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Eat & Run: Otto Pizza's creativity makes eatery stand out

July 30, 2009

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Shawn Patrick Ouellette/Staff Photographer
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Raymond Frchette serves a slice at Otto Pizza on Congress Street in Portland.

If I had thought about it very long, I might have decided that a pizza with mashed potatoes and bacon was not really my idea of pizza.

Thankfully, as with most food-related queries, I did not think. I just ate.

So for \$3, I bought one of the best slices of pizza I've ever had – from the new Otto Pizza on Congress Street, about a block from Congress Square. The place opened in June.

There was no tomato sauce on my slice, and the mashed potato blended perfectly with the cheese, making for a creamy, harmonious taste. The pieces of bacon were real, not bacon bits, and there were also scallions to add zip.

The crust was thin but firm enough so you don't have to fold it to eat it if you don't want to. It was crisp on the outside and chewy on the inside.

Otto is one of those rare places that does not do pizza by the slice as an afterthought.

The day I went, there were four pizzas from which you could choose slices. All were sitting on their oven-baking sheets out in the open. They were not under heat lamps, like at some places.

When I picked my slices, the man behind the counter put them in the oven for a few minutes and gave them to me warm. They were just warm enough and still very flavorful.

Besides the potato-and-bacon combo, I also had a classic Margherita with tomato slices and basil, and a plain cheese slice.

All three were \$3 each, and all had the same great crust. All had superior cheese too. It was not the kind that comes off in slabs or

OTTO PIZZA

WHERE: 576 Congress St., Portland. 773-7099.

HOURS: 11:30 a.m. to 9 p.m., Sunday through Thursday; 11:30 a.m. to 2 a.m., Friday and Saturday.

CHEAPEST GRUB: Pizza slice, \$3.

WAIT: A couple of minutes to warm up the slice.

PARKING: On street.

RATING: ****1/2

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strings when you bite, which is another common peril of pizza by the slice.

The slices were huge. Two filled me up completely. The plain cheese was larger than the paper plate it came on.

Otto Pizza is a tiny storefront place, with only a couple of seats inside. So the focus is really on takeout.

The menu is also small, and focused. Besides pizza by the slice, there are whole pizzas made to order and a house salad (\$4) each day.

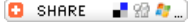
The pizzas are \$7.99 for a 12-inch and \$12.99 for a 16-inch. Toppings are \$1 each on a small and \$1.75 on a large.

The toppings include sweet Italian sausage, caramelized onions, roasted red pepper, fontina cheese, ricotta cheese, Genoa salami, black olives, scallions, mushrooms, pepperoni and others.

Red Zinger lemonade is \$2. Soda and water are \$1.

The Features staff of the Portland Press Herald/Maine Sunday Telegram anonymously samples meals for about \$7.

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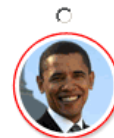
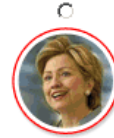
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