

‘Artisan’ goes mass-market hoping to win both elites and masses—a difficult path to win over two groups that despise each other’s taste and style

By Tiffany Hsu,

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Domino's Pizza, with the introduction of its Artisan Pizza line this week, is the latest food company to call an offering 'artisan.' The term has traditionally referred to a meticulously handcrafted product, made in small batches....

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In the food world, "artisan" used to mean a meticulously handcrafted product, made in small batches.

No more.

This week, Domino's Pizza introduced its Artisan Pizza line at its nearly 5,000 outlets across the country. It joined the trend of major companies in describing products as artisan.

Wendy's has its Artisan Egg Sandwich, Ralphs markets offers Private Selection Artisan Breads and Starbucks sells Artisan Breakfast Sandwiches.

The term, from the Italian *artigiano*, was coined as far back as the 16th century to refer to a skilled craftsman who carved or otherwise hand-tooled an item.

More recently, foodies have used it to describe a bread, cheese, chocolate or other cozy item made in an old-fashioned, hands-on manner.

But the food industry has fallen in love with the term to the point that the Panera Bread chain advertises "artisan fast food."

"The word 'artisan' has been so co-opted by industry and marketing that it no longer really means artisan," said acclaimed baker and author Peter Reinhart, who wrote a book about pizza, "American Pie."

Domino's Pizza Inc. promoted its artisan line heavily in advertising over the weekend. Russell Weiner, its chief marketing officer, conceded that the new pizzas do not use specialty flours or wood-fired ovens associated with artisan baking.

But the company defended the use of the word, in large part because of the ingredients used. There is feta cheese on one of the offerings instead of the usual mozzarella or Parmesan. Tuscan salami tops another in place of pepperoni.

They're "pizzas you have with a bottle of wine," Weiner said. "It's something where, before we launched, people would have laughed at us and wouldn't have believed we could do it."

Josh Viertel, president of Slow Food USA, an advocacy group for healthful eating, said he doesn't automatically object to large-scale production being termed artisan.

But it's nearly impossible, he said, for a nationwide company to use another hallmark of artisan — locally sourced ingredients.

"I have no problems with the scale, but it's really hard to fake authenticity," Viertel said. "Domino's is diluting the meaning of the word."

Domino's is on a roll lately — shares in the Ann Arbor, Mich., company have risen 80% this year, gaining 19 cents Tuesday to \$28.80.

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Weiner said the company wanted to make it clear it's not "being snobs or persnickety."

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