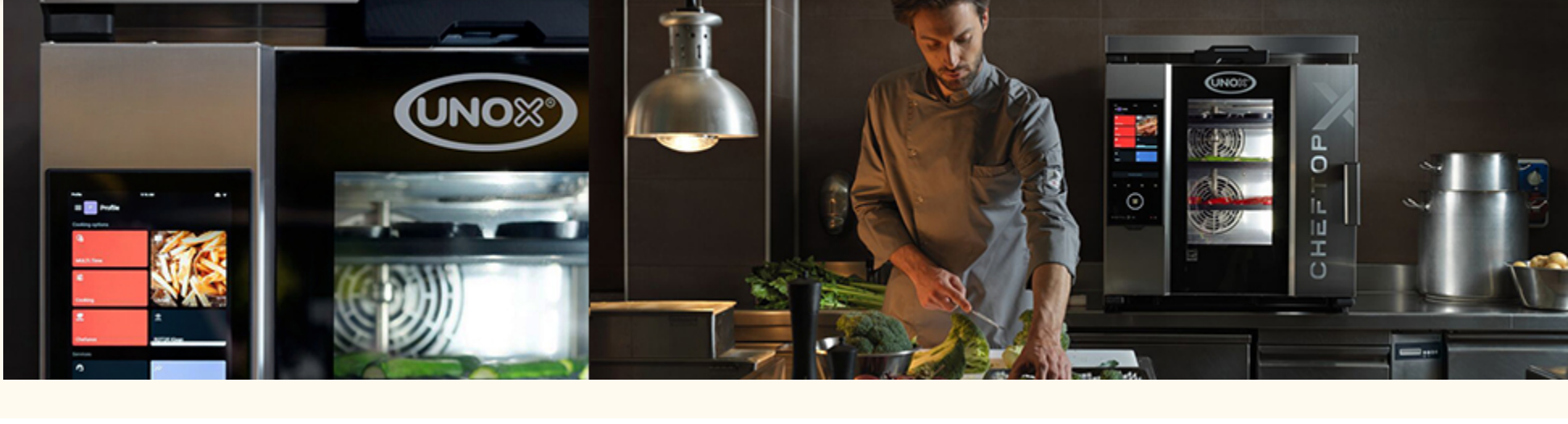




MENU | IN-DEPTH

Meet the tastemakers behind Australia’s continuous strive for better pizza

Food trends come and go, but pizza is a staple. And Australia's pizza chefs continue to strive to create a better pizza. [Getting Prepared Meal Kits](#)

By Maida Pineda March 23 2026 6 min read



Food trends come and go. But as far as Australians are concerned, pizza is a food staple. According to Ibis World, the market size of Pizza Restaurants and Takeaway in Australia in 2024 was US\$4.1Billion. That's a lot of dough!

Despite its popularity, Australia's pizza chefs continue to strive to create a better pizza.

Johnny Di Francesco changed the landscape of the pizza industry opened 400 Gradi in Melbourne in 2008. He introduced Australians to Neopolitan style pizza cooked at 400 degrees for 90 seconds. It is now a pizza chain with multiple awards including best Pizza in the world for Margherita in 2014, the first Australian Pizza Restaurant to be certified by AVPN (Associazione Verace Pizza Napoletana) and the 2024 8th Best pizza chain in the World. Di Francesco, recognized as an AVPN Principal in Australasia, was also named best Pizza Chef in Australia in 2023.

This renowned pizzaiolo recalls how it took a couple of years before people jumped on the trend: “They started to notice that Neopolitan pizza was something completely different to what Australia ever saw. From about 2012, everybody wanted to open up their own Neopolitan pizzerias. Most either came through our business or worked for us wanting to compete in that space.”

He noticed new pizza trends in Australia: “What I’ve seen the last five years is probably a little bit more of a different trend. They call it contemporary pizza or contemporary Neapolitan pizza, which has a very, very, really high crust, or cornicione, as we would call it. And it's very, very high pronounced crust and toppings are probably a little bit more in the center.”

Di Francesco shares, “I’m also starting to see other trends like American style namely New York and Detroit Style pizzas. But what is probably taking off the most is Pinsa Pizza, a Roman style pizza made popular by Gabriele Bonci. It's very light and airy on the inside and crispy on the outside.”

Necessity is truly the mother of invention. In order to survive Melbourne's long lockdowns, 400 Gradi needed to innovate. As a result, they have now expanded their market to 660 Coles stores across Australia and select IGA stores.

Di Francesco says, “You can argue that you're never going to get restaurant quality pizza from a supermarket. But what we've done is we've risen the bar when it comes to pre-made pizza.” Using same techniques they use in the restaurant, he says, “We're still doing the 24-hour fermented dough, all natural ingredients and no preservatives. So, you can eat a pizza, that's sitting in your freezer or in your fridge, knowing it's going to still have those elements behind it.” [Booking A Table At Fine Dining Restaurants](#)

“Wow, that dough!” – Jamie Oliver

Meanwhile in Sydney, Daniel Semrani, the owner and chef at Gigi's Pizzeria in Balmain, Sydney is gaining much attention for his pizza blending Roman and Neapolitan styles.

Over the past decade, Semrani mastered his dough, creating the perfect balance of softness and crunch. He earned his place in 50 Top Pizza Asia-Pacific ranking, taking the 33rd spot in 2023 and 29th spot in 2025.

But perhaps, the greatest accolade comes from Jamie Oliver who raved about it on Instagram, “Just got to try Daniel's pizza. Wow that dough! That crust's so good, so light!”. Oliver points out Semrani's unique 92% hydration dough method and ends his post saying, “It's always good to remind yourself what good pizza tastes like.”

According to Semrani, “The pizza that we're doing at the moment stems of a contemporary Neapolitan pizza, but also with our own twist.” This Sydney chef Semrani is a bit of a rebel when it comes to creating his pizza, “Basically, I look at cooking in a way where you can express your emotions. So, there's never any rules when you come to create pizza toppings on top of the pizza because it's creating an emotion.”

Bold and innovative, Semrani won't think twice putting pineapples on top of his pizza. When it comes to toppings and emotions, Semrani does not hold back. He says, “If I like to use pineapples, I will use it in a beautiful way with Pancetta and caramelised balsamic reduction.” He cleverly calls this creation, “Don't Tell Nonna.”

He continues: “I even make a Korean inspired pizza with a beautiful salami, a kimchi, fior di latte, and a black garlic mayo. I don't stick to the rules so I like to bend the rules. That way the pizza goes to the table and it's expressed my emotion at the table.

Sembrani noticed a few different styles emerging in Australia: “I've seen a lot of Focaccia and a lot of tray pizza. They make the pizza directly on a ceramic tray. Once they're made, they're displayed by the window. That type of pizza is super thin and sort of crunchy.”

Pizza should be eaten fresh and hot

Despite the popularity of takeaway and delivery, Semrani advocates for dining in restaurants and the importance of eating pizza fresh and hot: “What is the science behind the pizza? Once it comes out of the oven, it needs to be eaten directly within the first 10 minutes.

Because what happens is the pizza steams on the plate and create sogginess at the bottom of the plate. So, you can imagine if it goes into a box to take away and to go 20-minute drive back home. What's going to happen to the pizza? It's going steam in the box. It's going to go super soft and soggy.”

Paolo Gatto of Sycily points, “We are the most expensive place in the world for pizza. We're talking about \$26 for Margherita Pizza.” He attributes it to the high cost of running a business: the rent, the labor, ingredients, and taxes in Australia. “So, it has to be worth it given the price. The quality stands up to the price. It delivers exactly.”

With all the innovation happening in Australia, ultimately the consumers are benefiting in having access to superior pizza. Semrani echoes this sentiment, “With the passion for pizza and with people wanting to innovate more, so we are lucky here in Australia.”

The learning never ends with Di Francesco sharing exciting news, “We're in the process of building a professional pizza school, which will probably be the first pizza School in Australia, accredited by a Master Pizza school in Italy.” The school will offer five to ten-day professional courses, with the opportunity to stage in one his restaurants.

Maybe 15 or so years ago, people just thought that pizza was just pizza. The Australian pizza market has evolved much, so have the palates of discerning Australian diners.

Di Francesco and Semrani are judges at the Australian Best Pizza Awards, part of Pizza, Pasta, & Italian Food Show at Food & Hospitality Week 2026. [Getting Prepared Meal Kits](#)

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