# Picazzo's Gourmet Pizza & Salads - Tempe, Arizona

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Moody and I met up with Adam and his son for dinner the other night at a Pizza place Moody had spotted and wanted to try out. From the outside, **Picazzo's** looked just live every restaurant in strip-mall sprawl laden Phoenix. Once inside, however, I was pleasantly surprised. The restaurant was nicely decorated and well laid out. For a Wed night around 8pm, the place was doing a brisk business. Almost every table was filled.

I'm pretty tough on pizza places in Phoenix. I find that the majority of them make pizza's that are difficult to distinguish from cardboard, or the assembly line pies that come from the likes of Domino's and Pizza Hut. Knowing from the sign out front that Picazzo's bills itself as a gourmet pizza place was setting me up for disappointment. I fully expected to be handed a menu with 5 or 6 "gourmet" pizzas, followed by all of the standards. I was completely surprised and delighted when I open the menu to almost two full pages of what I would consider true gourmet pizzas. The menu was divided up into categories. In addition to appetizers and salads, the pizzas were split out into Meat - Red Sauces, Meat White and Peanut Sauces, Vegetarian Red Sauces, and Vegetarian White Sauces. In addition, there was a section for create your own pizza with over a dozen sauces and cheeses, and close to three dozen toppings. Picazzo's also features Collazzo Grande, described as "homemade pizza dough stuffed with toppings and baked into a moon shaped grande croissant". This sounds like a calzone to me, but I'll take their word for it.

Besides the food, Picazzo's also has an extensive drink menu and wine list. Moody and I opted for cocktails while Adam stuck with water. I ordered a Lemonade Cooler, made from fresh lemonade, Chambord and Absolut Kurant. It was good, but a little too heavy on the Chambord. Moody went with a Prickly Pear Rita. I had a sip, and thought it was ok, but nowhere near as good as the version at the Roaring Fork.

Deciding on exactly which pizza's to try out was tough as there were more than a few interesting ones. Some of the highlights included Chipotle and Beef (Barbacoa and chipotle peppers), Leaning Tower (alfredo sauce, mozzarella, chevre, fresh spinach, mushrooms, Roma tomatoes, and homemade Italian sausage), and Spicy-Spicy Veggie with Glazed Walnuts (olive oil, fresh and roasted garlic, broccoli, spinach, jalapeños, red chile flakes, red and yellow bell peppers, and candied walnuts). In the end, we decided on three smalls so we could all sample. We chose the Anchovy Lovers (olive oil, fresh garlic, red sauce, parmigiano, anchovy filets, and Roma tomatoes), the Mykonos (hummus, olive oil, fresh garlic, French feta, artichoke hearts, Kalamata olives, Roma tomatoes, and oregano), and the Thai Chicken (Bangkok peanut sauce, mozzarella, chicken, red and yellow bell peppers, green onions, red chile flakes and sesame seeds).

All three pizzas had an excellent crust. The crusts were crisp on bottom, and had just the right amount of chewyness, without having a raw dough taste. The Anchovy Lovers came with a decent amount of anchovy that balanced well with the cheese. My only complaint here is that they kept the anchovy filets whole, while I would have preferred them coarsely chopped, but that's just my personal preference. The Mykonos was interesting. We wondered how hummus would play out on pizza, and to our surprise, it was quite good. There were a few sections of the pizza where the hummus was a little thick, but otherwise, it was very good. The Thai Chicken was my least favorite of the three. I'm very partial to my own version of this pizza, so I find other restaurant versions usually lacking. It wasn't bad by any stretch of the imagination, I just like mine better. Picazzo's was very light on the peanut sauce, which I find is one of the key elements in a good Thai Chicken pizza.

Overall, I was very impressed with Picazzo's and am already thinking of coming back to try out some of the other offerings. They also have a lunch combo (slice and salad) that may be worth checking out.

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