

Jon Pulker (Primo Pizzaiolo)



Pizzeria Prima Strada, 105-230 Cook St., 250-590-8595

The recent discovery of **Pizzeria Prima Strada** in the Cook Street Village brought back some fond memories. My mother grew up in Montreal in a neighbourhood that included many first-generation Italian families. They shared their homes, their food and their culture with anyone with an appetite. She would make pizza the way the Montreal Italian families used to make it—by preparing dough using a century-old recipe, adding leftover tomato sauce from spaghetti marinara, baking in one very, hot, wood-fired oven (500°F). Result—a simple Napoli pizza!

Born and raised in the San Francisco bay area, Cristen Dallas met up with her future husband, Geoffrey, in the early '90s while he worked in software development. When Geoffrey and Cristen arrived in Victoria to raise their children, their first discovery was the lack of traditional Italian pizza. Their mutual passion for regional culture and food would eventually coalesce, and the Prima Strada concept was born. Their desire for an authentic pizza experience inspired them to do advanced research at home. They discovered three key things to great pizza: a really hot oven, a naturally leavened starter in the dough and minimal toppings.

The Prima Strada pizza is baked in a wood-fired oven at 600°F. The pies go in one or two at a time and come out in under three minutes. From the *pizzaiolo* (internationally certified pizza chef) to the professionally trained barista, Prima Strada does not miss one detail in delivering a delicious product.

On our first visit to Prima Strada, we tried the Salsiccia Piccanta: fennel sausage, tomato, mozzarella and roasted bell pepper. The quality of this pizza experience rests within the simplicity of the toppings—a quartet of locally sourced ingredients that deliver clean flavours without the distraction of a chewy or thick crust.

On subsequent visits we ordered the Funghi pizza, little more than mushrooms, roasted onions, thyme and a remarkable mozzarella. We started with the salad special—greens, marinated cherry tomatoes and mozzarella. Paired with a local beer, a Pilsner from the Vancouver Island brewery, Prima Strada pizza is not only a feast for the palate; the space itself serves up a constantly changing visual ballet. Sightlines afford a clear view of the traditional oven and the pizzaiolo as they prepare, bake and deliver their hot product to eager patrons. We closed our evening with espresso and a single scoop of gelato. Memories are made of this! —*Colin Newell*