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Pizza Presentation

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When it comes to tableside pizza presentation, it's easy to leave it and forget it. But serving pizza is an opportunity to add drama and a hands-on personal touch to the dining experience. Presentation styles and pizza stands vary widely: from the typical C-shaped riser, to the chrome pedestal, to double-decker stands, to custom built pieces of functional art. Some pizzerias utilize what's on hand, such as repurposing large tomato cans as risers or using wooden pizza peels. Others serve the pizzas directly on or beside the table.

Typical pizza stands are a minimal cost, running \$3 to \$7 for a standard tray stand. Others, such as the chrome pedestal, run around \$10 to \$35 and offer a classic solution with retro flair. Multi level wire and wrought iron stands maximize table space and range from \$13 to \$45 and can stack two to three pizzas. Any higher than that and the stand is best used behind the counter

for display. The pay off in table space is worth the investment. But for those seeking unique solutions, many pizzerias have found stylish solutions.

The provoking stands at Regents Pizzeria in La Jolla, California, are a prime example of how a utilitarian object can set your restaurant apart. Made of repurposed and recycled industrial scrap, the stands add wit and whimsy to the pizza presentation. Commissioned from the owner's neighbor, Regents Pizzeria has seven stands, each unique from the others.

"Whenever we bring out a full pizza, they make a great conversation piece," says employee Rachel Torus. "He also made our tables and sconces; people think it's really cool that we recycle." Custom stands may not be the most cost-effective solution. But the investment in these conversational objects makes a big impression on customers and ties the restaurant to the community. The "art" pieces open lines of communication with guests and give the pizzeria an innately strong personality.



One of the most varied arsenals of pizza stands can be found at Tony's Pizza Napoletana in San Francisco. Tony Gemignani serves nine regional styles of pizza and has nearly as many ways to serve them. The wood-fired napoletana pizza is presented on beautiful painted ceramic pedestals. His Detroit-style pie is served in blue steel pans directly from Detroit. But the most striking presentation is his three-foot long Pizza romana. Served on a wide wood peel, the pizza takes center stage when placed upon two raised wire racks. Besides offering tailored presentations for each style of pizza, the array of heights, sizes and colors create a fanciful eatable landscape. Each pizza evokes a sense of place and honors the way in which it is "supposed to be served."

The first slice is the deepest, especially when that slice is into a deep-dish or stuffed crust pizza. But other menu items, such as calzones, are best brought to the table intact. They can be served with a serrated blade or rolling slicer. An operator should determine if the server should slice and serve the pizza for guests. This usually depends on how messy the process is. In San Francisco, Neapolitan-style pizzeria Zero Zero serves its pies on a custom stand that holds three tiers of white ceramic plates. A small nub sticks out, holding a chic little rolling slicer. When they serve their ripieno—a folded, calzone-like pizza—the wait staff carves the football-shaped pocket tableside but lets customers select their own pieces. By leaving the slicer attached to the stand, the table is uncluttered and at the end of the meal customers can split that last piece of pizza evenly.

Sometimes, serving the pizza yourself is part of the fun. At Happy Joe's Pizza and Ice Cream in St. Louis, manager Tony Arnzen says: "We serve the pizza on a tray and place it on the riser on the table, but we don't serve the first slice."

The popular taco pizza elicits smiles as customers balance the topping-heavy slices on a spatula from pan to plate. Each self-served slice reveals a little bit more of the logo-printed pan. But this doesn't mean the staff ends its interaction after the pizza arrives. "I encourage all employees to say 'hi, how are you' and to

“interact with customers are least three times while here,” says franchisee Rick Simmon. “After the pizza is served, we check back in five minutes” ensuring customers are fully stocked with condiments.

Selecting a slice can be a rather personal experience, but some styles of pizza can bewilder patrons. This is when a server’s intervention is required, sometimes just for safety’s sake. The nearly two-inch wall of pizza at Chicago’s Giordano’s Famous Stuffed Pizza is such an example.

“We serve the first slice. There is a lot of cheese and if you haven’t done it before it can get kind of messy. it shows the customer how to do it,” says Manager Chris Furman, “and it looks nice!” This act of showmanship is a learning experience for the guest and a way for novices to avoid embarrassing mishaps. it shows, through performance, that the guests are being treated to something special.

When looking for pizza stands, there’s no need to limit the search to pizza specific items. When browsing catalogs, take a look at:

- buffet risers
- multi-functional holders
- cake stands

Empty cans are multi functional, plus they flaunt the quality of your ingredients. They can be used to hold:

- silverware
- bread
- crayons

If you’re happy with your existing stands, consider dressing them up with decorative elements:

- logo stickers
- engraving
- quirky toys
- colored tape/ paint

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