

Interview with Matt of Brick Fire Tavern: Mastering the Art of Making Neapolitan Pizza at Festa Italiana

Welcome to an exciting deep dive into the world of making Neapolitan Pizza with Matt from [Brick Fire Tavern](#). Recently, Matt took on the monumental task of preparing over 800 Neapolitan pizzas at the annual [Festa Italiana](#) in Honolulu, an event that celebrates Italian culture and cuisine. In this interview, Matt shares insights into his pizza-making process, the unique "[Neapolitan slap](#)" dough technique he learned from Enzo Coccia, and the teamwork required to pull off such an impressive feat. Whether you're a pizza enthusiast or just curious about the craft behind authentic Neapolitan pies, this conversation will give you a flavorful glimpse into what it takes to make these iconic pizzas at scale.



Getting Ready for a Long Night of Pizza Making

How many dough balls were you working with for this event?

We started with 820 dough balls, but by the time I was interviewed, we had already gone through 400. So, there's a lot of pizza to be made! It's definitely going to be a long night, but the energy and excitement at **Festa Italiana** keep us going strong.

When did you start, and how long will the event last?

We kicked off around 4 PM, and it was about a quarter to seven when we chatted. So, we were roughly halfway through and still had much to do. The work is continuous, but that's part of the fun when surrounded by great food and a lively crowd.



The Teamwork Behind Making Hundreds of Neapolitan Pizzas

How do you manage to make so many pizzas? It sounds like a massive operation.

Absolutely, you can't do it alone. We have a solid team setup—three of us handle the dough stretching, one person cooks the pizzas, and another manages the expo and cutting. It's a smooth

workflow where everyone knows their role, allowing us to keep the pizzas coming quickly and efficiently.

What types of pizzas were you making at the event?

We focused on some classic favorites: Margherita and pepperoni with soppressata. We dress each pizza carefully before sending it straight into the oven. The goal is to keep the quality consistent, even with the high volume.



The Neapolitan Slap: A Unique Dough Stretching Technique

Can you explain the "Neapolitan slap" technique you mentioned?

Sure! The Neapolitan slap is a dough-stretching method I learned from **Enzo Coccia**. It's all about protecting the crust while stretching the dough. You keep your hands under the crust, pushing the air towards the edges so the crust stays puffy and light.

When you slap the dough, you flatten the center without damaging the outer crust. This technique uses movement: Stretch the dough up your arm, turn it as you go, and always keep your fingers

underneath the crust. It's a skill you develop over time; when you get the hang of it, you almost become a star!



Why is it essential to protect the crust during stretching?

The crust is what gives Neapolitan pizza its signature airy texture. If you poke or press too hard on the crust, it won't rise properly during baking. You'll see the difference in the final product—the crust won't have that beautiful puffiness and softness characteristic of Neapolitan pies.

What ingredients go into your Neapolitan dough?

It's a simple, classic recipe: flour, water, salt, and yeast. The key is hydration. We leave enough moisture in the dough so that steam forms inside the dough when it hits the oven's heat, causing the crust to rise beautifully.

Cooking with the Best: Wood-Fired Ovens and Quality Ingredients

What kind of oven are you using for these pizzas?

We used a Forno Bravo wood-fired oven, which **James Orlando**, a world pizza champion in the making, generously lent to us. This oven is incredible for achieving the high heat and quick cook times essential for authentic Neapolitan pizza.

How does the wood fire affect the pizza?

We're cooking with Kiawe wood, which adds a wonderful aroma and flavor to the pizza. You can smell it in the air, and it really enhances the overall pizza experience. The wood fire reaches the perfect temperature to cook these small 6-inch pizzas quickly, giving them a crisp yet tender crust.



Personal Stories and Connections in the Pizza Community

Tell us about your connection to the Pizza Expo and how it ties into this event.

After Festa Italiana, I headed to the Pizza Expo in Las Vegas. It's a big event where pizza professionals gather to share knowledge and celebrate the craft. I met you, **Albert**, in 2015 at Pizza Talent Expo. We bonded over trying to get coffee and realizing we were both from Hawaii. That's the kind of history and community that makes this industry so special.

What keeps you motivated during such intense pizza-making sessions?

The crowd's energy, the smell of the wood fire, and the joy of sharing authentic Neapolitan pizza keep us going. It's a team effort, and everyone's passion shines through. It's about more than just making food—creating an experience.



Tips for Aspiring Neapolitan Pizza Makers

What advice would you give to someone learning to make Neapolitan pizza?

Focus on protecting the crust during stretching—this is crucial. Use the Neapolitan slap technique or a similar method that keeps the outer ring full of air. Also, keep your dough hydrated so the steam works magic in the oven.

Remember, Neapolitan pizza is simple but requires respect for the ingredients and the process. Flour, water, salt, and yeast are all you need, but the technique and fire make the difference.

Where can people find more information about your work and Brick Fire Tavern?

You can check Brick Fire Tavern's website at brickfiretavern.com to learn more about our pizzas and events. I'm also active in the pizza community and share tips and stories that can help anyone passionate about making Neapolitan Pizza.

Conclusion: The Art and Joy of Making Neapolitan Pizza

Making Neapolitan Pizza is more than just a culinary task—it's an art form, a community, and a celebration of tradition. Matt's experience at **Festa Italiana** highlights how dedication, teamwork, and respect for authentic techniques like the Neapolitan slap can produce hundreds of delicious pizzas that bring joy to a crowd.

Whether you're a professional or a home cook, embracing these principles can elevate your pizza-making game. So next time you're stretching dough, remember to protect that crust, cherish the simple ingredients, and enjoy the process as much as the final slice.

Thanks for joining this interview with Matt of Brick Fire Tavern. Stay tuned for more pizza stories and tutorials at the [Pizza Therapy YouTube Channel](#), and keep the pizza passion alive!

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