

## EATING &amp; DRINKING



HUAYI TSAI

**CUTS ABOVE** Traze started as a pop-up in Queens, N.Y. Now these pizzas are available frozen, nationwide.

TASTE DRIVE / FROZEN PIZZA

## Get a Piece of These Pies

No longer a mere meal of last resort, frozen pizza now brings wood-fired flavor and artisanal ingredients home

By GABRIELLA GERSHENSON

**M**ENTION FROZEN pizza and most of us think of the utilitarian discs found in the supermarket freezer case, not wood-fired creations meticulously crafted by top pizzaioli. “If you would have told me [a year ago] I would be doing frozen pizza, I would have told you I have a bridge to sell you,” said Chris Bianco, chef-owner of Pizzeria Bianco in Phoenix, Ariz., credited with some of America’s best pies. But with his restaurants operating at half capacity during the pandemic, Mr. Bianco began supplementing earnings by freezing his celebrated pies and selling them nationally through the delivery site Goldbelly.

He wasn’t the only pizza pro to pivot this way. Frozen pizza has grown beyond the usual grocery-store brands to include intriguing mail-order options. Between establishments like Pizzeria Bianco that ship restaurant-quality pies and new direct-to-consumer brands

ranging in scale from micro to major, the options are diverse and enticing.

The demand was certainly there. According to the market research firm Nielsen, from March through April 2020, supermarket frozen pizza sales jumped 63.2% from the previous year. The appeal to consumers is obvious: Frozen pizza is quick, it’s easy and it can appease even the most finicky palate. When you’re cooking nearly every meal at home, those are all major wins.

In addition to being decidedly delicious, the frozen pizzas recommended below have a few other things in common. All were shipped in insulated packs with dry ice and arrived frozen. All came with clear, simple heating directions that yielded melty cheese and appropriately crisped crusts. While most of the instructions recommend reheating the pizzas either on a baking sheet or directly on the oven rack, a grease-dripping incident smoked out this tester’s kitchen; for pizzas that are crammed with rich toppings, consider sticking with the sheet. Beyond that, these pies are pretty foolproof.



## Meat Lover’s Pizzas

Pizzeria Bianco’s Wood Fired Pizza + Sicilian Pizza four-pack (\$135, including shipping) comes with three thin-crust pizzas plus a rustic rectangular Sicilian pie and lets you choose from the restaurant’s signature combinations—many of them meaty. The Wisegu, crowned with house-smoked mozzarella, fennel sausage and roasted onions, comes with a vial of peppery Puglian olive oil to drizzle on top. The Sonny Boy (shown) marries soppressata and Gaeta olives, while the Sicilian, saturated with olive oil and topped with fontina, comes plain or with gold-standard Ezzo pepperoni. The crisp, airy crusts are crafted from organic flour, and the sauce is made from Mr. Bianco’s own Bianco DiNapoli tomatoes. Vegetarians, do not despair: There are meatless options, too. [goldbelly.com](http://goldbelly.com)



## Straight Outta Italy

Direct-to-consumer pizza peddler Talia di Napoli has shipped frozen pies from Naples, Italy, since February 2020. Founder and CEO Edouard Freda hires certified master pizzaioli to make Neapolitan-style pies by hand, using ingredients such as fine 00 flour, olive oil from Puglia, and tomato sauce and fior di latte mozzarella from Campania. “Our pizza meets all requirements of Neapolitan pizza, from ingredients to preparation,” said Mr. Freda. “But the designating body does not recognize frozen pizza.” The Classico 8 Pack (shown) has four Margherita and four Provolina pizzas, with smoked mozzarella and sliced tomatoes (\$110, including shipping). A very good gluten-free option uses a blend of buckwheat flour, rice flour and gluten-free wheat starch (\$108 for 6, including shipping). [taliadinapoli.com](http://taliadinapoli.com)



## Best of Brooklyn

The restaurant Roberta’s in Bushwick, Brooklyn, has been selling a frozen version of its lauded wood-fired pizzas for more than a decade. The brand combines a purist’s eye for process and ingredients with a chef’s sensibility when it comes to genius flavor combinations. The Baby Sinclair (shown), showered with kale, Calabrian chiles, sliced garlic, cheddar and Parmigiano-Reggiano, is compulsively noshable. Roberta’s other frozen pie, an impeccable Margherita, comes topped with the classic trio of bright tomato sauce, housemade mozzarella and fresh basil. The bubbly sourdough crust is forged in a 900-degree oven before being frozen and packaged. All it takes at home is 5½ minutes at 450 degrees to produce some very fine pizza (10 for \$149, including shipping). [huckberry.com](http://huckberry.com)



## Creative Veggie Pies

In 2015, Natalie DeSabato started Traze as a one-woman pop-up operation in Queens, N.Y., selling square slices of highly original pizzas at local markets and breweries. Last October, she added frozen pizzas to her repertoire. Ms. DeSabato’s 10-by-10-inch vegetarian pies are fun and fully loaded. The signature Falafel pizza (\$14, or \$17 for vegan) has a sesame-dotted crust topped with crumbled fava-bean falafel, halalcart-style white sauce, smoked gouda and extra-sharp cheddar. The Vodka Flambae (shown; \$14) comes smothered in fresh mozzarella and pesto-studded vodka sauce. The Bleu Dream (\$16) features Alfredo sauce thick with artichoke hearts and spinach, plus Parm, mozz and blue cheeses, and a topping of stuffed mushrooms recreated from her Aunt Susan’s recipe. [trazeus.com](http://trazeus.com)

## CUTTING CLASS

## Shoulder Season

Get maximum value from a lamb shoulder by butchering it yourself into multiple cuts for all your springtime fêtes

**S**PRING AND LAMB go hand-in-hand, thanks in part to the holidays that usher in the season. For Passover it’s often braised; a roast is an Easter favorite. Those observing Ramadan, this year April 12–May 12, traditionally fill their tables with whole lamb, stews, roasts and kebabs to mark the end of a month of fasting.

It’s a busy season for halal butchers such as those at Salem’s Market and Grill in Pittsburgh. According to proprietor Abdullah Salem, “There’s nothing else like a young, halal lamb. The flavor is simply fresher.”

Halal means “permissible” in Arabic, and in butchery it describes humanely slaughtered meat that adheres to Islamic dietary law. The animal must be alive, healthy and comfortable before slaughter, and not in the company of other animals. The slaughter is done in one

swift motion with a very sharp knife, by a Muslim hand (not a machine). A blessing is recited and all blood drained from the animal.

When Mr. Salem’s father, who is Libyan, arrived in the U.S. in the late ’70s to pursue studies at the University of Pittsburgh, meat butchered this way was hard to find. So he patronized a kosher butcher, and when he inquired about the specifics of slaughter, he was invited to the slaughterhouse to slaughter a lamb himself. Soon he was visiting once a month, and friends and neighbors were putting in requests. “He was bringing home 12–15 lambs at a time,” Mr. Salem said. “It became a hassle, so he and a friend decided to open their own meat store.” Since its founding in 1983, Salem’s has grown into a bustling butcher, restaurant, caterer and market. Mr. Salem has expanded and modernized the business.

He sources lamb locally, from Pennsylvania, Ohio and West Virginia. In his view, the shoulder is the choicest cut, and within that sub-primal he values the neck loin above all. At right, Mr. Salem demonstrates how to carve out that loin, great for shish kebab. You’ll also get a shoulder to roast, stew or grill; bones for soups and stews; and plenty of trim to grind. —Kathleen Squires

► Find Mr. Salem’s recipe for shish kebabs at [wsj.com/food](http://wsj.com/food).

## HOW TO BUTCHER A LAMB SHOULDER TO ROAST, GRILL AND STEW

**What You’ll Need**  
1 (6–8 pound) bone-in lamb shoulder  
6- to 7-inch boning knife, semi-flexible (Mr. Salem prefers Forschner brand)



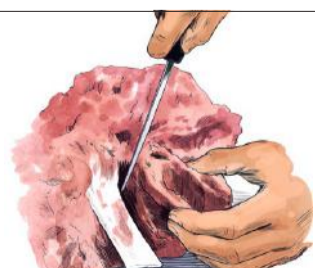
**Step One** Set shoulder rib-side down, with exposed ribs facing you. Find opening between rib plate and meat, and insert knife. Cut meat from bone, peeling shoulder back with opposite hand until rib plate and shoulder separate. Reserve ribs for grinding and soup.



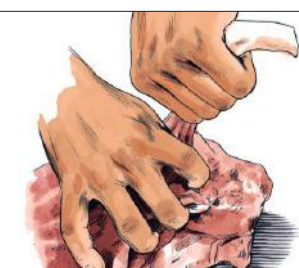
**Step Two** With fat cap down, locate tubelike roll, or neck loin, at end of shoulder, opposite leg bone. Find the natural separation and gently cut it apart, rolling it away with opposite hand. Trim fat, cut into 1-inch cubes and reserve for kebabs.



**Step Three** With shoulder fat cap down, poke to find joint connecting blade and leg bone. Make a small incision to expose blade, then scrape meat away from blade, peeling away with opposite hand. Continue until entire triangular bone is exposed.



**Step Four** Slice down middle of leg bone. Scrape along bone with knife and peel away meat with opposite hand, rotating and making small cuts until entire bone is exposed and attached only at joint.



**Step Five** With your hands, grab leg bone and yank bone and blade from shoulder. Reserve bone and blade for soup. Reserve meat for roasting, grilling or stew.

## PRO TIPS

1. Check that the meat is light pink, not blood red. A proper piece of halal meat should not have any dark blood spots.
2. Keep in mind that butchery is about gently following the bones and the seams, not about hacking, chopping and cutting fast and hard. Always cut as closely to the bone as possible when deboning.