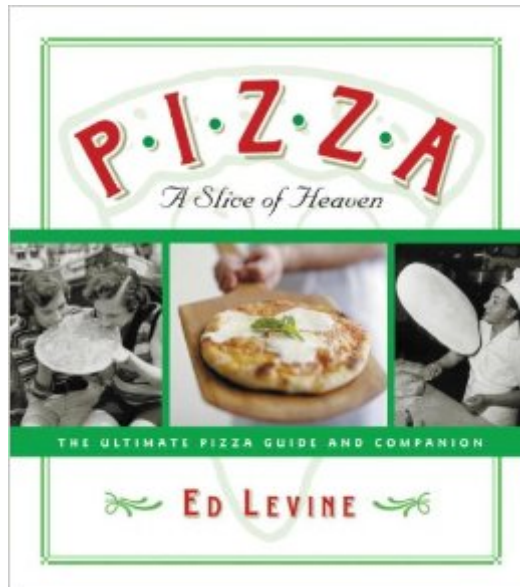


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# Pizza: A Slice Of Heaven: The Ultimate Pizza Guide And Companion



## Synopsis

Celebrates one of our most beloved, ubiquitous, and debate-stirring foods. Pizza is the most popular food in the world, and everywhere in America you can find it. Americans consume 33 billion dollars worth of pizza annually from approximately 63,873 pizzerias. Levine and some of America's best writers and cartoonists set out to answer every cosmic question involving this beloved food: Is Chicago pizza really more of a casserole? What makes New York pizza so good? What and where is the Pizza Belt? Is there such a thing as a good frozen pizza? All these questions and more will be answered by Levine and Calvin Trillin, Ruth Reichl, Roy Blount, Jr., Arthur Schwartz, Mario Batali, Jeffrey Steingarten, and Eric Asimov, among others, who tackle the profound questions and never-ending debates that invariably arise whenever the subject of pizza is brought up in polite company.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

'Pizza, A Slice of Heaven' by New York Times culinary journalist, Ed Levine and a proverbial cast of thousands is a digest of many different opinions about pizza making around the country and around the world. The cover states that the author includes contributions from Nora Ephron, Mario Batali, and Calvin Trillin, but the 'and many others' includes many heavyweights in the world of writing about food in general and pizza in particular, including Jeffrey Steingarten, Ruth Reichl, Robb Walsh, and Peter Reinhart. There have probably been many more books recently on pizza, but the only one really worthy of consideration to my knowledge is Peter Reinhart's recent 'American Pie' which takes a much less democratic and much more analytical and rational and professional

approach to the search for the greatest pizza. It is immensely satisfying that these two very different books came up with the identical conclusion that the very best American pizza is Chris Bianco at Pizzeria Bianco in Phoenix, Arizona. Bianco was easy to pick, as he is the only pizzaiolo to have been awarded a best regional chef award by the James Beard Foundation. For those of us who do not live within easy driving distance of Pizzeria Bianco, all is not lost. Things are especially good for those of us who live in Levine's 'Pizza Corridor' stretching from Boston to Washington, D.C., the landing sites for the great wave of immigrants from southern Italy in the latter half of the 19th century. Particularly good are pizzas available in famous shops in New Haven, Connecticut, New York City, New Jersey, Philadelphia, and, to a lesser extent, in Baltimore and Washington. Levine's book is collected from two or three kinds of articles, depending on how you want to slice them. The most common type of article is the informal survey of pizzeria's in various parts of the country and the world. Many, but not all of these are written by Levine. Others are written by correspondents who report on the state of pizza affairs in lesser pizza hot spots, such as the report from Charlotte by baking teacher Reinhart and the report from Argentina by Tex-Mex expert, Robb Walsh. The non-survey articles can be divided into introductory pieces written by Levine to lay out the land for the survey articles and background articles, many of which are reprints from other authors' collections. The very best thing about the survey articles is that they give knowledgeable ratings for both whole pies and slices from a very large number of famous and almost famous pizzerias. This means that if you are a serious pizza lover, you can travel to many major cities in the United States and have on hand a reference to several good pizzerias, especially in the northeast corridor. The only drawback about these ratings is that they are not all done by the same people. Some ratings appear in articles by contributors such as Nora Ephron who is not a culinary professional. I will grant that she is a gifted amateur in pizza circles, but there is no guarantee she will evaluate things in exactly the same way as Mr. Levine. Thus, it is important to read the narrative evaluations and not go by just the number of icons given to rating the slices or pies. The use of so many different contributors means that there is a fair amount of overlap from one article to the next. Levine edited well enough so that this overlap is not annoying, but it is there none the less. One item which raised my opinion of Mr. Levine's judgment in food matters was his criticism of a Consumer Reports evaluation of frozen pizzas. He not only disagreed with their specific recommendation, but he questioned their overall competence in evaluating food products. I am certain they are honest. I am not certain they pick the right criteria on which to judge things. In addition to the survey of great independent pizzerias around the country, Mr. Levine also evaluates the great pizza chains and frozen pizza products. There are no big surprises here, as Mr. Levine's opinion of almost all the

chains is pretty dismal. While I have probably less than one thousandth of Mr. Levine's experience in evaluating pizza, I have a hunch that pizzas from major chain outlets may show a lot more variability than he may indicate. I am certain that on average, it is simply not as good as the very best you can find, but it may, on average, be as good or better than what you get from an undistinguished local pizzeria. It's the old Howard Johnson rule. It may not be the best, but in unfamiliar cities, you know what to expect from them. Two pizza icons which get a tepid reaction from Mr. Levine are Chicago style deep dish pizza and California pizza. Levine goes so far as to say that deep dish pizza is really a casserole rather than a pizza. His take on Wolfgang Puck and Alice Waters is relatively gentle, but also tends to treat them as a footnote to the great classic Neapolitan / American pizza standard. If you are really interested in a serious discussion of what makes a great pizza, and how to make it yourself, then get Reinhart's 'American Pie'. If you simply enjoy reading about pizza and want to know where the very best can be found, get this book. Just don't follow any advice found in Jeffrey Steingarten's tongue in cheek essay on how to achieve a very hot pizza baking environment.

Most of this book is written as a guide; depending on where you live, you can look up your area to find the best pizza around. Ed Levine ranks pizzas all across the country and in Italy. In general, the best pie is found in the New York City area. The best in the world is Pizzeria Bianco in Phoenix, Arizona - Chris Bianco is originally from the Bronx. I have gone to Totonno's Pizza - rated the best in New York - and it is exceptional. SPECIAL NOTE: Levine is ostracized from Chicago for calling deep dish pizza "a good casserole at best." The negative reviews on this cite are all from disgruntled citizens of Chicago. The beginning of the book contains the history and science of pizza, as well as pizza essays by various writers. Of course, there is also a recipe. The trouble is, to make pizza right, you need a nine-hundred-degree brick oven. The method they have of duplicating this at home is to have an outdoor charcoal pit. Without the pit, you use your own oven. Most ovens only get up to about five-hundred-degrees so the pizza takes a little longer to cook and the crust does not come out perfectly. However, home-made pizza is almost always better than delivery pizza. I tried the recipe in my own oven and it came out pretty good.

Have you ever visited a city on vacation and wanted to know where to find the very best pizza? Well look no further than this well-written and comprehensive guide to America's favorite food...Pizza! Food Writer Ed Levine who has had a lifelong love affair with Pizza provides the info in this outstanding book that comes in the year when Lombardi's in New York celebrates its 100th

anniversary as the first licensed pizzeria. Levine spent over a year touring over 200 pizzerias in 20 states, Canada, and Pizza's native home of Naples, Italy and sampled thousands of slices to provide the necessary ammo for this ambitious book. But not only that, Levine consulted with the food writers in the various cities he visited with many contributing essays on pizza for the book. Levine visited the mom & pop pizzerias as well as the major chains. Levine doesn't try to hid his disdain for the big chains noting that, "It kills me when people say Pizza Hut's great." He has similar dislike for frozen pizza, even the new, gourmet rising crust pizzas don't grab accolades from him. But more than that Levine reveals how passionate people are about good pizza and how people can vividly recall their favorite pizza joints even if they are no longer around. He guesses that perhaps only 1,000 pizzerias out of 63,000 serve something better than mediocre, a sobering thought to those of us who truly love a good pizza. Clearly Levine favors Northeastern part of the country due to their long Italian heritage but Levine has found many good pizzas in the south and west as well such as Pizzeria Bianco in Phoenix. Perhaps Levine's biggest excitement comes not with the the pizzerias that have been around for generations, but with many of the new stores with chefs who adopt old ways such as wood burning stone ovens for the perfect crust. Just a fun and fascinating book and indispensable for any pizza lover.

I'm Swiss-Italian and lived in Milan for 12 years; Now I live in New York. Ed Levine is completely correct about Chicago Deep-dish "pizza". I admit that it can be tasty, but it's not pizza. His cleverly worded comment ("[deep dish pizza is like] a good casserole at best") captures all of that. When it's good, it's like a good casserole (or chicken pot pie, or soup in a bread bowl), but it's certainly not pizza. In response to Kyle Garrett, adding too much cheese is a sure-fire way to ruin a pizza - the crust gets soggy, especially if you compensate by adding more sauce. The crust is the star player in pizza, which is something that he must not have had the pleasure of finding out. It's this kind of "more is better" mentality that results in excellent foreign recipes being butchered in this country.

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