



John Carruthers' Chicago Tavern-Style Pizza

I think the point has been beaten to death by my fellow Chicagoans, but just in case — we just don't eat that much deep dish pizza here. Nothing wrong with it (yes how clever of you to say casserole, you are the first to think of this), but the pizza that powers the day-to-day gatherings, mealtimes, and celebrations of our city is thin, topped to the edge, and more often than not dotted with sausage befitting the former Hog Butcher For the World. Tavern-style pizza, friends. It's our way of life.

Call it Tavern-style pizza (herein the preferred term), or Party Cut, or Chicago Thin Crust, or honestly whatever you want to call it except St. Louis.), but it suffers from a strange problem. As a town known for deep dish, we constantly get the "no, not like that, that's too different." And then with Tavern-style, we get "well no, that's too similar to other pizzas in the Midwest." Well yes, no shit, it would go to reason that the denizens of the region's largest city eat most would influence a region. This pizza style also suffers from Grumpy Old Bastard syndrome from local devotees who whine "we just used to call it pizza," referring back to the days when you needed a working knowledge of micofiche to truly grasp the regional differences of pizza.

But I digress.

You, friend, YOU are going to love this style. The crust is thin but assertive and flavorful. The sauce is long cooked, conducted to just the right note by a symphony of sweet, savory, sour, and salty elements. The cheese is rich and flavorful, but balanced in application. The bake is coaxed to the pivotal seconds of perfection between "just another sec there" and "ah, shit."

And the toppings. The toppings! You can make any kind of pizza you want. I do! Bring it fresh and seasonal with farmer's market ingredients on a white pie. Load the entire might of a South Side deli onto a single pie with ten different plates

DOUGH

365g **high-gluten flour** King Arthur Flour Sir Lancelot or Ardent Mills Kyrol

13g (4 teaspoons) **cornmeal** just use your very cheap Quaker yellow cornmeal, not something medium-grind or fancy

5g (1 1/4 teaspoons) **sugar**

5g (1 teaspoon) **fine** salt

2g (1/2 teaspoon) **SAF instant yeast** red label

185g **ice-cold** (~35°F / 2°C) water

30g **olive oil, plus more to store**

SAUCE

1 tablespoon **unsalted butter**

1 tablespoon **olive oil**

4 **garlic cloves**

85g (3 ounces) **tomato paste**

14 ounces **peeled tomatoes with juice** hell, get the San Marzanos if they're on sale

1 1/2 teaspoons **Marmite**

1 tablespoon **fish sauce** Three Crabs

brand or bust

1 tablespoon **red wine vinegar** plus more to taste after blending

1 ½ teaspoons **sugar**

¾ teaspoon **fine salt** plus more to taste after blending

1 ½ teaspoons **dried basil**

1 ½ teaspoons **dried marjoram**

1 ½ teaspoons **dried oregano** grab Mexican oregano if you can get it

TOPPINGS (PER PIE)

156g (5.5 ounces) **full-fat low-moisture mozzarella, shredded** 1 1/3 cups

57g (2 ounces) **Parmesan, processed fine (1/2 cup), divided**

Optionally, you can replace 42g (1.5 ounces) of the mozzarella with white cheddar

half of a 16-ounce jar of giardiniera, drained and scattered about the pizza in a mockery of the regimental sausage placement I told you about above John recommends either Caruso or Marconi brands

8 ounces **of sausage, arranged in alternating lines like you're building only one color of chessboard squares**

South Side deli onto a single pie with ten different plates spinning in universal harmony. Or just craft a bad pun because it makes you happy. Tavern style has room for everyone. So let's make you one.

1 DOUGH: Add the dry ingredients to the bowl of a food processor fitted with a dough blade and pulse to combine.

2 Clear the sides of the processor bowl with a spatula and pour in the oil and water along the sides.

3 Run the processor (on the dough setting if yours has it) until the dough begins to cohere and run above the blade. Count to 30 (*15 if using a metal blade*), then stop the processor and wait for 20 minutes. (If you're in the middle of dry winter in the Midwest, and the dough won't form up, keep a squeeze bottle of water and give it an extra splash or two while the processor is running to help things along.)

4 Free the dough from the blade and process again, for 40 seconds (*20 if using a dough blade.*)

5 Remove the dough and form into a ball. Divide the dough into two equal balls roughly 295g each and form those into individual balls.

6 Oil the balls lightly and place each into a 32-ounce deli container. Close the lid and label with the date.

7 Ferment the dough in the fridge, at the very least overnight and at the most aspirational 7 to 10 days. Most of my pies average 4 to 5 days of fermentation. (I've kept dough for a month to see what would happen. It PSSSHHH'd like a pop can and baked up into something very tasty and fermentation-forward.)

8 The night before you want to bake, remove the dough containers from the fridge and let them warm to room temperature, 2 to 3 hours. Then roll out the dough to a 14-inch round (*or oval ones that are 16- by 12-inches, which will allow them to fit on standard-width parchment and a rimmed baking sheet*) and dock on both sides with a fork or dough docker. Store the rolled and docked sheets between sheets of nonstick parchment (*if your parchment is narrower but you still want to roll out a 14-inch pie, just double a few pieces up*) and keep in the fridge overnight, uncovered. A pan under the stack will make it easier to move in and out of the fridge. This is called "curing," and it's the difference between a pretty good tavern-style pizza and a fantastic one. If you go past 24 hours of curing, the dough will begin to get brittle and curl. So only cure

if you're looking to bake the next day.

9 SAUCE: Heat the butter and oil and fry the garlic until it just starts to take on color.

10 Add the tomato paste, nestle the garlic in it above the heat, and cook until the paste begins to darken, about 5 minutes.

11 Add the tomatoes and juice and stir.

12 Add the Marmite, fish sauce, vinegar, sugar, and salt, and simmer, stirring frequently, for 40 minutes.

13 Add the basil, marjoram, and oregano and cook another 5 minutes.

14 Blend the sauce with an immersion blender and taste. If you need anything, it's probably more vinegar. Sometimes it's more salt. On occasion, I've added a little honey or agave nectar to round out the sweetness. Really, really, really sweet pizza sauce is a South Side thing. Nothing wrong with that, but I'm on the North Side.

15 If not using immediately, refrigerate and take out of the fridge an hour before using.

16 THE BAKE: You need a steel for this, which is pretty easy these days. I like a 16-inch steel at 3/8-inch thickness, but I also use a 14-inch at the same thickness and a 14-inch at 1/4-inch to good result. Heat it to 550°F (or 500°F is fine if that's your oven max) for an hour before baking.

17 Lightly dust a wooden peel with cornmeal. Not too much, as your cured dough won't be prone to sticking. Turn the dough off of the paper directly onto the peel and dock it again if there's still some moisture.

18 Spread the sauce thin across the pizza to the edges. Add half the Parmesan, then the mozzarella, the sausage, the giardinera, and the other half of the Parmesan.

19 Launch the pizza onto the steel and cook undisturbed for 8 minutes.

20 After 8 minutes, use a metal peel or spatula to rotate the pizza for any uneven cooking and to check the bottom. Sometimes it'll be done if you're topping-light. Sometimes it can take another 1 to 4 minutes. The sausage should have some decent browning, and the cheese should be well baked.

21 Remove from the oven and cool on a rack for 1 to 2 minutes.

22 Move to a pizza cardboard (you also buy these buy the 50

count, right?) and cut with a rocker cutter. I enjoy a 4 x 4 cut. A lot of Chicago places do 3 x 3. My former bartender friend used to call for delivery cut 5 x 5 because he had a lot of loyal regulars. You do you, but I recommend starting with 4 and exploring the space from there.

23 Enjoy? I honestly never know what to put in the final step. I hope you dig it.

The Dough

We use high-gluten flour for this, because we prize stretchability and gluten development. You are more than likely fine using regular 'ol bread flour if you aren't futzing with this enough to run a pizzeria from your alley.

Likewise, I ferment the bastard out of my dough because it increases the stretchability, improves the crispiness, and showcases a yeast-derived fermentation flavor that makes the whole experience better. There isn't a ton of writing out there about this pizza style, but they almost uniformly ask you to avoid extended fermentation. They're wrong.

Also I use a food processor.

The Sauce:

I've always found sauce to be more art than science. I use the same brand of tomatoes 80% of the time, and I still see batch-to-batch variance that makes finishing with salt or (most frequently) acid the most important part. I'm also chasing the sense memories of hundreds of Chicagoland pizzas consumed from my formative years through now, so your experience may vary.

The Toppings

We are one of those few towns where sausage far outstrips pepperoni as the #1 topping. The sausage here is good. And if it's not good, you won't have to walk far to the next pizza place. But the real magic happens when you pair it with bright, spicy giardiniera. Both the sausage and the giardiniera can be mild or hot, and my personal preference is the latter for both.

For the sausage, you need good stuff. I make my own, and I have asked too much of your time already. But find yourself a sausagemaker who respects the garlic AND the fennel and you're golden. For a 14-inch pizza, I add a full 8 ounces of sausage, arranged in alternating lines like you're building only one color of chessboard squares.

I am not a cocktail guy, but I own several cocktail strainers. And

they're all used for giardiniera-draining purposes. You absolutely need to drain the giardiniera or your pizza will be oily and terrible. But fear not — that oil is its own separate currency. Use it as the base of a fantastic mayo, to poach amazing shrimp, or just as a killer finishing oil. For each 14-inch pizza, you'll want half of a 16-ounce jar of giardiniera, drained and scattered about the pizza in a mockery of the regimental sausage placement I told you about above.

The Bake

Here's my favorite part — you can absolutely make a tavern-style pizza as good as the restaurant can. This is a utilitarian style based around what bars could execute with home ovens (or larger versions thereof). You can't claim that for so many styles! But here, you're chasing 100% completion and that's a pretty amazing feeling.