

Pizza! A Woman's Job Is Never Done

Letizia Airos (May 02, 2016)



Giorgia Caporuscio may not be an astronaut, but her occupation is fairly uncommon among women. For her, making pizza and teaching people how to make pizza - in America no less - is a mission. This is the story of how a young woman from a small city took a gamble and won big.

She's made the rounds of New York for sometime now, yet other American cities are beginning to recognize the petite, dark-haired young woman whose features show off her deep Italian roots. [Giorgia Caporuscio](#) [2] may not be an astronaut, a famous scholar or a soccer player, but her occupation is still fairly uncommon among women.

The pizzaiola was born in [Terracina](#) [3], a small city between Rome and Naples, and despite its apparent simplicity, her story deserves to be told.

"Hospitality school led me to the restaurant industry," says Giorgia, greeting us with flour-caked hands. "Of course, it was also my father's line of work, and I'd been attracted to this world ever since I was a little girl." Giorgia's father, renowned pizza chef [Roberto Caporuscio](#) [4], had been in New York for many years prior to her arrival. His most famous pizzerias are Kestè on Bleeker Street and Don Antonio on West 51st.

How does a young woman decide to go work in New York before she's turned twenty?

I was 19. At that age, you still don't know what you want. I sort of came on a whim, hoping to learn



English. The first few months were pretty rough. I had no friends. It was just my father and me. But after two years, I told myself, "I'm staying for good."

What happened to make you feel that way? Was there a turning point?

I'm rather shy and my father has always pushed me to break out of my shell. He sent me to Miami to teach people how to make pizza. I knew how to make pizza – I'd learned it from him – but I didn't know how to teach. I pulled my hair out I was so afraid! But it went really well... I'd thought I was so young, but [my students] treated me as their elder. That was when I realized that I could go further here than in Italy, that I could be appreciated for my know-how despite being a woman.

What's the hardest part of your job?

The hardest part is interacting with male pizza chefs. "A woman make pizza?" they say incredulously. Let's just say it's unusual. In fact, I used to stay out of sight when I was getting my start. I wanted people to appreciate the product without knowing a woman had made it. It took a long time to assert myself, not only because I was a woman but because I was also the boss' daughter! It might seem easier, but it's the exact opposite.

What is it you like about making pizza?

It seems very simple. All you need are tomatoes, flour, water, salt and yeast. But it's much more complicated than that. I'm not a cook. I don't know how to cook. But I'm really good at making pizza. It takes passion and perseverance.

Teaching people how to make pizza is now your day job...

Yes. It's hard but a lot of fun. You never know who you're going to work with. I've taught an airplane pilot, chefs who have a lot more experience in the kitchen, and I have to adapt accordingly.

What is it like being a female teacher?

They always regard me skeptically, since I'm twenty-five and a woman. They look at me like I'm a monster. "What is she going to say?" they wonder. I always start out by saying that I will make them do what I did, teach them everything I know, and while they're learning from me, I'll be learning from them. I'll learn how to be a better teacher. My students appreciate that.

Have there been students you've had greater difficulty teaching?

Some men. Partly because to learn how to make pizza you need to feel the dough with your hands, by touch, and that's a big part of my training... My father knows how I teach. Sometimes he worries... especially with students from cultures that have narrower views of women. But I did it! I may be a woman, but I'm a lot like my grandfather—stubborn.

Have you taught any women?

Sure. It's still hard for them, and I get it, but meeting me gives them confidence. Do you remember that film with Sophia Loren where she makes fried pizza? Women have always made pizza; they just didn't leave the house to make it.

How much time does it take to learn how to make pizza well?

My course lasts ten days. The hardest part is using your hands. Once you've learned the 'secrets', it



takes a lot of dedication and persistence to stay in practice and find your own style. The ones who really succeed are very passionate. It's a bit like playing an instrument. You have to be an artist!

You also teach people about the culture surrounding pizza.

I cover a whole unit on the culture and tradition. It's like giving out passports to go to Italy. I teach students about how we think about pizza, the combination of flavors. And I always ask my clients about their backgrounds so I know how I should be teaching them. You mentioned earlier that women have always made pizza, while men were the ones who ran pizzerias. In Italy it's still widely considered a male occupation. Why?

It's a question of mentality. Women stayed at home. That's still often the case. No one expects them to know how to handle the entrepreneurial side of the job. They themselves don't expect to. They think that they'll have to quit as soon as they have a family.

And what does your father think?

We made a bet as to whether family or work would finally win out. I think I could handle working and having a family. I think that in Italy I would have always been seen as someone who should stay home and cook. Fortunately that idea of women doesn't exist in New York. Americans don't look at me like I'm a freak. Three years ago I won the pizza championship here and there were other women who competed. We're slowly gaining ground.

You teach, manage the staff, and make pizza. What do you like best?

Making pizza is the best. I used to a lot more...

How do you get along with your dad's partner, don Antonio Starita, an icon in the Neapolitan pizza industry?

We get along spectacularly because, you know, he's a touchstone in Italian gastronomy. Having him for a teacher was the best. And he had fun teaching me. For me, making pizza is more relaxing than doing yoga or going to the gym. Work is stressful, but making pizza is relaxing.

[Don Antonio](#) [5], your father... You work with another "member of the family," too.

My boyfriend, Raffaele! Between him, my father, and don Antonio, I've been blessed with men! He's a restaurant manager. I met him in America a year ago. While I was in Atlanta my father hired a guy from Formia, a city close to mine. We had some mutual friends. And then we met again in New York, while I was making pizza and he was waiting tables.

And it was "love at first pizza..."

Yes, I taught him how to make pizza. He teases me now. He says he's getting better than me. But it's not true, even if he's on the right track...

What would you say to a girl who wants to get into your line of work?

Don't get discouraged! Be persistent and courageous. It can be hard but it's very satisfying. I hope a lot of women get into this line of work. Here and in Italy. Even in Japan there are a lot of young female pizza chefs nowadays!

And there's a project in the works to break out on your own...

I'd like to open my own place, without my dad, though with his guidance. When I first got started, I would never have imagined myself saying that, but it's true. I don't want anything big. I want to take it step by step. I would like to open a small place in keeping with the Italian tradition, with an Italian feel, yet which is young and speaks to young people.



Your Pizza Montanara earned you a major award. But what's your favorite pizza to make?

[La Kestè](#) [6]. It has tomato sauce, bufala mozzarella, arugula, and shaved Parmigiano-Reggiano. It's a classic, simple but always special.

Simple but special. A little like you!

Best of luck, Giorgia

[Kesté Pizza & Vino](#) [7]

271 Bleecker St, New York, NY 10014

[Don Antonio](#) [8]

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