



Pizza: A Global History (Edible)

By Carol Helstosky

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Thin crust, Chicago deep-dish or Sicilian; there are countless ways to create the dish called pizza, and the debate over the best way to cook it never ends. Carol Helstosky documents the fascinating history and cultural life of this chameleon-like food in *Pizza*. Originally a food for the poor in eighteenth-century Naples, pizza is a source of national and regional pride in Italy as well as of cultural identity. In the twentieth century, pizza followed Italian immigrants to America, where it became the nation's most popular dish and fuelled the rise of successful fast-food corporations such as Pizza Hut and Domino's. Pizza has been adapted to local cuisines and has become a metaphor for cultural exchanges. From the world's largest pizza, which was 37.4 metres (122 ft 8 in) in diameter, to the most expensive – sprinkled with edible 24-carat gold shavings – pizza is one of the world's best-loved and most adaptable dishes. *Pizza* also features several tasty recipes and a wealth of illustrations. Whether you love sausage and onions on your pizza or just unadorned cheese, *Pizza* will satisfy even the pickiest of readers.

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Editorial Review

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People dining in the finest restaurants on truffle-and-lobster pizza may be surprised to learn that pizza originated as a food for the very poor in Naples as early as the late eighteenth century. It took World War II to make pizza an international dish, soldiers returning from Italy with fond memories of tomato-and-cheese-crowned flatbreads. These novel “pies” began appearing in America’s metropolises, especially in neighborhoods where there were concentrations of Italian immigrants. In American hands, Naples’ bread-based pizza became thinner (New York) and thicker (Chicago). Eventually, pizza lost its moorings almost entirely as it acquired such toppings as pineapple, barbecued chicken, and jalapeños. Within a few decades, pizza conquered even the conservative tastes of school-lunch programs and became the basis for many an entrepreneur’s fortune, thanks to the innovation of home delivery. Helstosky offers practical recipes for making all styles of pizza. --Mark Knoblauch

Review

"The Edible series contains some of the most delicious nuggets of food and drink history ever. Every volume is such a fascinating and succinct read that I had to devour each in just a single sitting. . . . food writing at its best!"

(Ken Hom, chef and author 2008-07-14)

"Books in Reaktion's Edible series are paragons of their type; concise and flavorful, jammed with interesting facts, period photos and just a handful of recipes, in case you want to 'do it yourself.' I recommend these books to foodies and academics alike."

(Robert Sietsema, restaurant critic for the Village Voice)

"A timely retort to gourmandism run amok, the first three titles in this chapbook series aim . . . to illuminate and elevate taken-for-granted staples via concise, discrete histories."

(*Atlantic*)

"It is indeed difficult to overestimate pizza's importance to America or America's importance to pizza, even if today's chain pizzas would make a Neapolitan fume. . . . However, while Pizza Hut and other chains have brought a standardized pie to the world, it was eventually by unstandardizing, Helstosky shows, that chain pizza has flourished globally, taking on the foodways of different countries."

(Nina C. Ayoub *The Chronicle Review*)

"*Pizza* is structured a lucid thesis: the food originated as a poor person's meal but has been culturally reified. Helstosky makes an interesting point regarding the authenticity of a food, pointing out that those who bemoan the commercialization of the pizza ignore its humble origins. This is not say that she promotes or praises Domino's, but she points out the futility of trying to prevent a traditional food from changing. . . . Ultimately, *Pizza* offers a succinct overview of food history, with impressive analytical heft for a book of its size."

(Margot Kaminski *Gastronomica*)

"Whether they're pizza fanatics or pizza deniers, readers are quite likely to find Helstosky's book fascinating. Her research is impressive, she writes clearly, the photographs are captivating, and the approach to delineating world history through a specific food actually works."

(Steve Weinberg *Denver Post*)

About the Author

Carol Helstosky is associate professor of history at the University of Denver. She is also the author of *Garlic and Oil: Politics of Food in Italy* and *Food Culture in the Mediterranean*.

Users Review

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