



“How You Slice It”

CRAVE PIZZA? HEAD DOWNTOWN.

by Stacey Greenberg

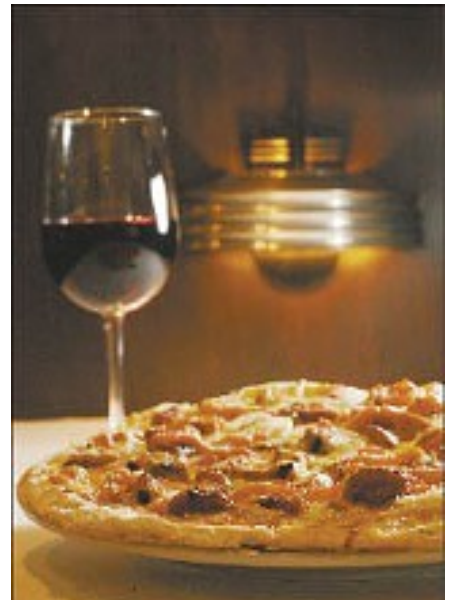
Downtown is distinctive for many reasons -- the river, the art galleries, urban living, and pizza. Yes, pizza. Within a short stretch, there are a number of restaurants offering various styles of pizza that are so tasty and unique, downtowners may never order delivery again.

Alice's Urban Market is on South Front Street, just around the corner from the train station. Andy Grooms, the owner and a former employee of Pizza Hut, introduced pizza to the menu in February after he bought a 700-degree oven. Some of his pizzas are named after popular television characters such as Miranda, Charlotte, and Samantha from *Sex and the City*. (Carrie didn't sell and had to be taken off the menu.) Others he's named for locals, such as businessman Andy Cates. When asked how someone might get a pizza named after them, Grooms quickly replies, "Give me a hundred bucks."

Alice's staff makes the crust daily, and it is really stellar. The crust makes traditional pizzas like the Plain Jane (cheese) and the Andy Cates (pepperoni) shine. However, there are also several unusual pies to choose from, like the Pedro, which is composed of chorizo and crawfish with sautéed onions, roasted red peppers, mozzarella, and pepperjack cheese. Call ahead 15 minutes and pick up a fresh, hot, New York-style pizza at Alice's Monday through Saturday from 4 to 9 p.m.

Across the street from the train station is the Arcade Restaurant. Though most popular as a breakfast spot, the Arcade provides something of a salve for those who are lamenting the closing of Pie in the Sky. The Arcade and Pie in the Sky have an intertwined past, and many of the pizzas the Arcade serves are reminiscent of those that were served at Pie in the Sky. At the Arcade, the Downtowner has garlic, ricotta, tomatoes, pesto, artichoke hearts, onions, and calamata olives, much like the former Moon Pie. However, this reincarnation is much cheesier and saucier than any slice at Pie in the Sky. (The entire crust was covered in sauce rather than swirled.) Keep in mind the Arcade closes at 3 p.m. Saturday through Thursday, so if you get a hankering for one of their pizzas for dinner, you better hope it is a Friday when they stay open until 8 p.m.

Hop on the trolley and go one block north of The Orpheum to the Majestic Grille for their signature flatbread. The Majestic specializes in grand food at a great price, and the Spicy Shrimp flatbread is a steal at \$6. The sauce and the cheese are good but nothing out of the ordinary. What makes this pizza great is the hearty serving of shrimp on top that is smartly combined with roasted onion and oven-dried tomatoes. It is plenty big and can easily be shared with a friend. The flatbread with pulled pork, barbecue sauce, caramelized onions, and mozzarella is also a hit with customers.



Majestic Grille flatbread

Next door to Majestic is Bluefin, which specializes in "edge" cuisine, a style of cooking that is on the cutting-edge and combines the freshest and most exotic ingredients in one dish. Bluefin offers a variety of edgy pizzas. The current favorite is the Spicy Tuna pizza. The crispy crust is drizzled with Japanese Kewpie mayonnaise, which has a sweeter flavor compared to regular mayonnaise, and Thai Sriracha hot sauce. On top is a sprinkling of bite-sized cubes of raw tuna, grape tomatoes, red onion, and nori. The nori, which is shredded and oddly very cheese-like in texture, is the real star of this dish. The Wild Mushroom pizza with pancetta, caramelized onions, smoked gouda, and red wine demi is Bluefin's second most popular pizza. The smoked salmon pizza, featuring capers, red onion, quail egg, and goat cheese, is also worth a try.

Over at the Peabody Place shopping center, Encore offers daily pizza specials, all of which are made with a fresh and crispy crust akin to pita bread. The Braised Short Rib pizza features a tomato and onion fondue sauce, fresh mozzarella, incredibly tender and juicy short ribs that have been braised for 24 hours in Beaujolais, and a fresh spring mix. The end result is more like an open-faced sandwich than a pizza, and it literally melts in your mouth. Other daily specials include a garlic ham pizza and Pizza Margherita.

Finally, just a couple blocks away, in the old Café Samovar spot, is Meditrina, which specializes in Mediterranean fare. The Coca is a Spanish-style pizza made with a yeast-free crust that is a cross between a pastry and a cracker. The toppings vary daily depending on the chef's mood and what ingredients are available. Normally, the sauce is made from pesto, and the topping is fresh-roasted Ripley tomatoes and goat cheese. Other recent toppings have included grilled asparagus, roasted chicken, smoked salmon, and capers. The Coca is a very popular lunch dish and is served with a side salad. It's just enough to make you full but not fade into a food-induced coma.

Alice's Urban Market, 513 S. Front (575-9979)

Arcade Restaurant, 540 S. Main (526-5757)

The Majestic Grille, 145 S. Main (522-8555)

Bluefin -- Edge Cuisine and Sushi Bar,

135 S. Main (528-1010)

Encore Restaurant and Bar, 150 Peabody Place,

Suite #111 (528-1415)

Meditrina, 83 Union (523-9625)