

# Cheers

M2MEDIA360

THE BEVERAGE BUSINESS MAGAZINE FOR FULL-SERVICE RESTAURANTS AND BARS

SEPTEMBER 2009

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# Pizza Pairings

Beverage pros find that pizza goes well with a range of beverages, including cocktails and sparkling wine.

By Amy Sherman



● The Bloody Uno (top of the page) pairs well with eggplant flat bread and the deep dish pizzas (above) at Uno Chicago Grill.

Neapolitan, Roman, New York, California, deep dish and flatbread. Styles may vary, but America's love affair with pizza is well established; roughly 77 percent of American consumers report eating pizza more than once a month, according to a recent Technomic online survey, and 35 percent consume it more than once per week. Seemingly never-ending topping options make it one of the most versatile and customizable dishes, too. Likewise, there is no one beverage that pairs best with pizza. These days, beer, wine and even cocktails are being served with pizza.

According to Tony Gemignani, owner of the San Francisco-based Tony Gemignani's International School of Pizza, the venerable pizza pie isn't paired as much with beer or red "pizza wine" in its home country, Italy. "It's thought that the yeasts in beer don't mix well with the yeasts in pizza, so in order to cleanse the palate, pizza schools suggest prosecco as the best match."

Sparkling wines such as prosecco and rosé are featured in brunch cocktails at casual pizzeria, Beretta, in San Francisco. Bartender Ryan Fitzgerald says the cocktails are specifically designed to complement eggs and pizzas, including its brunch pizza, the Pizza Carbonara, \$12, made with pancetta, eggs and mozzarella. According to Fitzgerald, "Sparkling cocktails have an acidity to cut through the eggs and bacon, and are all about cleansing your palate." Of the four specialty brunch cocktails, two are sparkling: the Tulio Oro, \$9, a combination of prosecco, limoncello and Punt é Mes, and the Cardinale, \$10, a mix of sparkling rosé, Lillet Rouge, hibiscus and Angostura bitters.

While most Beretta pizzas are not specifically paired with cocktails, Fitzgerald says a well-balanced cocktail should





pair with a well-balanced pizza. Some of their unique cocktails have “subtle Italian undercurrents” that help with pizza pairings, he adds, such as fresh herbal notes.

The Lonsdale, \$9, a combination of Broker’s Gin, apple, lemon, basil and honey, complements their classic Margherita pizza, \$11, because both have notes of basil. Meanwhile, the Acadian, \$9—made with Wild Turkey Rye, sloe gin, lemon, honey, absinthe and rosemary—is a good choice with their white pizza, \$13, made with potato, rosemary, radicchio and gorgonzola dolce. He points out that some ingredients in pizza sauces, such as anise and cinnamon, also often are present in gin.

To balance flavors and keep cocktails from getting too sweet for pizza, Fitzgerald relies on bitters. They create “a fourth dimension, adding complexity,” he says. “Bitters function like tannins in wine.” Perhaps most importantly, though, bitters help “that balancing out of sweetness and alcohol which helps your mouth look forward to the next bite.”

### A DASH OF SEASONALITY

While cocktails offer interesting new pairing opportunities for pizza, beer and wine still have a rather substantial place at the table.

Boston-based Uno Chicago Grill, known for its Chicago-style deep dish pizza and with more than 200 units in 31 states, has great success pairing beer with its pizzas, especially during summer months. “We sell a lot of Miller, Bud Light, Sam Adams beers, and American craft beers are particularly popular,” says Marc Sachs, corporate beverage manager for the concept. “Why does beer work so well? Perhaps because grain-based drinks go with grain-based food, and also because the cool temperature of the beer is refreshing with the pizza. Finally, beer has always been a great cheese match.”

Cambridge, 1., chosen the best thin-crust pizza by *Boston Magazine* in 2008 and with a location in Boston and another in Cambridge, Mass., likes the seasonal angle. “There is a trend toward craft and local beers, and local breweries are offering more seasonal options,” says general manager Will Holmes. Diners look for seasonal flavors both in their pizza and in their beverage, he notes. In the summer, the Lobster pizza, with fresh corn and scallions, sells well at \$10. Because the lobster and corn have buttery notes, Holmes recommends pairing it with something with bright fruit flavor, either an Italian pinot grigio such as the Marco Felluga 2007 or Zenato 2006. He also recommends the Italian St. Michael-Eppan Chardonnay 2007, \$7.50 a glass.

Carrabba’s Italian Grill, a casual bistro-style restaurant based in Tampa, Fla. with more than 200 locations nationwide, offers traditional Italian-style, brick-oven-baked pizzas as well as classic Italian entrées, fresh fish, seafood and steaks. Beverage director Shelly Hurley says their philosophy is to “stick to our heritage but not be limited by it.” That means a wine list that includes plenty of Italian wines but also some regional favorites, another reflection of the “eat and drink local” trend. Hurley says that for the last year and a half, they’ve been offering more



● At Carrabba’s Italian Grill, a wide range of wines complement the Rustica pizza and help reinforce the concept’s cultural theme.

regional wines. For example, in Williamsburg, Va. they sell the local Acte 12 Chardonnay at \$11 a glass.

When it comes to getting customers to indulge in wine with their pizza, Carrabba’s most successful beverage promotion to date has been Wine Wednesdays, where customers take \$10 off any bottle. Says Hurley, “Wine Wednesday started as a limited promotion, but we’ve extended it. The staff gets a lot of energy because everyone is ordering wine, and it brings back the culture of an Italian restaurant.”

Whether wine, beer or cocktails, pizza presents a multitude of pairing opportunities. ●

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