

LOCAL PIZZA MASTER

The PIZZAZZ of Coco Pizzeria

BY JACLYN OLSEN

Coco Pizzeria offers guests an imaginative, vivacious take on the traditional pizzeria experience.

Astoria native **Ciro Verde** is the executive chef and co-owner of **Coco Pizzeria**, a restaurant that recently opened in Sutton. He fell for the charms of the culinary arts at a young age, as a boy of 12 who began to spend his summers in Italy. In the small town of Portici, just outside of Naples, he apprenticed for his uncle, **Ciro Mazza**, who recognized a nascent talent in his adolescent nephew. There, **Ciro** mastered cooking with a wood-burning oven, hence the restaurant's centerpiece — a wood-burning oven that suffuses the room with savory aromas, lending **Coco Pizzeria** a warm and alluring atmosphere, in tandem with the chic décor. It's no wonder guests enjoy a delicious and stylish afternoon or evening.

At 19 years old, **Ciro Verde** had mastered the techniques of his uncle, and so set sight on Manhattan. He found mentorships working as a pizzaiolo with chef **Marco Fregonese** at **Mezzaluna**, a small trattoria that opened in



1984, and with chef **Tom Repetti** at **Petaluma**, an Italian-American grill serving the Upper East Side for over 30 years. Both **Fregonese** and **Repetti** were preeminent chefs of the late 80s and early 90s. In later years, while working for **Le Medri**, **Ciro** met **Pino Luongo**, a renowned New York chef and restaurateur.

In 1995, **Ciro** opened his first restaurant, **Da Giro Ristorante**, on Lexington Avenue. He began to entertain his culinary intuition and imaginative sensibility to create the unique dishes he is known for today, among them his most celebrated dish, the **Focaccia Robiola di Giro** — a dish highlighted by the Food Network, and the house specialty of **Coco Pizzeria**. For a four-year stretch, he ran **Da Giro Trattoria** in Brooklyn. Twenty-odd years later, **Ciro** is reunited with **Pino**. Together, they have opened **Coco Pizzeria** right here in Sutton Place.

Coco Pizzeria inherits the name of **Coco Pazzo**, one of **Pino's** ventures. The word *pazzo* is Italian for crazy; *pizzeria* a portmanteau of *pazzo* and *pizzeria*, speaking to the restaurant's vibrancy. Rather than the grab-and-go style typical of New York pizzerias, at **Coco Pizzeria**, guests are greeted with thoughtful layout: In the front sits the "bubbles and oysters" bar that offers guests an assorted selection of fresh shellfish as well as an ample wine menu; in the center, the aforementioned pizza oven.

Coco Pizzeria offers over a dozen restaurant-original, artisanal thin-crust pizzas. For the gourmands out there, these pizzas are neither Neapolitan nor Roman but original creations, through and through. Each pizza is made with **Pino's** famed pasta sauce. The restaurant's Lunch, Dinner, and All-Day menus evince a cultivated Old World Italian palate, as they are complete with a curated menu of pastas, buzzetti, panozzi, and focaccia.

Coco Pizzeria is a delectable update to well-beloved and time-tested favorites, for a well-beloved community.

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