

Critic's Rating: 2 1/2 stars

Dick's Pizza dishes doo-wop with mod pop



[Benny Sieu](#)

An egg arrives sunny-side-up and surrounded by Yukon Gold potato slices with radicchio and rosemary on white sauce.

A parlor with pizzazz

Aug. 19, 2011 | [\(4\) Comments](#)

Dick's Pizza & Pleasure on Milwaukee St. is a pizza restaurant with ultra-sleek lounges for partying.

Or maybe it's ultra-sleek lounges for partying that happen to have a pizza restaurant.

From its email blasts and social media promos, you'd hardly know that Dick's makes pizza; it's mainly

about the DJs and the scene. (That's inevitable, maybe, when you consider that Tom Wackman of the Milwaukee St. clubs Kenadee's and Apartment 720 was involved in the project.)

Have a late dinner there on the weekend, and watch the stream of short skirts and low-cut tops file to the back of the restaurant, where stairs lead to the second- and third-floor bars with a DJ soundtrack.

The lounges are so stylish they might make you gasp. Colors from LED lights wash over the lounges: now blue, now magenta, now green. Those colors seep from the giant windows facing Milwaukee St., announcing "Party over here!"

The staff looks styled as well - the women, anyway, in short black shorts and slightly naughty "I (heart) Dick's" T-shirts, with the apostrophe all but disappearing in the font.

But the restaurant takes its food seriously - it's picky about its ingredients and the way it bakes its excellent pizzas, with crisp crusts that give way to a pillowy chew. Dick's even makes the garnishes for its dozen or so milkshakes, down to the marshmallow and dense fudge on the Happy Camper: vanilla ice cream from Sassy Cow Creamery with chocolate swirl (\$6).

The former Chicago fine-dining chef who designed the menu for the May opening, Daniel Jacobs, has since moved on, but his imprint remains: Use good ingredients and make elements from scratch.

It's not a huge menu (a half-dozen appetizers including bruschetta; four salads; eight specialty pizzas), though there's talk at the restaurant of taking the lineup further. Nor is it a huge restaurant, with just six tables (all high-tops) seating 24, and 16 spots at a bar.

The dining room looks like a modernist-meets-old-school diner in white subway tiles, white marble and white wall coverings, a temple of cool. Color leaps out from Japanese-anime murals and the retro sparkly red vinyl cushioned seats. Round barstools line up to a circular window that lets guests peep at the coal-fired pizza oven, where they can see the pizzaiolo tossing a disc of dough in the air - circle on circle on circle.

But before the pizza, an appetizer.

Dick's bruschetta showed there are better, more delicious toppings than the usual tomato that's a disappointment 10 months out of the year. Crisp toasts topped with pea purée, a dollop of fresh, soft ricotta and garnished with preserved lemon (\$5) nearly shocked with their fresh, bright flavors. Now, as tomatoes are coming into their own, they're featured on the toasts.

The prosciutto wraps (\$7) - simply thin slices of salty prosciutto wrapped around creamy fontina cheese and sautéed, then drizzled with olive oil and balsamic - were so good they nearly drove one companion to commit larceny from another's plate.

And spicy chicken wings (\$7) from free-range birds, crisped from their time in the oven, got a fresh approach through dill sauce.

But the calamari (\$9) - meh. More breading than squid, when it's better the other way around. And the pesto on a caprese salad (\$7) with roasted cherry tomatoes had lost its brightness, leaving the pesto

pointless. A small, focused menu is a wonderful thing, but it does narrow the room for error.

Much better was the chopped salad (\$9). It could be the anti-pizza dinner for one, but the mound is a natural for a table to share before or with the pizza. It's got zing, with matchsticks of spicy soppressata and slices of peperoncini among the mozzarella and radicchio and iceberg lettuces, all lightly dressed with roasted shallot vinaigrette.

Arugula salad (\$7) with shaved fennel, white mushrooms, lemon, oil and shavings of Carr Valley's Marisa - the slightly nutty, cave-aged sheep's milk cheese - has enough peppery bite to cut through some of the rich pizzas here.

Those pizzas are baked in about two minutes in the intense heat of the oven. Some pies will have a charred, burst bubble of dough on its rim; consider it a beauty mark.

Staff at Dick's visited the crazy-popular Pizzeria Mozza in Los Angeles, the brainchild of chef Nancy Silverton, to pick up some pizza-making tips. You'll see some of Mozza's influence in Dick's pizzas, like the brilliant sprinkle of sea salt across the crust that makes it sing.

There are pizzas with restraint, like the classic Margherita (\$11) with just crushed San Marzano tomatoes, fresh mozzarella and whole basil leaves: a simple composition that gives an excellent, delicious crust equal billing.

There are pizzas that go all in on flavors, like the salami (\$13): soppressata in paper-thin sheets across the pie over crushed tomatoes, with melting mozzarella; salty pecorino, and more spice from piquillo and Calabria chiles to spike the flavor.

Pizza with a sunny-side-up egg (\$11) and slices of Yukon Gold potato with radicchio and rosemary on white sauce could make a person wish Dick's were open for breakfast.

Richer yet is the White and Black pizza (\$15), all creaminess from white sauce, ultrasmooth burrata cheese, and easy-melting fontina and aged mozzarella, punctuated with shavings of pungent black truffle.

Basics like spicy house-made sausage on crushed tomatoes (\$13) and mushrooms on white sauce (\$11) also are available by the slice at weekday lunch and weekend late nights.

The pizzas are one of the cheapest meals you'll find on Milwaukee St. - a 12- to 14-inch pie likely will feed two, particularly with a shared appetizer or salad. They're mostly under \$15, unless diners design their own toppings with abandon.

But there's opportunity for excess.

Say you found a \$100 bill on the street. There on the menu, conveniently, is the \$100 pizza to separate you from your cash. It's as rich as the price: white sauce, shavings of Kobe-style beef, mushrooms, burrata, shavings of black truffle and foie gras, though I lost the foie in the toppings shuffle. It comes with a half-bottle of Veuve Cliquot - even with premium ingredients on the pizza, the price demands it.

I can't imagine eating more than one slice; it might be possible, but it's definitely not necessary. Pure richness. This is one pizza that would be easy to share four or even six ways.

Dick's has a brief wine list and beers on tap, but the seasonal specialty cocktails and the milkshakes (with and without liquor) are the drinks to order here. Don't dally too long in ordering that shake; with just a couple of old-style mixers behind the bar, they seemed to take longer to make than the pies did.

The elaborate shakes are the closest Dick's comes to offering dessert, but they're more inspired than desserts at many restaurants. Take the Pan Handler (\$8), concocted with vanilla ice cream, Grand Marnier, and orange granita and candied orange zest, both made in house.

Maybe patrons are showing up at Dick's for the club scene, but it's a scene with great food. Dick's pizza is the pleasure.

DICK'S PIZZA & PLEASURE

730 N. Milwaukee St.

(414) 272-3425

dickspizza.com

**** 1/2** (good to very good)

Food: ** 1/2

Service: ** 1/2

Ambience: ***

Fare: Pizza, milkshakes, salads and appetizers

Atmosphere: Cool, modern diner

Hours: Dining room: 11 a.m.-10 p.m. Monday-Wednesday (first-floor bar open until midnight); 11 a.m.-1 a.m. Thursday-Saturday. Lounge: 10 p.m.-2 a.m. Thursday, 10 p.m.-2:30 a.m. Friday-Saturday. Pizza by the slice 11:30 a.m.-1 p.m. Monday-Friday and 1-3 a.m. Thursday-Saturday.

Prices: Pizzas range about \$15 or less

Parking: On-street; valet \$5 during the day, \$10 at night

Wheelchair access: Entry and restrooms, but all tables are high tops

Payment: MasterCard, Visa,

American Express, Discover

Of special note: Vegetarian and vegan options; warm-weather patio, smoking allowed; takeout; high chairs; private parties; VIP lounge; entertainment Thursday-Saturday; Wi-Fi

Reservations: Not taken

Noise level: Moderate at dinner hours