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Pizza legend Patsy Grimaldi is making pies again — but not under his name

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Photo by Paul Martinka

Patsy's back: the storied, 81-year-old pizzaiolo behind the original Grimaldi's is back on Old Fulton Street, opening Juliana's in the same space he opened his first pie place in 1990.



Photo by Paul Martinka

At 81-years-old, the venerated pizza man Patsy Grimaldi can still throw a killer pie.



Photo by Paul Martinka

Patsy and wife Carol Grimaldi are back to restore glory to their name, they say.



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Patsy Grimaldi is back — and you'll find him right next door to Grimaldi's.

The famed 81-year-old pizzaiolo christened his new restaurant Juliana's last week at 19 Old Fulton St., the same storefront where he opened his first pizza place in 1990 and built up a loyal following before calling it quits and selling his eponymous business, and last name, to pie slinger Frank Ciolli in 1998.

Ciolli turned Grimaldi's Pizzeria into a pie paradise beloved by tourists and aficionados alike, but had to give up the old digs — and the space's coveted coal oven — and [move next door due to a rent dispute](#).

Grimaldi snatched up the vacant pizzeria and he and his wife Carol say it's great to be back, even though they're just steps away from a rival eatery that bears their name.

"Retirement wasn't really part of our vocabulary," said Carol, 74, as she presided over business on opening day at the re-done restaurant, which is named after Grimaldi's late mother. "We are so thrilled to be back."

The sleek 65-seat space received a 21st century makeover — gone are the red and white checkered tablecloths — and the menu boasts more specialty pies, appetizers, beers, and wines. Juliana's even offers a custom raspberry chocolate chunk ice cream from the Brooklyn Ice Cream Factory.

The vintage-style jukebox now features Tito Puente, Ella Fitzgerald, Marvin Gaye, Billie Holiday, and Sam Cooke in addition to Frank Sinatra and the Rat Pack.

A margherita pie ordered by this newspaper confirmed that the pizza legend hasn't lost his step in the 14 years he's been out of Fulton Ferry Landing.

Still, the Grimaldis admit that nuts and bolts of running a business have changed since they sold their last pie in 1998.

"We have dotted all the i's and crossed all the t's with the city — the city even approved our facade," said Carol. "The red tape you have to go through is different. Now you need a plumber, an electrician, someone for everything, it's a lot of work."

There have been plenty of changes in the neighborhood as well: DUMBO has gone from dicey to desirable and Grimaldi's Pizzeria has become a staple on the tourist itinerary.

But plenty of old the pizza-maker's old fans remain.

"There's nothing like this pie," said Linda Grove, a former regular who has lived in nearby Brooklyn Heights since 1992. "I expect it to overshadow the other place — soon we won't be able to get in here!"



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The other place is, of course, Ciolli's Grimaldi's Pizzeria — now a restaurant chain with outposts in states including Texas, Nevada, and South Carolina.

Ciolli [lost a battle to move the old coal oven with him](#), but later managed to secure a new one despite city laws barring the installation of coal furnaces.

Still undecided is Ciolli's court case [seeking to halt Grimaldi and his wife from doing business](#) due to an old non-compete clause.

But Grimaldi — who got his start making pies at his uncle Patsy's famous East Harlem joint and cannot use that name either — doesn't want to talk about all that.

"I'm looking to make pizza in peace," Patsy Grimaldi [told the New York Post](#), our sister paper. "I'm not looking for any trouble [with Ciolli]."

Juliana's Pizza [19 Old Fulton St. between Water and Front streets in DUMBO. (718) 596-6700 www.julianaspizza.com].

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