

SYLVIA RECTOR | WORD OF MOUTH:

New Crust pizza cafes likely to rise quickly

BY SYLVIA RECTOR

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Once in a blue moon, you can walk into a place and know immediately it's a hit in the making, and the new Crust pizza in Rochester Hills shows all the right signs.

Small and locally owned, the stylishly contemporary pizza café and wine bar has an inordinate number of good things going on, from its food and chic interior to its affordable wine program and innovative dessert service. The Rochester Hills shop debuted in mid-March, and a second one is scheduled to open later this summer at Maple and Telegraph in Bloomfield Township.

I wouldn't be surprised to see even more locations because the thin, handmade Neopolitan-style pizzas are terrific. I especially like the ones topped simply with crushed San Marzano tomatoes, fresh Italian-style mozzarella, good olive oil and torn basil, and the white ones, which omit tomato sauce and combine cheeses with flavorful ingredients like pancetta, roasted garlic, spicy sausages, spinach and more.

You can watch them bake in a deck-style oven that's as big as a silo and hot as a rocket engine. Its baking temperatures approach 900 degrees and finish a pizza in about 90 seconds.

The menu also offers appetizers, soups, salads, sandwiches and a couple of pastas.

The wine list, by co-owner Curtis Nordeen, former managing partner of Capital Grille in Troy, is designed to offer high-quality affordable selections, sold by the bottle, glass and in flights of 2-ounce pours that customers can specify themselves.

Nordeen plans to replace about half the 35 labels every six weeks to keep things interesting.

You can't help but love the dessert concept: From a rotating list of about 20 items, five choices are offered nightly, presented in miniature glass tumblers for \$1.75 each.

There's nothing small about their flavor. On Friday night, the choices included sweet-tart key lime pie with graham cracker crust and whipped cream, a decadently adult chocolate mousse, Boston cream pie and carrot cake with cream-cheese icing.

Designer John Abela of Christopher Enright Architects in Birmingham designed the interior -- a cool, young, urban-chic space done in oranges, browns, grays and black with strong horizontal and vertical lines for a clean, modern look.

Nordeen's co-owner is businessman Jon Sherer; both men are from Birmingham.

Crust, at 2595 Rochester Road, Rochester Hills, is open 11:30 a.m.-10 p.m. Monday-Thursday, 11:30 a.m.-11 p.m. Friday-Saturday and noon-10 p.m. Sunday. 248-844-8899.

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