

# GRAB A SLICE!



Le Panyol's Copper Pizza Oven.

*The pizza industry is huge. Pizza ovens represent a small slice. Now's the time to get in on the action.*

If there was ever a doubt that pizza is the favorite food of Americans, consider these industry statistics:

- 94 percent of the U.S. population eats pizza.
- 93 percent eats it at least once a month.
- The pint-sized set, ages three to 11, prefers pizza over all other foods for lunch and dinner.
- 17 percent of all restaurants in the U.S. are pizzerias.
- A growing number of those pizza restaurants now serve artisanal-style pizzas with gourmet toppings cooked in wood-fired ovens.

*Imagine the impact of grabbing a slice of this \$30 billion industry!*

"There is tremendous potential for the backyard pizza oven category," according to Russ Faulk, vice president of marketing and product development for Kalamazoo Outdoor Gourmet. "People love cooking pizza at home. You don't have to follow a recipe and you can get creative with toppings. It's very social and it's really fun, not to mention being delicious."

Albie Barden, owner with his wife Cheryl of Le Panyol wood-fired ovens, recently has seen a significant increase in consumer awareness and demand for the product. "Our Web site hits have skyrocketed in the last year. There is definite growth and interest among people who want to include a pizza oven in their complete outdoor kitchen, and

also among people who just really care about food and like to entertain.

"The interest in cooking in a wood-fired oven dovetails with a profound shift in consumer attitudes about food quality," he continues. "People are getting into the 'Slow Food' movement; they want to buy locally, eat well and know where their food comes from. This type of product fits in with that mindset and the market for it is growing."

In response, the number of manufacturers getting into the game has increased substantially, with over two dozen different companies now either making or importing and distributing outdoor pizza ovens in the United States. The pizza ovens themselves can be divided into three main categories – traditional, large masonry ovens; smaller units on cart bases; and tabletop ovens. Depending on the model, the ovens can be fueled either by wood, gas or a combination of the two.



Cart-based pizza oven from Bull.

Le Panyol ovens fall into the traditional category. Made in the Provence region of France, the oven core is crafted from "Terre Blanche" or "white earth," a pure white clay found only in a quarry along the Rhone River. According to Barden, it is screened for the highest possible purity to meet food safety standards and is the same material used to make the renowned French ceramic cookware.



Mezzo pizza oven from Stone Age Manufacturing.

"We call it an organic oven," he says.

Barden sells the oven core to masons, landscapers, outdoor kitchen retailers and do-it-yourselfers who finish the exterior with stone, stucco, brick or other material. But Le Panyol's best-selling signature oven comes finished with a striking copper surround, hand-welded by a copper sculptor from Maine. The unit may be polished occasionally to maintain its shiny exterior, or it may be left to weather naturally.

Other manufacturers of traditional, full-size pizza ovens include Earthstone Ovens, Wood Stone Ovens, Forno Bravo and Chicago Brick Oven.

Stone Age Manufacturing also makes wood-fired pizza ovens that can be finished to look like the traditional outdoor cooking hearths found throughout Europe, only they are designed in a modular Cabinet Component System to facilitate assembly. According to Rob Wright, director of sales and marketing, the system can be put together and secured with masonry block glue in under an hour. It can then be finished to coordinate with the home's exterior or patio. Wright estimates that half the ovens the company sells are for built-in outdoor kitchen applications and the others are finished as stand-alone units.

"We've offered these ovens for several years," says Wright, "but we've seen a lot more consumer interest in the last year or so, even in colder climates. I was surprised by how many

calls we've gotten from people throughout the Midwest and Northeast – even places like Minnesota."

The freestanding pizza ovens from Michigan-based Forno de Pizza were developed with the needs of cold climate dwellers in mind. The mobile ovens on wheeled carts are heavy-duty enough to withstand the high cooking temperatures, yet are lightweight enough to make them easy to move. In addition, the oven's narrow profile fits through a standard 36-in.



Wood Stone pizza oven.

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*Wood Stone pizza oven.*



Quintessential QX-C wood fired oven.

side door of a garage, should owners care to store it for the winter. Forno de Pizza ovens use a gas burner to light the wood fire quickly and easily, and the burner may even be left on while cooking to help the fire burn more efficiently.

Forno de Pizza joins a growing group of manufacturers producing smaller-scale, cart-based pizza ovens including Bull, Tuscan Imports, Mario Batali Ovens from Chicago Brick Oven, Quintessential Ovens, and Tuscan Ovens. The size and design of these units make them generally able to heat up faster than the larger, traditional ovens, offering convenience as well as cost savings to consumers.

“We live in a fast-paced society,” notes Hugo Laranja, owner of Forno de Pizza. “It’s a major advantage to have the oven heat up in

35 to 40 minutes, as opposed to two hours for many traditional ovens.”

Gas-fired countertop units, such as the Outdoor Artisan and Artisan Fire pizza ovens from Kalamazoo Outdoor Gourmet, the 2-in-1 Pizza Oven/Warming Oven from Cal Flame and the Salamangrill from Twin Eagles, make the process even easier, with heat-up times in the neighborhood of 20 minutes or less. What they might lack in esthetics, they make up for in convenience, say proponents.

“There is no shortage of big, traditional-looking pizza ovens,” points out Faulk, “but we wanted to do something different. Our oven reaches 800 degree temperatures in 20 minutes – it’s very convenient.”

Kalamazoo Outdoor Gourmet introduced its second gas-fired, countertop pizza oven this past fall. The Artisan Fire features one burner beneath the cooking stone surface, and an open-flame burner in the rear. The two burners offer more cooking flexibility, including the ability to prepare deep-dish style pizzas and calzones that require lower heat and longer cooking times.

Whether the pizza oven is fueled by gas or wood is a matter of personal choice that closely parallels the gas vs. charcoal grill debate, say manufacturers. Some consumers prefer the tradition and flavor that cooking in a wood-fired oven brings, while others prefer the convenience and speed of a gas appliance.

Laranja insists that cooking over wood is essential for taste, aroma and an authentic experience. Faulk argues that not much wood smoke flavor is absorbed in

the two minutes it takes to cook a pizza anyway. “What’s important is dry heat,” he points out.

In addition to entire appliances dedicated to the task of making pizzas, many companies have recently introduced accessory products designed to cook pizza on the grill. Primo, Big Green Egg and Kamado Joe all offer pizza stones for preparing pizza on their ceramic cookers.



2-in-1 pizza oven from Cal Flame.



Forno de Pizza’s oven.



Artisan Fire pizza oven from Kalamazoo.



16-inch glazed pizza stone from Primo Grills.

## Pizza Ovens

Actually, the ceramic material of these appliances closely replicates the firebrick interior of a pizza oven, creating excellent results.

Fuego's Element Grill comes with an optional pizza accessory that swaps out with other cooking grid surfaces. Cal Spas has introduced the Pizza Brick Tray that fits over the burners of any Cal Flame grill. And the Companion Group has had great success with its Pizza Que, an elevated pizza stone that makes wonderful crispy-crust pizzas on any gas grill.

According to the experts, the next trend might be smaller and lighter-weight pizza ovens that could be used for tailgating or by caterers. Most manufacturers reveal they are hard at work developing all sorts of new products to introduce in the category in the coming years.

In the meantime, the critical task at hand continues to be creating awareness of pizza ovens among consumers. The Bardens of Le Panyol ovens have partnered with an outdoor kitchen business in the Boston area and attend home shows together with a joint display booth. They also offer workshops to educate retailers,



*Element pizza stone from Fuego.*

landscapers, hardscapers and others on how to install, finish and cook in their wood-fired ovens.

But one of the company's most effective and innovative marketing efforts has been to donate ovens to four baking and culinary schools around the country, including the San Francisco Baking Institute, the King Arthur Flour baking school, Johnson & Wales culinary school and a baking school in Maine.


"The plan has been to expose artisan baking professionals to this product and win their respect," explains Barden. "There is then a trickle-down to

average consumers."

Laranja of Forno de Pizza has created a successful program of renting out ovens to consumers who use them to make pizzas at their own parties. He will even provide a catering staff to make the pizzas on location at a party, providing the dough, while the homeowner provides the sauce and toppings. In some cases, consumers will rent an oven as a way to try it out before committing to a purchase.

"We've had 100 percent positive feedback with these marketing programs," notes Laranja. "People are impressed that we can set up the oven in 20 minutes and fire it up so it's ready for cooking in 40 minutes. These efforts have worked very well and have led to sales. We will even deduct the rental price from the purchase price if people end up buying an oven."

All manufacturers point to the importance of product demonstrations to educate consumers and excite them about the delicious results that pizza ovens yield. In fact, the best opportunity to showcase pizza ovens and pizza-making accessories may very well be this month. Industry statistics show more pizza is consumed during Super Bowl week than any other week of the year.

So, get out those pizza ovens or pizza accessories and demo! Or, if you don't carry them yet, make it a point to learn more about the category so you can start grabbing a slice of this profitable pie. 



*Pizza stone from Big Green Egg.*



*Garth's Pizza Oven.*



*Companion Group's Pizza Que.*



*Kamado Joe's Heat Deflector and Stone.*