

Pizzeria Bocce

As a city, Cottonwood, Arizona, doesn't have a lot in common with Naples, Italy, but when it comes to pizza, there's a common denominator that will surprise you — and make you wish you lived in Cottonwood.

KELLY VAUGHN

HERE'S THE THING about Pizzeria Bocce: Even if you walk through the door saying you're only, "eh, kind of hungry,"

you're going to walk out the same door about an hour later, popping a mint and clapping your hands in appreciation of

the meal you just devoured (with gusto).

That's because chef-owner Michelle Jurisin is certified in the art of pizza-making by the Associazione Verace Pizza Napoletana, the official overseer of Neapolitan-style pizza. The designation is significant, in that it means Jurisin's pies live up to the standards of dough-slingers in Naples, Italy, the birthplace of what I like to call "the food of the gods (and goddesses)."

Among those standards: A high-protein flour must be used in the dough, which has to be kneaded by hand (or with a low-speed mixer) and no more than 3 millimeters thick once it rises. The pizza must also bake for no more than 90 seconds in a wood-burning oven heated to 905 degrees.

The result — at least at Bocce, a stunning, tile-walled space with an expansive bar and outdoor patio — is a plate full of decadence.

A traditional Margherita pizza is the foundation of the pie menu, along with the Americano (it adds pepperoni). From there, you can build your own pizza or take advantage of one of the 10 other pre-conceived beauties on the menu.

After a long-haul hike in nearby Sycamore Canyon, you might consider the Cire's. House-made Italian sausage and mozzarella meet pepperoni, ricotta, mushrooms and basil to create a gooey masterpiece. It's a perfect counterpart to the House Mista salad — think: organic greens, tomatoes, sunflower seeds, shaved Parmesan and red onions dressed in white balsamic vinaigrette.

If you're of the more diet-conscious breed, there are plenty of other salads on the menu, but I'll implore you to adopt a more devil-may-care attitude as it relates to the Bocce menu. The pizza is worth it, as is the short list of panini sandwiches, which features three selections. And, of course, the dessert menu rivals the main menu, with a banana-and-Nutella pizza worthy of a gold medal — or at least designation by some official-sounding organization.

