

Forno Classico Opens Doors to Pizza Heaven

Giuseppe Crisa Builds Pizza Ovens for Restaurants and Backyards in Goleta Workshop



*Giuseppe Crisa in the Goleta warehouse where his Forno Classico pizza ovens are made by hand.
(December 16 2019) | Credit: Paul Wellman*

By **George Yatchisin**

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"I like food," explains Giuseppe Crisa, founder and owner of the pizza oven company Forno Classico, "and that's how everything happened."

Twelve years ago, and still new to the United States, the Sicilian-born Crisa was living in Summerland and craving a better pizza. So, like his grandfather before him, he decided to build his own oven. "My English was badder than now," he says, joking, "and nobody wanted to hire me, so I had some time on my hands."

He'd moved here from Palermo to be near his brother, who owned a plumbing company, but the two couldn't work together. "We'd fight too much," explained Crisa, throwing his fists about to prove the point. "We're Italian family." So Crisa watched *Three's Company* to learn English and built a brick-dome oven. "Overall, I'm an immigrant," he quipped, "even if I'm good-looking and have a charming accent."



A friend got him a gig cooking for a celebrity Montecito family. “They paid for me to cook like at home,” he said. “I’m not a chef.” That included pizza from his homemade oven, which was a hit. With a push from Renato Moiso of Via Maestra 42, Crisa decided to try to sell an oven. “If this guy with business perception thinks this could work,” he thought, “maybe I should?” Three hours after putting an oven design on eBay, he had his first sale.

Crise lucked into a handshake rental deal for a warehouse on Aero Camino in Goleta — he’s now in his second location there — and got to work. That was 2008, and today Forno Classico makes nearly 60 ovens a year for private homes and restaurants that you’ve eaten at, like The Lark, Lucky Penny, Convivo, S.Y. Kitchen, and, in Los Angeles, Madeo. One of his largest installations is the six-foot-wide Colosso 140 at the SBCC culinary school.

They’re not cheap — the smallest current model is the Cupola 65, which starts at \$3,800 — and Crise admitted that purchasing one of his ovens is “like a swimming pool; you only buy it once.” But he can only report happy customers. “In 10 years, I’ve never got a call, ‘I don’t like your oven,’” said Crise, who is prototyping an even smaller oven called the Piccolino.



What makes a Forno Classico, well, classico is that everything is made by hand. To prove the point during our chat, Crisa holds up his very dirty hands, as I had interrupted his addition of an exterior mosaic to an oven. “Precision is the sum of detail,” he asserted.

That detail includes making the oven gorgeous on the outside while ensuring the hand-cut brick interior creates consistently even heat. “You can only make a good pizza with a homogeneous temperature,” he explained.

There’s no electricity involved. “If the lights go out and the oven doesn’t work, I don’t like that,” said Crisa. Instead, the hybrid gas and/or wood models can fire up to 1500 degrees Fahrenheit, plenty of heat for pizzas that best bake around 800 degrees.

Crisa believes the ovens bring a piece of what he calls “Italianity” to the United States. “I think everybody wants to be Italian,” he explained. “But that’s partially because we like the idea of somebody else’s thing. For instance, I would buy a Harley-Davidson to be more American when I should buy a Ducati.”



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Forno Classico may be more than just ovens, then, but windows into the slower-moving Old World ways. “In Italy, if you go to the market to buy a fish, it still moves,” he said. “That’s what organic is to me.”

For Crisa, these ovens have opened his entire life. “I come from poverty, and now, thanks to Forno Classico, it pays my bills,” he said. “I meet a lot of beautiful people. Once they buy my oven, they become my friends.”