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# The way it 'Otto' be

**Congress Street slice shop sticks to the basics**

By LEISCHEN STELTER | November 11, 2009



SIMPLE, ELEGANT Otto Pizza's pies. Photo: MARK JAMES/ENVISION

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People queued up along Congress Street during the First Friday Art Walk last week may have been in town for the art, but they were in line for the pizza. As one of the few late-night eateries downtown, Otto Pizza has caused a buzz in Portland during its four short months in business.

The small 300-square-foot, two-oven shop **OTTO PIZZA** | 576 Congress St, Portland | may only have enough stools to Sun-Thurs 11:30 am-9 pm; Fri-Sat 11:30 am-accommodate three or four people, but 2 am | MC/Visa/Amex/Disc | 207.773.7099 Anthony Allen, owner and sole proprietor of Otto Pizza, says that's exactly what he intended. "I wanted something efficient and small and highly specialized in good pizza," he says.

And what makes his pizza so good? Allen says it's keeping everything simple. Otto's offers Neapolitan style pizza with a blend of Romano, mozzarella, fontina, and asiago cheeses. For sauce, Allen uses Pomodoro Premio Originale — unopened cans of the sauce are prominently displayed along rows of shelving inside.

Every day, beginning at 11:30 am, Otto offers between four and six pizzas for customers to choose from, at \$3 a slice. Combinations range from a traditional margherita with basil and tomato to an increasingly popular bacon, scallion, and mashed potato pie. Coming up with the combinations is largely a communal effort among his employees, but Allen says he's "gotten a lot of different ideas from traveling around the world and trying things that I've seen in other food applications, that you can throw on a pie."

The growing popularity of the slice shop means "we move whatever we put out there," he says. However, to instill confidence in some of his non-traditional combinations, Allen offers a money-back guarantee on every slice. While Otto's focus is on its \$3 slices, they also offer full pizzas starting at \$7.99 for a 12-inch pizza and \$12.99 for a 16-inch. And delivery is available in the immediate arts district.

The pizza might keep people coming back, but the location of the shop was nearly as important. Strategically located across from Empire Dine and Dance and down the street from Port City Music Hall, Otto's has become a popular late-night spot, staying open until 2 am on Friday and Saturday nights. But even so, Allen says that isn't where the majority of the business is coming from. "Late-night isn't quite there yet," he says. "It's good enough to stay open, but the main thrust is definitely the lunch and dinner crowd."

Allen says it took him a long time to find the location on Congress Street. A commercial real-estate broker by profession, Allen says he wanted a place outside the Old Port. "Congress Street didn't have a pizza place and as a main spine of the city, it's centrally located and I knew the slice traffic would be high," he says. "We're not in the Old Port — and I'm delighted not to be there — up here there's more of a subdued artistic crowd, without the trouble they have down in the Old Port."

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