



David Freedenberg

Web Contributor • New York City

June 22, 2006

So much of New York City's flavor comes from its long history as a magnet for Italian immigrants. That thick New York accent is full of Italian inflections, those red and white checked tablecloths in Italian restaurants are iconic, and the famous thin crust New York slice is just an Americanized version of authentic Neapolitan pizza. Indeed, most "Italian" institutions in New York are distinctly Neapolitan. But Neapolitans are not the only Italian immigrants that contributed to this town's culinary heritage. So let us not forget the great gastronomic treasures that steamed into New York harbor along with those other Italian immigrants: Sicilians.

Madonia Brothers Bakery

2348 Arthur Ave, The Bronx • 718-295-5573



photo: David Freedenberg

Arthur Avenue in the Bronx is known by New Yorkers as the real Little Italy. Even though it seems to be mostly Dominicans living in the neighborhood, the Arthur Ave strip is packed even more tightly than Manhattan's Mulberry Street with old-fashioned Italian eateries and specialty food stores. Countless cheese shops, bakeries, and salumerias line both sides of the Avenue, and they all seem to be approaching the century mark in age. The highlight is Madonia Brothers Bakery, a Sicilian pastry

shop that shares a wall with the famous Arthur Avenue Retail Market. Madonia's small sales floor is so packed with fresh cookies, tarts, and biscotti that you might get a contact high just from breathing in the intensely sweet pervasive scent. The cannolis are hand-piped before your eyes by smiling Sicilian counter girls speaking with the old world accent. The shells are perfectly crunchy and flaky, and the ricotta tastes like it came fresh from Sicilian sheep country.

L & B Spumoni Gardens

2725 86th St, Brooklyn • 718-449-6921



photo: David Freedenberg

Virtually every pizza parlor in New York offers a thick "Sicilian" slice along with their featured thin crust slice. But at L & B the tables are turned. The thin slice is an afterthought to L & B's thick square pizza. Their Sicilian slice, always fresh from the oven, may just be this NFT writer's favorite slice in the entire borough of Brooklyn. Located at the geographical edge but spiritual center of Bensonhurst, L & B breaks the New York pizza mold. Their fluffy crusts are layered first with mozzarella, then smothered in tomato sauce, and finally sprinkled with parmesan. Relaxing at a picnic table on the outdoor patio with a steaming hot thick slice and a squeeze cup full of delicate, airy spumoni from the deep freezer is a unique culinary joy that every true New Yorker could appreciate.

Ferdinando's Focacceria

151 Union St, Brooklyn • 718-855-1545



photo: David Freedenberg

In the shadow of the Brooklyn waterfront docks near the end of Union Street at the gateway to Red Hook is a brick-walled focacceria called Ferdinando's. Even though the establishment is now over one hundred years old, the owner still speaks with a thick Sicilian accent as though he

just recently cleared immigration at nearby Ellis Island. A giant map of Sicily along with uniquely Sicilian menu options like nero de seppia make it obvious where Ferdinando's roots lie. Their most delectable treats from the old country are the Sicilian rice balls or arancini that sit alluringly on the counter giving off steam. The fragile balls of lightly fried rice coated in bread crumbs are stuffed with a delicious combination of ground beef, mozzarella, tomato sauce, and peas at its core. They can be ordered in a pint container filled with melted ricotta and tomato sauce, but their pure, hand-held incarnation is the way to go.

Euro Café

Cypress Avenue b/w Himrod & Stanhope, Brooklyn
no phone



photo: David Freedenberg

Few places are left in the city in which people smoke openly at all hours. There are even fewer in which people gamble openly. You can find all that and more at Euro Café on the Brooklyn side of the border with Ridgewood, Queens. But Euro Café isn't really in

New York. Once you've set foot on the sidewalk underneath their awning, you've stepped into a Sicilian embassy. Old men in suits and fedoras smoke cigars and sip some of the best espresso this side of the Mediterranean at the quiet bar up front. The door to the back room is always wide open, and boisterous men can often be seen gambling at green felt card tables as they watch soccer on RAI Uno. Euro Café is not even a decade old, and the Sicilians who run it are relatively recent immigrants. As a result, the cannolis are up to old country standards. You probably shouldn't try to walk into the back room unless you are wearing suspenders and are fluent in Sicilian dialect. But everyone is welcome to sit at the table on the sidewalk and in the front room, even Neapolitans.

Dave Freedenberg is a food writer who moonlights as a yellow cabbie and offers Famous Fat Dave's Five Borough Eating Tour On The Wheels Of Steel. Book a tour or read more of his published food writing, (including an article on Kurdish shawarma in Madrid) at www.famousfatdave.com and read his blog, The Hungry Cabbie, at www.famousfatdave.com/blog.