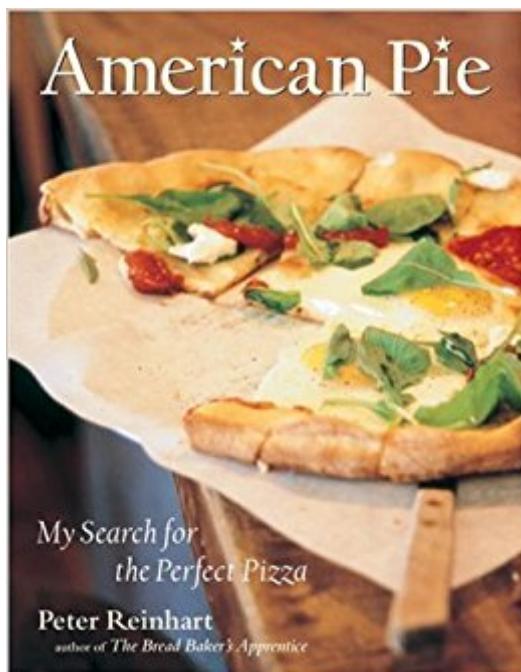


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# American Pie: My Search For The Perfect Pizza



## Synopsis

On the subject of pizza, there is never a shortage of opinions. Allegiances run from the general (Chicago versus New York style, Neapolitan versus Roman) to the particular (Pepe's versus Sally's, Gino's East versus Pizzeria Uno), and new interpretations ever extend the pizza frontier. In *AMERICAN PIE*, master bread baker Peter Reinhart follows the trail from Italy to the States, capturing the stories behind the greatest artisanal pizzas of the Old World and the New. Beginning his journey in Genoa, Reinhart scours the countryside in search of the fabled focaccia col formaggio. He next heads to Rome to sample the famed seven-foot-long pizza al taglio, and then to Naples for the archetypal pizza napoletana. Back in America, the hunt resumes in the unlikely locale of Phoenix, Arizona, where Chris Bianco of Pizzeria Bianco has convinced many that his pie sets the new standard in the country. The pizza mecca of New Haven, grilled pizza in Providence, the deep-dish pies of Chicago, California-style pizza in San Francisco and Los Angeles—“these are just a few of the tasty attractions on Reinhart's epic tour. Returning to the kitchen, Reinhart gives a master class on pizza-making techniques and provides more than 60 recipes for doughs, sauces and toppings, and the pizzas that bring them all together. His insatiable curiosity and gift for storytelling make *AMERICAN PIE* essential reading for those who aspire to make great pizza at home, as well as for anyone who enjoys the thrill of the hunt. A fascinating look into the great pizzas and pizzerias of Italy and America. Peter Reinhart's last book, *THE BREAD BAKER'S APPRENTICE*, was named Cookbook of the Year by both the James Beard Foundation and the International Association of Culinary Professionals. *Reviews* “Peter Reinhart has taken a deep look into pizza, one of the best and simplest of foods, embracing all its variety. He probes American pizza especially, but he has tasted the original in Naples and visited elsewhere in Italy to learn about variations and relatives. He tells vivid stories, and his recipes and techniques are thorough and practical. A splendid book.” Edward Behr, editor, *The Art of Eating* *“el doubt whether anyone else could be as passionate as Peter Reinhart about pizzas or have made such extensive and exciting journeys in pursuing them. He has collected great anecdotes and wonderfully detailed recipes in the course of his intercontinental hunt.”* Alan Davidson, author of *The Oxford Companion to Food* *“We all know that Peter Reinhart is a great baker and teacher, but now that he's fallen in love with pizza, we can see he's also a great tour guide as he takes us to the best pizzerias in Italy and America. Secrets are divulged, expert tips provided, and stories told. Much more than a collection of recipes, this is a book that is as fun to read as it is to bake from.”* Carol Field, author of *The Italian Baker*

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Baking bread is mysterious enough. But creating truly great pizza--the transformation of next to nothing into something extraordinary--is downright alchemical. It is for no small reason that there are distinct words in Italian for those disciples of these mystic arts who bake pizza and focaccia, pizzaiolo and focacciaiolo. Peter Reinhart, he who gave us Brother Juniper's Bread Book and the multi-award winning The Bread Baker's Apprentice, takes the reader of American Pie: My Search for the Perfect Pizza right into the heart of the matter. Reinhart begins his inquiry into pizza with his baseline palate memory for what a great pizza should be. As a teenager he had worked in a pizzeria, Mama's, and instinctively knew this pie to be the best. Returning as an adult years later, he discovered otherwise. Had he changed, or had the pizza changed? Both, it happened, were true. So what is the nature of perfection, and where do you go to find it? In the case of Peter Reinhart, this journey includes travels through Italy and across the US. This is Part One of the book, called The Hunt. It's not the most enlivening travel writing, which would have helped elevate the insights into the nature of great pizza and the people who make it happen. But it's only a third of the entire package. The best is yet to come. In Part Two: The Recipes, Reinhart comes entirely into his own. Here is the master at work. Chapters include "The Family of Doughs", "Sauces and Specialty Toppings," and "The Pizzas." Reinhart gives you the building blocks, no matter what your kitchen, tools, and oven might be like. And then he unfolds the roadmap--pizzas from the strictly classical to the strictly whimsical. Work diligently with American Pie and in time you will be able to call yourself, without hesitation or rising color, pizzaiolo and focacciaiolo. --Schuyler Ingle

A fascinating look into the great pizzas and pizzerias of Italy and America. Includes in-depth pizza-making techniques; more than 40 classic pizza recipes; and an engaging narrative of Reinhart's pizza hunts with such food luminaries as Rick Bayless, Jeffrey Steingarten, and Joanne Weir. Peter Reinhart's last book, *THE BREAD BAKER'S APPRENTICE*, was named Cookbook of the Year by both the James Beard Foundation and the International Association of Culinary Professionals.

It wasn't too long ago that baking bread was a complete mystery to me. I started with the now very popular no-knead technique popularized by Mark Bittman and then began branching out into other types of bread. I now make bread on a weekly basis. But even after becoming our family's bread expert, I still left the pizza-making to my wife, who is by far a much better cook than I. But I knew her pizza technique was lacking (sorry, Honey), and decided, since crust is key, that I needed to put my newly-found bread-making expertise to work. I started with the recipes available in the cook books we own and with some online resources. Once I got rolling, I was hooked. I had been looking to buy *Crust and Crumb* (one of Reinhart's other popular books) and, being bitten by the pizza bug, I knew I had to check out *American Pie*. This book has truly inspired me to create the best pizzas I possibly can at home. In fact, I've begun thinking seriously about even opening a pizzeria. But I digress... If you want a fairly complete compilation of pizza styles available in the US as well as a perspective on Italian pizza, this book is a great addition to any shelf of cookbooks. The wonderful thing about Reinhart's style is that the book is not just a cookbook; rather, it is accompanied by his narrative on the process he went through in discovering great pizza. This book has everything you need to know to make great pizza at home. I have only two knocks against it (and results in the four- instead of five-star rating). The first is that there's not quite enough perspective on pizza-making from the professional pizzaiolo. I would love to know more about working with dough, sauce and toppings beyond 555 degrees. The other is that I think his perspective on sauce tends to be more is more. One of the reasons I am so attracted to pizza-making is because, like great design, less is more. All in all, this book is a good read (not something you usually hear about a cookbook) and a great jumping off point to learn more about making pizza. If you want to make good pizza at home, you'll need only this book.

I found this to be a fairly serviceable treatise on the topic of pizza. The author, a baking instructor, had a longstanding interest in global pizza hunting, and always made it a point to sample the local pies wherever he traveled. Eventually, he got around to putting it all into book form, wherein he

takes the reader on a condensed recap of his far ranging pizza (and focaccia) travels, from Philadelphia, to Texas, to NYC, to New Haven, to Italy, to California, to Chicago, etc., in his quest for perfect pizza. The author then provides the reader with a basic dough recipe covering each of the (as he classifies them) major types of pizza: Napoletana, Roman, Neo-Neapolitan, New York-Style, Pizza Americana, San Francisco Sourdough Style, Grilled Pizza dough, Chicago Deep-Dish, Sardinian, etc. He then goes on to provide some basic tips for sauce, cheese, toppings, and some philosophical guidelines to help achieve balance in a given recipe. I already knew most of what little information he provided about sauce and cheese and toppings - the primary focus in this book is primarily on dough making & handling, followed by baking methods, and there's some very helpful information here for amateur home cooks who've always wanted to learn the basics of home pizza making, either in a pan, atop a pizza stone or with a full fledged hearth insert. I've been making pizza at home for years, and even I learned a few helpful tweaks to my technique ... and I've added a few famous pizza establishments to visit to my life itinerary. My Nits ? I have a few. 1) IMNSHO, dusting a pizza 'peel' with cornmeal before using it to slide a pie into a home oven is just not practical technique for most home cooks. In a home oven, the cornmeal (or flour, or semolina, or whatever you use) scorches, and causes one's kitchen (unless you're fortunate enough to have a powerful exhaust system) to reek or burnt flour. That's a technique intended exclusively for commercial high-volume pizza ovens that are easily and frequently swept out, and where keeping costs low is the golden rule. Try sweeping out a home oven, and you'll not only make a mess of your floor, but probably set your broom ablaze on the electric heating elements or gas burner. PERSONALLY SPEAKING, I've found that a much easier and cleaner technique for home cooks like me to use is to transfer a partial rolled out dough onto parchment paper for its final rollout & toppings, then bake it directly on a well heated pizza stone (7 mins at 550F is just right). Ignore the author's direction to remove the parchment midway through baking - doing so is completely unnecessary, causes your oven to lose 100F+ of precious heat, right when it needs it the most. The crust doesn't come out quite as crispy after the initial baking, but if you want a crispier crust, and more caramelized toppings, it's a simple matter to keep toss the pie back into the oven after a 10 min rest for another 2 mins. Using a first baking that's 2 minutes longer is a mistake, as the cheese invariably separates and exudes too much oil ... do it like the pizza shop and toss it back in the oven to reheat - 2 bakings are better than one long one. 2) I'd have liked to have seen a lot more photos. This book only has a precious few of them, all of them black and white, and all of them of decidedly poor quality and exposure. In fact, the photography is downright inept. 3) I think the author aimed a little low in this book, with regards to heft. He could have, and IMO should have, squeezed more material

into this book. To me, it read too quickly, and when I'd finished it later the same day, I felt it was a bit thinnish ... I wanted more regions covered, more recipes, and a lot more photos (esp competent ones).<sup>4)</sup> I think the author could have included a 'putting it all together' chapter, where he could layout the nuances of how a home cook (i.e., most of the readership) could do a practical in-home pizza party for, say 20+ people ... with nesting rising pans, pre-cut parchment, a cooling rack with screens, mis en place, and how to pre-bake and re-heat in a party settings, and how to store the equipment when not in use. Instead, the author just concludes with his list of dough recipes, and then assortment of topping combos to try. Other than those 4 nits, this book is recommended. Add a point/star if you've always wanted to try making your own pizza from scratch, and this book succeeds in helping you take the plunge, or if the book inspires you to take your existing pizza dough technique to a new level (as it did for me). Basic homemade pizza is fairly easy, and you can always strive incrementally for new levels of perfection.

I have several of Reinhart's books & love them all. This book is full of recipes for different styles of dough that have helped me satisfy all of my family member's taste.

I have tried several of the dough and sauce recipes out of this book since I bought it about a month ago. The recipes work out great and I have made some delicious pizza! However, the memoir part of the book, which is the first half, is very much lacking. Reinhart is a great chef at presenting his recipes but he is awful at writing about his life. He didn't strike me as a person that I would ever want to share a pizza with and I gave up on the memoir part about halfway through. The recipes are delicious and unlike most books, tailored to what you can do with your home oven, rather than requiring an ultra-hot professional oven. The purchase was worth it for the recipes alone.

The part of this book devoted to recipes is money. I've taken my home pizza game to the highest level. Everything in this book to cook is great. My pizza crust went from dry, flavorless, and relatively inconsistent to great. I learned that making bread was more than putting a few things in a bowl and stirring it with a spoon. Peter Reinhart can do no wrong. Little things like resting the dough overnight in the fridge or mixing spices into the cheese just turn everything up to 11. When you make pizza for your friends they'll assume it should have been a 10 dollar night out, when you did it on the cheap without leaving home.

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