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A slice of Canada in Berlin - Pizza shop serves up gourmet 'Canadian-style' pies

ELIANNA LEV - THE CANADIAN PRESS

Posted 3 years ago

BERLIN — Canada has its maple syrup and back bacon and Germany has its sauerkraut and bratwurst. Neither country is particularly known for its pizza.

Yet a popular pizzeria in the south Berlin district of Kreuzberg prides itself on its "Canadian-style" pies.

The pizzas at the Ron Telesky eatery are thin-crust, often with a bizarre mix of toppings. The Cronenberg Crash, for instance — named after the Canadian filmmaker and his 1996 film starring Holly Hunter and James Spader — is a mix of mango, peanuts, cheddar and tandoori tofu. The Flaming Quebec is a medley of creme fraiche sauce, bacon and serrano ham.

Co-owner Ole Schnack, 32, said that while the restaurant has been around for over a year, the idea behind it was first cooked up after the joint's other owner, Sebastian Hunold, 33, lived in Peterborough, Ont., as an exchange student in the early '90s.

DID THINGS DIFFERENTLY

While there, Hunold took up an after-school job at a pizza shop. There he noticed that they did things differently.

The pizzas weren't American-style items with thick dough and lots of cheese.

They also weren't Italian-style, known for simple and traditional ingredients.

"When he came back from Canada, Sebastian told me about this gourmet pizza we don't have here in Europe, especially not Berlin," said Schnack.

"Coming out of the advertising field, I realized there was a product that could have success if it's set up right."

Most of the recipes used at Ron Telesky were lifted from pizza shops Hunold came across during his time in Canada.

Customers are encouraged to add free toppings provided at the counter: Black olives, arugula and the iconic all-Canadian condiment, maple syrup.

The concept of Canadian pizza is proving to be popular amongst Berliners.

The city magazine "Der Tip" named it the third best place to eat lunch in Berlin.

The restaurant attracts a mix of locals, people who work in the area and families.

The majority of customers are German but there is the occasional Canuck who gets excited by the bottled Moosehead and Molson Canadian beer available. (Employees at the Canadian Embassy are also frequent customers, despite being about a 30-minute walk away.)

Schnack makes a point of hiring expats from Canada. It helps if they speak German, but that isn't necessary.

"We like to talk English with our employees or French," he said.

"We had a couple of Americans coming in and asking for a job and we had to tell them we rather take Canadians."

Wendy Bateman, originally of Nanaimo, B.C., worked at the pizzeria in her six months spent in Berlin. She appreciates that there's a place in Berlin that Canadians can identify with.

"I think they nailed it as a Canadian place, but I don't think the pizza has anything to do with being Canadian," she said.

'PIZZA IS JUST PIZZA'

"For me, being a Canadian, pizza is just pizza."

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The decor at the casual, below street-level restaurant is unmistakably Canadiana.

Vintage wallpaper displays a Rockies scene, while a row of skis is used for coat racks.

The intimate setting seats about 15, with several tables outside. While most customers opt to stay and eat, the restaurant has a bicycle delivery service for the neighbourhood.

A large moose head is displayed prominently.

The restaurant is named after a Winnipeg taxidermist who crafted the eatery's centrepiece — a plaque bearing his name is mounted under the moose. (The real Telesky is now deceased.)

Schnack said the joint is inspired by the pizzas they create, which he calls "trashy, glamorous and wholesome."

"You combine unrelated things and you get the unexpected," he said.

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