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# Adventurous Addition to the Pizza Landscape

## A Review of Osteria Procaccini in Kingston



Aaron Houston for The New York Times

**BUSTLING** Osteria Procaccini emphasizes organic ingredients.

By KARLA COOK

Published: March 2, 2012

OSTERIA PROCACCINI has aspirations. It aims for something beyond the culture of the slice: a pizza topped with clams; salads with beets and arugula or pear and gorgonzola. Though not perfect, it is a success. The restaurant, which opened early last year in Kingston, several miles northeast of Princeton, is a worthy addition to the pizza landscape in central New Jersey.

Tino Procaccini Jr., the chef and owner, spent summers as a child in Molise, a region of Italy south of Rome where his family has relatives; back home in Princeton, he would sneak away from work at his father's landscaping business to join his mother in the kitchen.

"I would do all the fun stuff," he said. "It was a dream of mine to open my place." Mr. Procaccini started two restaurants with his older brother, John, leaving the second one, Sotto, in Princeton, in late 2010 to venture out on his own. (His brother still runs that restaurant, which is now the [Princeton Sports Bar and Grill](#).)

Osteria Procaccini is about simple, sustainable and organic ingredients, local when possible. Mr. Procaccini uses

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Aaron Houston for The New York Times  
Beet salad with goat cheese, walnuts and arugula.

[Martin's Specialty Sausages](#), from Mickleton; [Applegate](#) organic and natural meats, from Bridgewater; and clams from the Jersey Shore. He fills in the gaps at [Albert's Organics](#), a certified organic distributor in Bridgeport. Mozzarella is imported from Italy. And his father grows basil and parsley for him year round in a greenhouse and, in summer, baby arugula and peppers.

The restaurant occupies a structure akin to a railroad car, with a fire-belching terra cotta pizza oven. To the left are a counter and the kitchen; to the right, a walkway and a narrow row of tiny tables set against banquettes. Mr. Procaccini plans to open a second branch in Pennington around mid-April.

The menu is small and laminated. A collection of antipasti and a half-dozen panini are offered, along with a couple of nightly specials — these days Mr. Procaccini's mother is sneaking into his kitchen to make meatballs once a month — but most diners on my two visits ordered pizza and salads.

Those salads are generously portioned. The aforementioned beet salad, with its goat cheese, walnuts and arugula judiciously dressed in a balsamic vinaigrette, was a table favorite, as was the burrata, a fresh ball of creamy mozzarella served atop diced plum tomatoes and dressed with sea salt, oregano, pepper, garlic and olive oil. The contadino, with mixed greens, shaved Parmigiano-Reggiano and prosciutto di Parma, suffered only from the thickness of the ham slices. The Greco, with feta, kalamata olives, plum tomatoes, cucumber and red onion over romaine, was sharp from too much red-wine vinegar.

The Gabriella panini, on ciabatta, was a fetching mix of roasted red peppers, cucumber, greens, feta, red onion and hummus.

As for the pizza, the crust is crisp, thin and almost crackerlike — as long as there is only a whisper's worth of ingredients atop it. But it buckled under the Dora, with tomato sauce, fresh mozzarella, sausage and pepperoni.

The trick is to order the pies well done, sacrificing a smidgen of the crust to black blisters in exchange for structure. Prepared this way, the white clam pizza, once lightly salted, was remarkable: Fresh, sweet seafood played beautifully against olive oil, oregano, parsley and Parmigiano, with the crust adding a slightly complex foil. A special mushroom pie with drizzled white truffle oil was its equal.

The ephemeral margherita, with basil sliced to chiffonade, allowed the simple tomato sauce its rightful starring role. The Napolitana, however, had too much of everything — anchovies, capers, kalamata olives, garlic, Parmigiano.

As for sweets, the house-made Nutella pizza with berries and bananas would do in a pinch, but why bother? There's a pear and gorgonzola salad that you could order instead.

**Osteria Procaccini**

4428 Route 27 North

Kingston

(609) 688-0007

[osteriaprocaccini.com](http://osteriaprocaccini.com)

**WORTH IT**

**THE SPACE** Pleasant atmosphere, but cramped quarters accommodating 20 people at tiny tables, with blasts of cold air when front and back doors are opened (frequently). When weather permits, there is outdoor seating for 32.

**THE CROWD** Noisy and casual, with lots of children. Service has occasional lapses.

**THE BAR** Bring your own wine or beer.



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**THE BILL** Salads, \$4 to \$10. Pizzas, \$10 to \$16. MasterCard, Visa, American Express and Discover accepted.

**WHAT WE LIKED** Beet salad, burrata, Gabriella panini, clam pizza, margherita pizza, mushroom with white truffle oil pizza, sausage and pepperoni pizza.

**IF YOU GO** Open Tuesday through Thursday, 11:30 a.m. to 9 p.m.; Friday and Saturday, 11:30 a.m. to 10 p.m.; Sunday, 4 to 9 p.m. Closed on Mondays. Limited parking on the street with more in a lot behind the building. No reservations accepted.

**RATINGS** Don't Miss, Worth It, O.K., Don't Bother.

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