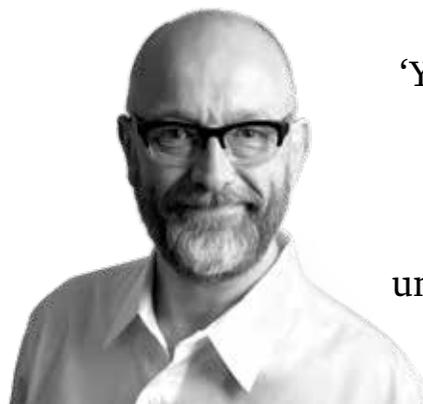


Tim Hayward



‘Young businesses are going back to the street-food roots of the pizza and rediscovering its unpretentious delight’

Not a pineapple in sight

London pizzerias

You'd be forgiven for disregarding pizza as junk food, whether it's the frozen frisbee of the supermarket aisle or the thick-crust disc of doughy guilt, biked to your door under cover of darkness. Though it's supposed to have roots in Naples, the pizza has spread so effectively worldwide that it seems anyone can have a go at appropriation. London, for example, is experiencing a bit of a pizza renaissance. Culinary adventurers are bringing back various takes on the original in the ceaseless search for new "concepts".

'O ver, on Southwark Street, is a tasteful venue with a high-ceilinged "architect's white" room propped with unmatched mid-century modern furniture, giving a Scandinavian feel that keeps to the gentler side of rigorous. The menu characterises pizzas as "healthy Neapolitan street food", ticking several boxes at once for the *engagé* metropolitan, and is packed with authentic ingredients, their provenance delineated with the attention to detail of a cheesy *Almanach de Gotha*. Chef Tommaso Mastromatteo has reputedly worked with the Associazione Verace Pizza Napoletana, guardians of Naples' pizza heritage. The unique part of 'O ver's offer (I'm trying really hard not to take issue with the name here, but it's hurting) is that the pizza bases are made with seawater.

The menu doesn't specify whether the seawater is shipped in from the Bay of Naples, or brought in a bucket from Bexhill (I've always bought my culinary seawater in dehydrated powder form from Maldon). I can't comment on the idea that trace minerals from the sea may be beneficial, but I can say that the base, though pleasant in texture, was woefully undersalted. This was not helped by the tomato element, which tasted like a reassuringly expensive tin of



Smoked Napoli pizza from Pizza Pilgrims

'O VER

44 Southwark Street,
London SE1 1UN
0207 378 9933;
overuk.com

PIZZA PILGRIMS

11 Dean Street
London W1D 3RP
0207 287 8964;
pizzapilgrims.co.uk

ZIA LUCIA

157 Holloway Road
London N7
0207 700 3708;
zialucia.com

tomatoes had been freshly opened for my visit. The Neapolitan mozzarella was as creamy and gorgeous as one could hope for but the whole left me wanting.

Fortunately, it is but a cab hop to **Pizza Pilgrims** on Dean Street, in Soho. This mini chain was set up by a couple of young street-food entrepreneurs who famously travelled to Naples, frantically instagramming their quest, although their operation feels more Manhattan. This site lacks a little in terms of air conditioning and other frivolous nods to comfort, but serves a cracking pizza. The base was crisp, thin and properly salted, and the tomato sauce had been reduced and seasoned with care. There is posh mozzarella available at a modest premium but it says a lot about the spirit of the place that this feels like an affectation. I mean, I wouldn't mind a creamy wodge of *fior di latte* on top but I'd be terrified

someone might hear me asking and judge me.

Zia Lucia has a friendly, family feel, Italian staff and tables that spill on to the glamorous, throbbing Mediterranean *corso* of Holloway Road. The menu is small and authentic, with the modern addition of some "healthy" bases, such as a gluten-free or a vegetable-charcoal base, which has "evocative flavour, dramatic look, digestive gas-absorbing qualities". This may be "a thing" in Italy, though I prefer to interpret it as a coded expression of anti-Trump sentiment. For purposes of comparison, I stuck with the simple margherita and was rewarded with a superb base – thin, chewy with only the slightest hint of sog at the centre, a tomato sauce that might just be the most relaxed evocation of Italian good taste since Monica Vitti in *L'Avventura*, and a judicious stewing of cheese.

'O ver, Pizza Pilgrims and Zia Lucia all represent different faces of the pizza *risorgimento*. But each has a new wood oven, offers properly made, long-fermented sourdough bases and has in some way innovated. 'O ver talks a good game around authenticity though, 'or me, it ever so slightly misses the fun. Pizza Pilgrims have street food in their DNA and create an informal buzz as well as a great pizza, though the ambience may be too riotous if you're looking for a comfortable meal. Zia Lucia sets a new standard for high-street independents: cheap, friendly and democratic. If you can do it in Holloway, why not any other high street? What unites them all is that they'll never stuff your crust or put pineapple on your pizza. For we punters, it's great that these young businesses are going back to the street-food roots of the pizza and rediscovering its unpretentious delight. **FT**

Tim Hayward is an FT Weekend contributing writer; tim.hayward@ft.com; Twitter @TimHayward