

# Boston Cheese Pie

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**P**izza Connection is hardly a secret. It's been in Canoga Park for nearly 10 years. Two years ago owner Joe D'Amore, former actor turned pizza baron, opened a second shop in Encino and last month a third in Chatsworth.

Regulars return for pizza, the Formica-table informality and first-name service.

Fliers advertise authentic Boston pizza, but about the only thing Beantown about the place would seem to be the owner. D'Amore does, however, claim to make his dough with water imported from Boston. He says it makes the best crust.

The dining room, with its eight tables (green checked cloths under glass) and nonstop television, is memorable only for the gallery of autographed 8x10s of D'Amore's cronies from the entertainment and sports industries. And for his impressively outgoing personality. Customers in jogging gear get quizzed about weekly mileage and pace. Then D'Amore volunteers a few tales from his running history.

One evening, customers got a free meal when the tread on D'Amore's running shoes failed him. Rushing around the kitchen to pack four pizzas, hot, for delivery, he slipped and the boxes went flying. After a few choice words, he appeared in the dining room and doled out the damaged goods.

Although there are subs and salads, spaghetti and baked pastas on the menu, it's hard to venture beyond pizza. And there's not much need for the stack of napkins on the table: These pies are pretty grease-free.

The signature pie, *pizza bianco* is simple: fresh spinach, roasted sweet peppers sauteed in olive oil and what could be a threatening amount of fresh garlic, with a decent proportion of ricotta, Parmesan and mozzarella cheeses just to bind, not smother, the goods. Gloppy it's not.

The dish owes half its success to the crust: crisp, chewy and, if you order it Neapolitan-style, nearly matzo-thin. It's ideal for eating one-handed.

Pizzas come in three sizes (14-, 16- and 18-inch), either thin Neapolitan or thick Sicilian. You can order any combination of the 18 toppings. When you order a slice, they bake a single individual slice for you; it takes about two minutes (a whole pie, the equivalent of eight slices, takes nine).

Of the pastas, I found an order of ziti with sausage soupy and short on flavor when I ordered it at the Encino location. It was better reheated the next day. A regular serving can really serve two.

The chopped spinach salad is reminiscent of the



## WHERE TO GO

Pizza Connection  
7137 Winnetka Ave.,  
Canoga Park, (818) 348-5900;  
15928 Ventura Blvd.,  
Encino, (818) 907-9100;  
20926 Lassen St.,  
Chatsworth, (818) 349-6500.

All locations open 11 a.m.-10 p.m.  
Sunday-Thursday; 11 a.m.-11 p.m. Friday  
and Saturday. No alcohol.

All major credit cards accepted. Takeout  
available. Delivery, based on location,  
starts at \$1 within three-mile radius.  
Dinner for two, food only, \$22.

## WHAT TO ORDER

*Pizza bianco*, chopped spinach salad.



Photos by LAWRENCE K. HO / Los Angeles Times

That's D'Amore, above, whipping out a *pizza bianco*. Left, a Sicilian pepperoni pizza.

giant "garbage" salads served in some restaurants (the family size serves four; the regular, two), but the quality of the ingredients—tomatoes, ripe olives, onions, garbanzos—raises its status. It has so many moist ingredients it helps to ask for the vinaigrette on the side (you won't need much). Garlic bread comes with entrees and salads; it's just squares of lackluster focaccia.

Submarine sandwiches (ranging from 8 inches to 6

feet) have filling options that read like a deli sampler of cold cuts, turkey, tuna and roast beef. The meatball sandwich, a hefty serving of beef, mozzarella and tomato sauce, deserves more attention during its stay in the microwave. A blast of high heat turned the roll into a wet, gummy handful.

Although the menu is the same at all locations, I prefer Canoga Park, where the action—mainly Joe—never fails to make its presence felt.