



## Talking with homemade pizza's Man Of Steel, Andris Lagsdin sprawls into passion, entrepreneurship, inspiring your kids--and (yes) pineapple...

**If you use a pizza steel, one of the reasons is Andris Lagsdin.** He's pizza Man Of Steel. Back when Nathan Mhyrvold and the team at Modernist Cuisine began experimenting with bread baking, they determined that the best baking surface was not stone, but steel.

**Andris was a culinary rockstar chef in Boston.** He used to run the pizza program for celebrity chef Todd English at his restaurant, Figs in Charlestown. However, Andris also comes from a decades-old family steel business called Stoughton Steel. He grew up in steel fabrication, and had gone back to the business to help his father when he saw an opportunity.

**I've heard Andris on various podcasts, and I was wondering if he'd be good enough to sit down with Free The Pizza.** He very graciously jumped at the opportunity, which seems to be how he does most things—with energy and grace. I expected a 10-minute conversation and he'd go back to his steel empire. Oh, no. After an hour, we were still going.

**I wanted Andris to talk about making pizza at home.** He did that—and so much more than I ever bargained for. This is a very small chunk of the conversation. There will be more to come.

**Once you read this, you'll probably want to know more about Andris Lagsdin and [BakingSteel.com](http://BakingSteel.com).** Know that he has free classes and pizza hangouts. Any information you want can be found at his website.

**BLAINE PARKER:** Andris, what is your favorite pizza memory?

**ANDRIS LAGSDIN:** Ooh, wow. That's a great question. So, I have two.



In the nineties, long before Baking Steel, I remember walking into Fig's restaurant in Charlestown. I had met Todd [English] through a mutual friend. I'm 24, 25 years old, and I'm a hotshot in the culinary world. In my own mind. Long story short, I got hired on the spot and slinging pizzas at Figs. And I remember tasting the pizza and it was next-level.

They had these big, Roman-style wood-fired ovens, and Todd making it up, obviously, and the bread, and the whole experience just opened my eyes. I had studied classical French cooking and culinary arts and did everything. As much as I loved pizza, I never thought I'd be doing pizza. But here I am in a professional kitchen with a legend making a pizza with him and tasting it. And that experience just brought my pizza love and passion, like, beyond words. Just the amount of effort he put into each pie and the toppings and just the nuance of baking it, and the dough. And I just fell in love with it. Then, I was on a quest to make great pizza.

Even when I left Todd's and I went to work in steel for my dad. I had all Todd's recipes, literally. And I had a pizza stone. I would make the dough, I'd replicate the pizzas at home, and they were good, good pizzas. But they weren't *great* pizzas. I thought you needed a wood-fired oven to really make it great.

So, fast forward, my second favorite memory of making pizza is 15 years later. I'm reading some *Wall Street Journal* article about steel and pizza and *Modernist Cuisine*. I'm like, you gotta be kidding me. Steel and pizza?

So I ran out to [the steel] plant. I grabbed a piece of steel, I brought it at home that weekend. I didn't clean the steel up. It was a little bit rusted. It needed some work.

My wife's like, "What are you doing with that steel?" I said, "I'm making pizza." So I made a Figs dough recipe that weekend on Saturday. Sunday I bake a pizza, and it was just a cheese pizza. But for the first time in 15 years when I was making Figs pizzas, I had a crispy crust in like six or seven minutes. I was blown away. I'm like, "You've gotta shitting me."

And I went back to the plant, and I went through a process of making this [baking steel] and designing it in like 15 minutes in my brain. I'm like, "Shoot, I've got a million dollars worth of equipment that can produce this steel starting tomorrow. Let's go! This is 2012. I had no idea



how to sell these things. I was just like, it's a good product. If I could sell 50 a month somehow, and that'll be my side hustle.

**Blaine:** How's the steel business going?

**Andris:** I'm grateful every day that I get to do what I love. And it's amazing. The steel business has been great. We're producing them in Massachusetts and shipping 'em all over the world, really. It's a direct-to-consumer business and I'm super passionate about it. I love it. I'm obsessed with helping people make pizza at home. And my whole thing is I never try to sell as much as I try to educate people on how to do it. I think we've been blessed and fortunate and grateful that we've got really amazing customers that love the product and they share and they help spread the word. The word of mouth kind of marketing has been amazing. And the social media's amazing. And doing podcasts and meeting new people and learning and learning your process, burning pizzas and sharing other people's pizzas. Bread too, by the way. Breads are phenomenal on steel. So we do a lot of bread. And we do burgers and smash burgers and steaks and breakfast brittle versions.

**Blaine:** I need to expand my horizons with steel. All I do is bake on it and then only pizza and occasionally bread.

**Andris:** And by the way, we're teaching Zoom classes every week. We're gonna do more of those, and it's free. Just come and hang out with us. Do a pizza hangout. And everyone's got questions. I mean, I have questions. I'd love to hang out with Peter Reinhart and make a pizza <laugh>. He's amazing, right? You're always learning something.

**Blaine:** Always. So, making pizza at home is a little different than making a pizza in a Todd English restaurant. Is it more fun doing pizza at home for family and friends?

**Andris:** Yeah, clearly. He had an open kitchen, so that was a cool experience, to see everyone light up. But sometimes you get so buried, you're working so hard. You're not really enjoying that as much as [making pizza] at home.



Let's say you have six to eight people over. I might make two pizzas right out of the gate. Usually, you feed the kids first. So put two cheese pizzas out there and hang out.

And, by the way, I've got my *mis en place* done, right? I've got my pizza station all set up. I've got my dough doing its final proof. I've dialed that in to like four hours, I know that dough is gonna be primetime and that can go four or five or six hours.

So I've got my guests hanging out with us, I'm making pizza, and I say, "Hey, by the way, why don't you come up, Kathy and make a pizza with us?" Or for your friends, "What are you gonna make? Here are your toppings." And it's social. Everyone's just kinda doing their thing.

So Yeah. We don't get to do that in restaurants.

**Blaine:** No. I can't imagine you do. You don't try to talk to Chris Bianco while he's making 300 pizzas a night. (NOTE: I tried this. Duh.)

**Andris:** Exactly. So that part, that experience, we have advantages that restaurants don't have. We can customize a pizza on the spot, right? You might say, "Oh, you know, I wanna try this raw onion in contrast to the caramelized onions. Like, what's the difference on a pizza? Let's, let's taste the difference."

**Blaine:** It can so expand your horizons as a home cook.

**Andris:** It's funny, I've been doing this thing. I've been making my pizzas really puffy. Instead of stretching it to 12 inches, I'll stretch the same amount of dough, 250 grams, to 10 inches or 8 inches. Right? And it just makes it like blow up. But uniquely. I know how to distribute the weight on the crust, and maybe leave it off the edges so it really pops up. At the end, you've got this like really unique looking pie.

**Blaine:** I've noticed some of your pizzas have got a shape that I've never seen before.

**Andris:** Oh yeah. And I'll get shit from the professionals on those ones. [LAUGHS] But that's okay, 'cuz it's passion. I find that's what's nice about working with the same ingredients. Like a New York-style, you can make 16 inches. A Large pizza. Beautiful, very traditional. But you can



take those same exact ingredients and shrink that down to 10 inches. Yeah. It's gonna be a whole different vibe. You're gonna be biting into more bread. Right? It's a little bit breadier and it's puffy. And right or wrong? Who knows?

**Blaine:** That Brad speaks to people's hearts. I've had people sitting here at my table, eating the bones instead of the pizza, going "I love this crust! It's fantastic!"

**Andris:** It's amazing. It's brilliant.

**Blaine:** Going back to that day you brought home that piece of steel, put it in the oven and that pizza came out? Did your head explode? What happened?

**Andris:** Yeah. My head exploded when I read the [*Wall Street Journal* article about *Modernist Cuisine* and steel] and created the baking steel in my head, and in my plant. I still remember like was yesterday. And then, when I made the pizza, it just validated everything.

We all have ideas as humans, right? We all do. I'm sure I've had 50 others. I've had a couple that I've executed on. I've had a bunch that I've never executed on. And as I got older I felt like this one, I had to execute on it. I just felt like it was my life.

It was like my life story in one product, if you will. I worked in food, which I loved. I worked in Stoughton Steel. I loved my family business. It was amazing. I loved helping, but I wasn't really passionate about what I did, you know? So I was looking for something different, something to show my kids. I had a four-year-old at the time I created the baking steel. And he used to ask what I did for work every day. And I wasn't super proud at that point. And I'm like, I don't wanna raise my kid thinking he has to go do something he doesn't like every day. (I mean, minus school, by the way, if they don't like school.) As an adult, I wanted to show my kid, Hey, you can be passionate about what you do for work. And find your calling and chase your passion. You can clearly do that. You've gotta find a way to do it. And you need a lot of experience to make something like that happen. That was really important to me.



The saying is, “Caught, not taught.” Right? My kids are seeing that I'm living a life that I'm super passionate about. And I love what I do. And hopefully, that shines through with what they're doing they'll find the same kind of passion.

**Blaine:** That's fantastic. And this is a whole other place than I ever expected this conversation to be going. So, why does making pizza never get old? Do you have any idea?

**Andris:** That's a really great question. I've made thousands of pizzas now in my baking steel in my home oven, you know? Man, I can remember almost every one. If I see a picture of it, I can remember the moment and the day. Any picture I've made and posted on Instagram, I can. And I've got a database on my Mac too. Years old pizzas. I'm like, I remember making that pizza. I remember how I wanted to look and then how I executed it. 'Cuz I tried to make 'em a little bit different, you know? And you go through phases, right? Like we're you kind of just wanna dial in New York-style.

And you just eat, eat and eat and test and test until you kind of dial in the one that you love and then, then you can shelve it 'cuz OK, this is a good recipe. I can share this. And then you'll tweak it again, you know?

But to answer your question, I think it's because it's like a snowflake. Every pizza's gonna be different, right? And it's such a passion thing.

**Blaine:** Have you got a philosophy on making pizza?

**Andris:** That's a good question. What I'm really passionate about—I always will have dough in my fridge. I'm always waiting to rock and roll for pizza. And I guess my philosophy is to use really quality ingredients. That's really important. And I'm using some different flours I've never tried before from these like micro mills. That just makes a huge difference. And so, just really trying to craft with passion. With love. That's really what it comes down to. The tomatoes, the quality of the cheese. And less is more, just like life.



**Blaine:** Oh, man. I didn't ask you the important question. I never thought about this one until just now.

**Andris:** OK, let's hear it.

**Blaine:** OK. Pineapple on pizza? Go!

**Andris:** A hundred percent. Yes.

It's funny. I was thinking the other day, what other ingredient is taboo on pizza? You can reverse engineer anything these days and people are impressed. But for some reason that sensitive topic of pineapple on pizza is crazy to me. I don't care what you do to your pizza, just make good pizza.

In fact I made pizza for an Italian. This guy, he owns a bunch of wineries, really well connected. He's like a billionaire. He came to my test kitchen in Massachusetts. I was really nervous. He's right from Italy, and I made him pizza. I knew it was a special night, so I put like 3 or 4% spelt in the dough, just to give it a little bit more uniqueness. I used Central Milling's High-Mountain flour and fermented the dough for three or four days. So I had the perfect dough.

And he's the nicest guy you've ever met. He comes in, gives you a hug and just beautiful human being. And I started making pizza. The very first one I made, it had arugula on top. I was making it, looking at him, and he was super kind. He looked at me, he goes, "Don't do that. Do not put balsamic on your pizza."

And I was like, Oh geez. I was embarrassed at that. But I was really proud of the pizza. And this was a spinoff of something we did at Figs, by the way. It's my wife's favorite pizza.

But I said, "Look, just try this." And he tasted it. And he looked at me. He goes, "I think this might be the best pizza I ever had."

So, I guess my point with the pineapple is like, don't be afraid to experiment and try things. If you don't like pineapple on pizza, that's fine. You know, some people don't like arugula.



**Blaine:** And how often does arugula become an argument?

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Learn more about Andris and his Baking Steel operation at [BakingSteel.com](http://BakingSteel.com). If you're interested in his cookbook, [\*\*Baking with Steel: The Revolutionary New Approach to Perfect Pizza, Bread, and More\*\*](#), you can find it here. And if you're interested in a somewhat simpler and sillier pizza manual, check out [\*\*Free The Pizza: A System For Making Great Pizza Whenever You Want With The Oven You Already Have\*\*](#) by clicking here.

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