

Pizza for All Mankind

Pizza Fusion, Orlando

By Alicia Callanan Mandigo

When people bandy about terms like equal rights, equal access and liberty for all, you probably don't think about pizza. But pizza is not an equal opportunity food. It contains cheese, which means no pizza for vegans and the lactose intolerant. It also contains wheat, which means no pizza for the gluten intolerant and those with celiac disease. And if you happen to be a 4-year-old kid, pizza sauce might be too spicy for you. Pizza is not for everyone, unless you're dining at Pizza Fusion.

Pizza Fusion is the newest concept to hit Orlando's

In addition to being able to enjoy a whine-free dinner with the kids, there are lessons to be learned. Part of Pizza Fusion's corporate mission is to be Earth friendly. The foods served are organic and sustainable. The restaurant itself is LEED compliant, meaning that it meets the standards set for high-performance green buildings.

Farmer's Market pizza, a farmer's medley of roasted artichoke hearts, red onion, roasted zucchini and roasted portobello with tomato sauce, mozzarella, provolone and Parmesan



PHOTO BY JOE BROOKS PHOTOGRAPHY

Restaurant Row. Based out of Fort Lauderdale, Pizza Fusion is committed to Earth-friendly, sustainable practices and organic food. In fact, Pizza Fusion is the Orlando area's first certified organic restaurant. OK, so that makes pizza good for the planet, but it also needs to be good for us.

"We're really shifting the paradigm from what is the

kids' most popular food to something that won't clog your arteries as much," says Pizza Fusion franchise co-owner Mark Adelhelm, "but what was most important to us is the pizza has to taste great." It only takes one bite to become a believer. The crust, one of the most important elements in a pizza, is light and thin, and somehow manages to be crusty and chewy at the same time. It doesn't

matter whether you order the original organic white crust or the multigrain; they have the exact same texture and are virtually indistinguishable in flavor, which means Pizza Fusion pizzas start out as a healthier option even before the toppings are added.

Pursuit of a healthier option is exactly what led Mike and Trina Day and Mark and Sharon Adelhelm to bring the Pizza Fusion franchise to Orlando. Friends and neighbors, the Days and the Adhelms had been looking for a potential business partnership when Trina lamented the need to hit fast-food restaurants. "Wouldn't it be great," she mused, "if there was organic pizza?" That question led her to the Pizza Fusion concept. A quick trip to Fort Lauderdale for a pizza taste test closed the deal for them. "I am a pizza lover and I don't like it when a pizza is premade. When I looked at the choices, and I saw that the vegetables were really fresh, I could see that the pizza was specially made for me," says Sharon.

That's part of the beauty of being organic. The toppings are impeccably fresh. Even the sauce — house made, of course — is a fresh sauce, not a cooked sauce. The Farmer's Market pizza is a wonderfully full-flavored pizza owing to its big pieces of portobello mushrooms,

Pear and Gorgonzola Salad, arugula, romaine, pear, Gorgonzola and candied walnuts

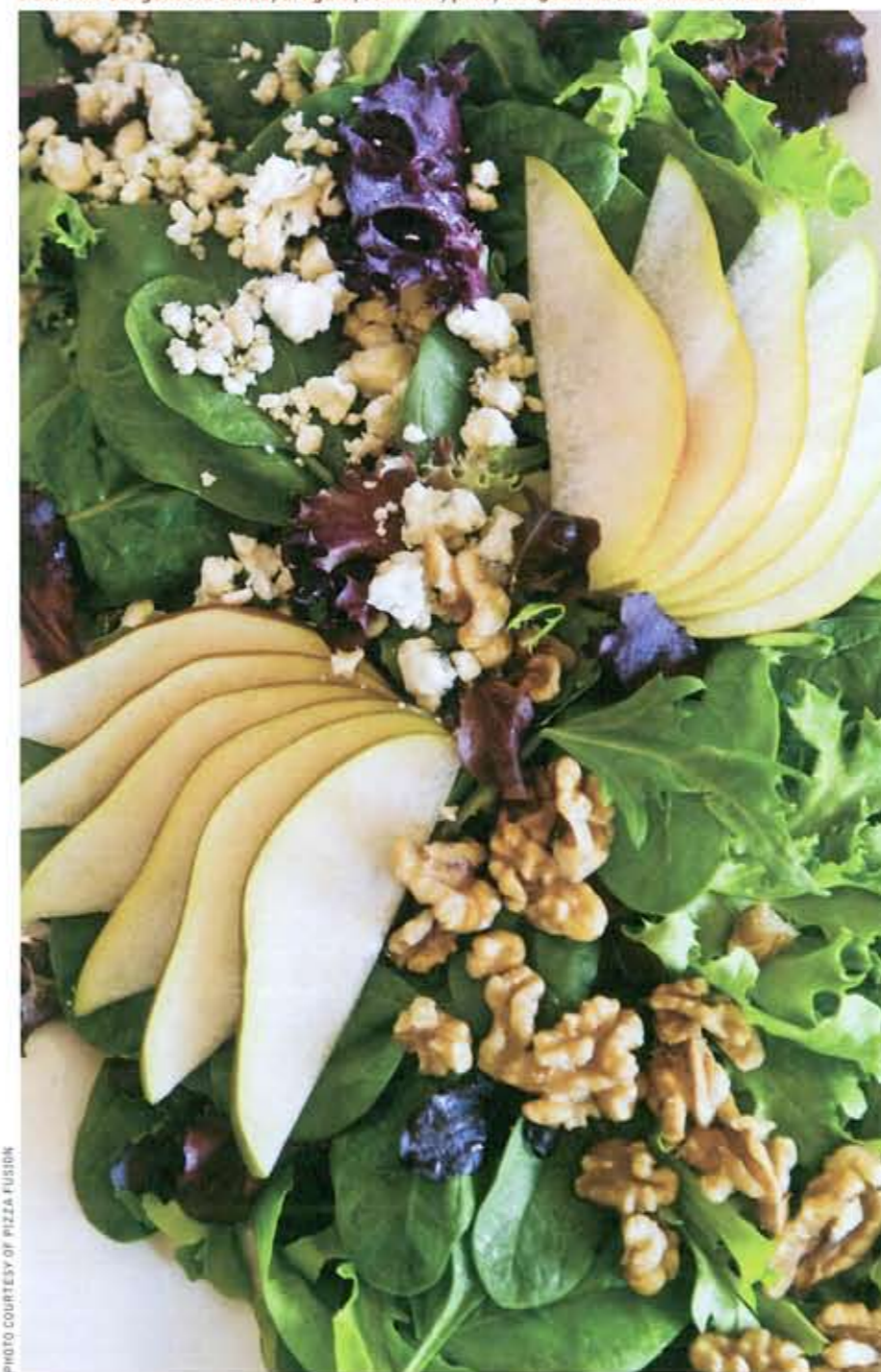


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fresh zucchini, artichoke hearts and red onion. It's a pretty sophisticated blend of flavors in a very nice balance. All of the Pizza Fusion pies are well balanced. The Greek pizza makes great use of the classic ingredients — feta cheese and Kalamata olives — without being overbearing or overly salty. The Sausage and Tri-Colored Peppers is colorful and bright in flavor, while the Philly Steak pizza successfully evokes both the

flavors and the mouth feel of a true Philadelphia cheese steak sandwich.

So, what about all of those pizza-deprived folks who are battling dietary restrictions? Feel free to invite your gluten-intolerant vegan buddy out for a pizza and a beer, because he'll be able to enjoy both. The Very Vegan pizza, topped with crimini mushrooms, roasted garlic, tomato sauce and soy cheese, is simply a great-tasting pizza that

would satisfy any pizza lover, vegan or otherwise. Plus, since there's a gluten-free crust available, and two gluten-free beers on the menu, even a gluten-intolerant vegan can partake in the pizza party.

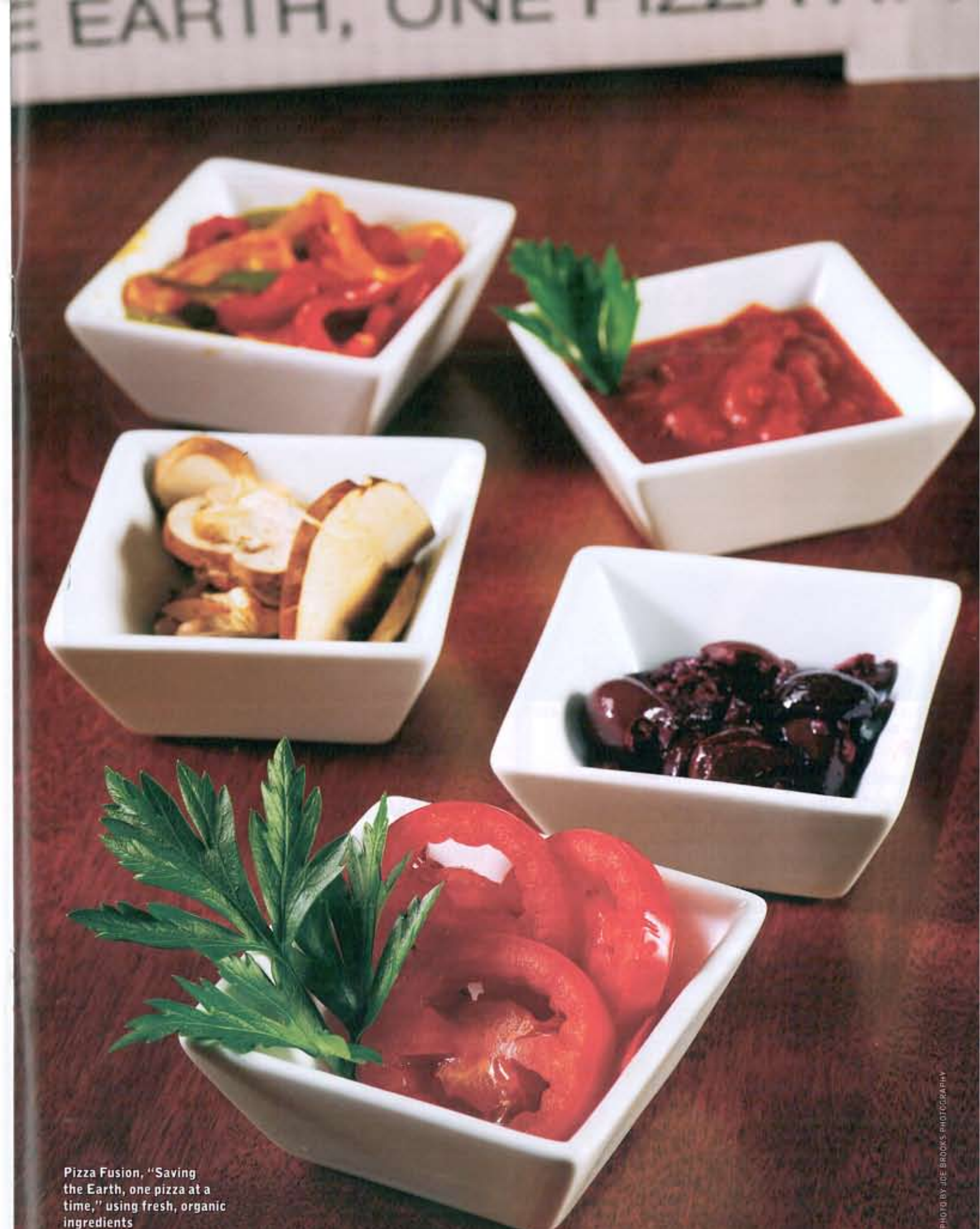
An impressive list of organic beers and wines, along with those gluten-free beers, makes Pizza Fusion's positioning on Sand Lake Drive quite fortuitous. "We are looking to attract some of the international tourist market, along with those visitors looking for specialized diets," says Mike. But as Mark notes, it was also a lucky choice for them personally, as Dr. Phillips is in their neighborhood, and their expectation is for Pizza Fusion to be a comfortable, neighborhood gathering spot.

As for that crowd looking for specialized diets, there are plenty of choices. Sandwiches and fresh salads, such as the Pear and Gorgonzola, are served in ample portions with the same thoughtful balance in flavors that the pizzas exhibit. Arugula and romaine support full slices of pear, salty Gorgonzola and a generous smattering of candied walnuts. If you're looking for something to take the edge off your appetite before ordering, try the Flatbread and Dip Trio. Crisp flatbread brushed with herbed

Portobello Grill, marinated portobello mushrooms, roasted bell peppers, pesto and fresh mozzarella



PHOTO COURTESY OF PIZZA FUSION



Pizza Fusion, "Saving the Earth, one pizza at a time," using fresh, organic ingredients

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Pizza Fusion Orlando: (left-right) Mark Adelhelm and Sharon Adelhelm, owners; Patrick Manney, General Manager; Trina Day and Mike Day, owners

olive oil is served with Pizza Fusion's house-made marinara, garlic olive oil and olive tapenade. While all three dips are good, the tapenade is particularly impressive. It's a smooth blend of black and Kalamata olives, Dijon mustard and a few other key flavorings. The tapenade was even enjoyed by an olive-hating 8-year-old guest.

That may be Pizza Fusion's biggest draw. Lots of savvy, grown-up flavors that are kid friendly, too. As 8-year-old Caelan noted while critiquing her cheese pizza, "It tastes cheesy, but not too oily. It's not big and thick and fat; it's just the right size for me. I think it's wonderful."

But wait, there's more. In addition to being able to enjoy a wine-free dinner with the kids, there are lessons to be learned. Part of Pizza Fusion's corporate mission is to be Earth friendly. The foods served are organic and sustainable. The restaurant itself is LEED compliant, meaning that it meets the standards set for high-performance green buildings.

Pizza Fusion is fast casual during lunch, and full service during dinner. And dinner, if you have kids in tow, frequently means dessert. The Adelhelms' and the Days' initial taste test of Pizza Fusion included dessert, and Sharon in particular was very impressed with the brownies. Two big-wedges stacked one on top of the other arrive at the table comfortably warm, not too dense, but nicely fudgy. Oh, and they're vegan. Animal fat? Who needs it when brownies taste like these? The gelato, a gluten-free dessert option, is creamy and full flavored. It's a great finish to dinner.

So, bring the environmentally sensitive, the vegans, the gluten intolerant, the grandparents, the kids and the beer and wine lovers. Bring everybody. Pizza Fusion is pizza for all mankind.

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