

food & wine

EAT, DRINK, & BE MERRY

THE REVIEW: EVO Pizzeria

Artisanal style and a Slow Food spirit guide the hands that craft unique flatbread pizzas and fresh local Italian food at EVO, a local pizzeria near vibrant Park Circle in North Charleston. Co-owners Matt McIntosh and Ricky Hacker are the creators of this "extra virgin oven," where panini, calzone, and pizzas baked with wood-fired heat are so good they'll leave you speechless with fervor for the next bite.

Faithful fixtures at area farmers markets for years prior to settling into their permanent digs, these entrepreneurs have created a quintessential neighborhood gathering place where food and atmosphere are equally magnetic. Lively chatter among friends and families is as much a part of EVO's charm as the fare. Chancing an

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Hog Wild: *The Pork Infected pizza with house-made sweet sausage, maple-smoked bacon, pepperoni, mozzarella, and red sauce*

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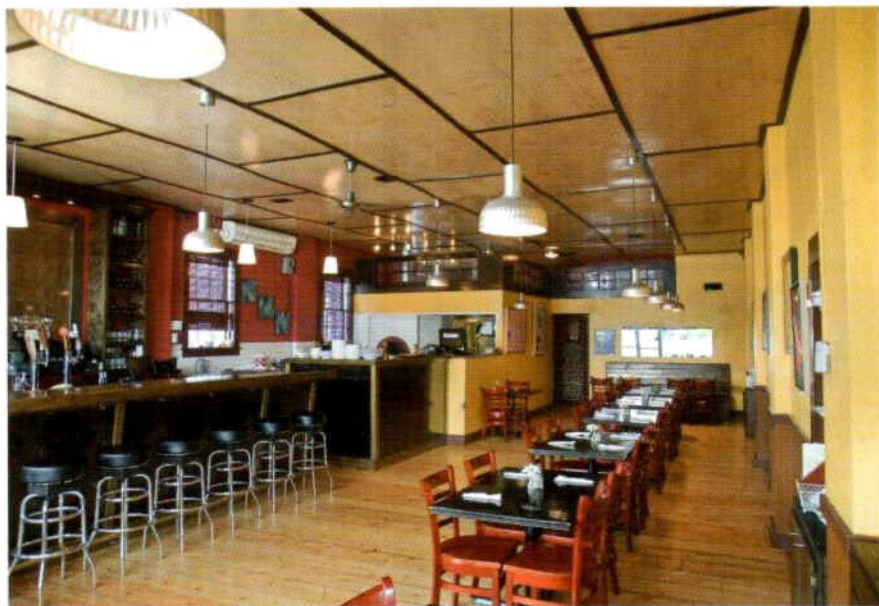
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impromptu early dinner on a recent rainy weekday evening, we were unexpectedly delighted to be greeted by several groups of friends who, like us, were drawn by the pizza, extensive beverage list, and fresh ingredients largely procured from local farms.

The regular menu includes a house-made focaccia and olive sampler as a starter, as well as soups, salads, panini, and a short but quite satisfactory list of pizzas. Having now tried them all, I'm thankful that the list of options is limited, as I can honestly say I could not declare a favorite. Daily specials add to the selection and during our visit included house-made malbec sausage with arugula; eggplant and tomato soup; and pizza loaded with roasted garlic, arugula, and speck.

From the first to last ethereal spoonful, the silken eggplant and tomato soup seemed impossibly fresh, gathering the pure essence of John's Island eggplant and tomato purée with a drizzle of extra virgin olive oil and shaved Parmigiano-Reggiano. Kurios Farms bibb lettuce salad was simply dressed in white



Panini, calzone, and pizzas baked with wood-fired heat are so good they'll leave you speechless.

wine vinaigrette and refreshed with slender radish slices and chives. From prior experience, we could attest to the quality of the panini and calzone, so on this evening we went directly to the heart of the house with a sampler of pizzas, beginning with the Margherita pumped up with extra garlic at the suggestion of our server. Fresh house-made mozzarella, Parmigiano-Reggiano, basil, and red sauce anointed the lightest, perfectly fired flatbread crust that disappeared almost as soon as it hit the table. The more delicate Pistachio Pesto pizza delivered emerald basil pesto, more fresh mozzarella and parm, goat cheese, and crème fraîche with a sprinkle of sea salt. And finally, the grand denouement and a house specialty: the Pork Trifecta pizza arrived in all its glory with house-made sweet sausage, maple-smoked bacon, pepperoni, mozzarella, and red sauce, evoking exclamations of pleasure that almost overcame the iron will of the lone vegetarian in our midst.

Dessert was a continuing discovery of intricate flavors encased in extraordinary chocolates made by staff artisan John Battles, whose sampler included star anise and sweet

peppercorn dark chocolate; sea salt and caramel dark chocolate (a personal favorite); lemon and sweet basil white chocolate; and white truffle butter and smoked sea salt dark chocolate. These delicacies are must-haves, even if you takeaway for later enjoyment or share the wealth and pair with other desserts such as the creamy panna cotta with raspberry coulis.

Among its many charms, EVO's pleasant bar and artfully conceived beverage list featuring high-gravity beers and compatible wines is reason enough to visit. Thursday night jazz, outdoor café seating, and the cozy aroma from the wood oven enhance dining and entertainment options. —*Patricia Agnew*



Matt McIntosh and Ricky Hacker started EVO as a mobile pizza oven at local farmers markets but settled in their Park Circle location last year.

EVO WOOD-FIRED PIZZA

1075 E. Montague Ave., North Charleston (near Park Circle), (843) 225-1796, www.evopizza.com. Tuesday-Friday: lunch 11 a.m.-2:30 p.m.; dinner: 5 p.m.-10 p.m. Saturday: 6 p.m.-10 p.m. 12-inch pizza: \$10-\$12