizzas and salads uses fresh ingredients, ranging from inventive to classic, and accommodates a range of dietary needs, with a gluten-free dough and vegan cheese option.

Lessing's Hospitality Group, one of New York's leading restaurant and catering companies, has signed an agreement to develop many franchise stores in the New York Metro area, Long Island, Westchester, and Rockland counties and in southern Connecticut. Lessing's has been dedicated to quality and excellence in food service since 1890. Blaze Pizza was founded in 2011 by Elise and Rick Wetzel (co-founder of Wetzel's Pretzels), and the concept is backed by many well-known investors.

As it came time for my friend and I to leave, a steady flow of customers made their way in and out of the bright, friendly restaurant. The line stretched out the door, but it moved quickly. Blaze Pizza will also custom build your pizzas before you arrive, but they wait until you check in with the cashier before firing them in the oven. This way they will be piping hot. Just remember: if you like it hot, make sure you have a large bottle of water to put the fire out! ■



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