

## Plain Sight: A Jersey Photo Blog

### Una Pizza Napoletana

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Antonino Esposito, a star of the Food Network in Italy and a renowned pizza chef of the style practiced in Naples, gave a demonstration at A Mano in Ridgewood yesterday...

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A Mano means "by hand" in Italian. It's how all the food at A Mano in Ridgewood is made—lasagna, eggplant parmesan, salads, gelato, panini, but most especially the Neapolitan-style (Naples-style) pizza.

A Mano imports most of its pizza ingredients from Naples—whole peeled tomatoes, Caputo "00" flour, most importantly. When it opened two years ago, the owners had Italian craftsmen come in to build traditional igloo-shaped wood-burning pizza ovens from volcanic rock and soil from the Mt. Vesuvius area. The ovens operate at temperatures from 800 to 1,000 degrees. Twelve-inch pizzas—the traditional Neapolitan size—cook in 90 seconds, sometimes less.

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Two weeks ago the owners brought in a celebrated master pizza chef, Antonino Esposito, who owns two respected pizza restaurants in his native Sorrento, to critique and tweak their operation and to give a demonstration to the public of traditional Neapolitan pizza making.

The good news for A Mano is that its own crew of pizzaiuoli (pizza-makers), trained in the 120-year-old Neapolitan style, and its equipment, received high marks from chef Esposito.

The chef began his demonstration by mixing flour, water, a bit of yeast and salt by hand in an aluminum bowl (top picture).

Then he removed the rough-surfaced ball (its skin, properly, having the texture of orange peel) on the marble counter (also imported from Italy) and let it rest under the over-turned bowl for about ten minutes, by which time its surface had turned silky.

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Then he began gently yet firmly (a seeming contradiction, but if you were there you would know what I mean) working the dough (middle picture).

Then he began to stretch the dough into a pie shape, the classic move of every pizza maker, foreign or domestic. One thing they don't do in Naples is toss the dough in the air as they stretch it. A stylistic no-no, Esposito (who speaks only Italian and was translated by A Mano co-owner Fred Mortati) pointed out.

To show the extreme elasticity of well-made pizza dough (and the quality of the imported Caputo flour), Esposito kept going well beyond the 12-inch round until the circle was perhaps three times that size and was so thin it was practically translucent. Mortati helped him hold up the dough. (bottom picture)

**TOMORROW:** Sauce making, baking, and the final product.