



TOP  
BLOG  
STORIES



Khe-Yo Brings  
Lao Food to NYC  
By Laura Shunk



Round Two With  
Johnathan Adler  
of Franny's  
By Laura Shunk



Favorite Dish:  
Tacos Mexico's  
Chorizo Taco  
By Laura Shunk

## Clash of the Titans

# The Juliana's and Grimaldi's Rivalry, Bite-by-Bite

By [Laura Shunk](#) Tue., Jun. 25 2013 at 9:30 AM

Categories: [Clash of the Titans](#)



Grimaldi's line, 11:45, Saturday morning

It's possible that [Grimaldi's](#), that pizza institution under the Brooklyn Bridge, is more famous for its lines than its pies at this point, and sure enough, 40 minutes before noon on Saturday, groups of people had already started to wait, hoping to catch one of the first tables when the doors opened. A few people glanced at the hordes and wandered two doors down to the original Grimaldi's location, where not-yet-year-old Juliana's was already doing business, turning out pizzas for a still-thin early lunch crowd. See that scenario and you might assume that Juliana's is an opportunistic operation, taking up residence to catch some of the overflow from a historic spot that was forced to move two doors away after facing eviction. Most food-obsessed New Yorkers, though, know that this set-up is actually the culmination of a long rivalry, which came to a head last year.

Patsy Grimaldi has been no stranger to pizza-related conflict over the years. A tiff with the group that took over his deceased uncle's Harlem pizzeria, Patsy's, forced him to change the name of his Brooklyn pizzeria from Patsy's to Grimaldi's in the mid-1990s. But his current feud began when he sold Grimaldi's to Frank Ciolli in 1998, which started a long-festering clash that played out in a way that belongs in a movie script: When Grimaldi's was forced out, Patsy Grimaldi moved back into his old restaurant space, where the coal-fired oven was still intact, to open a new pizzeria, Juliana's, to best his nemesis the good old-fashioned way--by doing better business. Ciolli tried to sue, but the case was tossed out, and now the joints operate side by side. And while there's no overt name-calling, at least not while customers are in line, Juliana's keeps an enlarged version of a [New York story that details Patsy Grimaldi's path to exacting his commercial revenge](#) plastered in the window. (We also covered a bit of this rivalry before when we reviewed [Juliana's in January](#).)

Since we found ourselves in DUMBO over the weekend, we decided to pit the two against each other in a taste-off.

We joined the collection of tourists and sojourners waiting for Grimaldi's first, eventually stepping into the cavernous dining room in the historic building at One Front Street. Guys work the coal-fired pizza oven immediately to the right of the door, but from our spot in a back alcove, we could only see glimpses of their work via a mirror. The original Grimaldi's location was a bit of a dive, with kitschy photos and an embedded layer of grime, and the new spot keeps up the same appearance as well as the gruff, aloof service style.



The regular pizza at Grimaldi's

Our regular pizza (essentially a margherita) arrived looking beautiful, paved first with slices of white mozzarella and then sauced thinly over the top. Leaves of basil had crisped in the oven, and the crust had blistered enticingly (though a cursory glance at the bottom of our first slice revealed less char than we would have expected or liked). But our first bite left us wanting--the crust had proper chew and the cheese good stretch, but the tomato sauce resembled Campbell's tomato soup in both consistency and flavor, and the rest of the pie required liberal quantities of garlic salt and red chile flakes to get it to pack the punch we wanted. A topping may have helped, and we lusted after the next table's pepperoni. We flagged down our server with some considerable effort and headed next door.

By the time we were back on the pavement for Juliana's, it, too, had amassed a line, though this one was much less structured, thanks to the crowd control of a host with good facial recognition skills. Our patience paid off with seats at the counter, where we learned that Juliana's goes through two pizza paddles a day when one of the kitchen guys sawed a new one to size during the middle of the lunch rush. Juliana's is a sunnier space. Grimaldi, along with his wife Carol and day-to-day manager Matt Grogan, outfitted his old-new spot with a sunny color scheme, daily special-listing chalkboards, and blond wood tables, effectively giving the place a facelift. The menu features similarly modernized fare; pies are topped with translucent slices of pink prosciutto, pistachio pesto, or red peppers roasted right in the oven.



For comparison's sake, we stuck with the classic margherita here, as well, and our pie looked nearly identical to the one we consumed next door (though the tell-tale char speckled the bottom of this pizza). But first bite revealed the gulf between the two, starting with the crust: the Juliana's base was crisp and airy, but it had the yeasty complexity of fresh-baked bread. The mozzarella was soft and creamy, the sauce vibrant and piercing, the basil fresh and verdant, and all flavors came into focus with the last-minute hit of salt, applied after the pie came out of the oven and rested, bubbling, on the pass.

**We'll go on pizza alone here, since Ciolli has purposely maintained a grittier service and decor style than at Juliana's, but we think Patsy Grimaldi's new place wins this one. Send your out-of-town visitors to the Grimaldi's line if they insist and head next door instead.**