



■ There's nothing classic about Francesco Valentini's smoked salmon, cream cheese and Gorgonzola pizza at Bar 35 except the Roman-style crust. Still, it packs a flavor wallop.

Bar 35

35 N. HOTEL ST. // 537-3535 // MONDAY THROUGH FRIDAY 4 P.M. TO 2 A.M., SATURDAY 6 P.M. TO 2 A.M.

// STREET PARKING (GOOD LUCK), MAJOR CREDIT CARDS // WWW.BAR35HAWAII.COM

Bar 35 has become a hip hang-out—even though the entire clientele, me included, looks awfully straight. It's not a great bar; only George Seabold (he's the bartender who's not one of the young women with tattoos) can mix a reliable cocktail. Still, it's dark and loud, and the only thing to eat is pizza.

Thank heavens, it's great pizza, created by Tuscany-born chef Francesco Valentini. Valentini's crusts are Roman—oblong, served on rectangular wooden paddles. But his pizzas are also Californian, in the sense that Alice Waters of Berkeley's Chez Panisse first started topping pizzas with almost anything she felt like, a trend that was picked up by Wolfgang Puck and then by the two lawyers who started California Pizza Kitchen.

Valentini calls his, "fusion" pizzas, though his "Italian Perdition" (\$12) is reasonably classic: fennel-heavy Italian sausage, anchovies, San Marzano tomato sauce and melted mozzarella—all on a nicely irregular crust, edges burned brown by the brick electric oven. "Good as this is," said my friend, "the crust is the best part."

Among the pizzas nouveau, we contented ourselves with "Smokey Heaven," one of the most interesting pizzas I encountered all month.

Valentini went wild on his other recipes. I was sad to see eliminated from the menu the "Black Sea" pizza, topped with seafood, the crust dyed black with squid ink. "Local people weren't ready for black pizza," says Valentini.

Among the pizzas nouveau, we contented ourselves with "Smokey Heaven" (\$12), with—heresy!—cream cheese. But the cream cheese is saved from insipidity by smoked salmon, red onion and the blue cheesy bite of Gorgonzola. Don't tell the Associazione Verace Pizza Napoletana, but this was one of the most interesting pizzas I encountered all month.

Valentini keeps threatening to open his own pizza place with a wood-burning oven. Please.