



The Doughnut Project Splashes Into New York Beet First

POSTED ON [OCTOBER 23, 2015](#) BY [THAT'S SO MANHATTAN](#)



The Doughnut Project co-creators Leslie Polizzotto and Troy Neal

A lawyer walks into a bar, and instead of being the start of a good joke, it turns out to be the start of a great doughnut shop.

At [The Doughnut Project](#) in the West Village, founders Leslie Polizzotto and Troy Neal are mixing up creative doughnuts with an artistic urban flair. But before they were serving bacon maple bars, they were cooking up plans at [Manzo](#), a restaurant inside [Eataly](#).

Neal had been working as a bartender at Manzo, where Polizzotto and her husband became regulars after moving to New York from Los Angeles at the end of 2012. Soon after, Polizzotto and Neal started talking about their love of doughnuts and began putting together their business plan in early 2013 for what would become The Doughnut Project, which opened this past October 15. Doing so, however, required a leap of faith, as neither had much experience with doughnuts.

For Polizzotto, starting The Doughnut Project was a 180 from her previous job as a litigator, with her doughnut resume consisting of enjoying them.

"When I moved to New York, I decided I didn't want to practice law anymore," she says. "I wanted to do something more fun and to do something either with art or with food, and so this place is kind of a combination of both because we have integrated street art into the aesthetic of the space."



Meanwhile, Neal had moved to New York from Seattle in 2010, and while he had already been working in the restaurant industry, doughnuts were a new foray for him.

After getting out of work one day, Neal bought some simple, small doughnuts at Madison Square Eats that reminded him of one his favorite places back in Seattle, [Daily Dozen](#). After having them in New York, however, Neal decided he could make a better doughnut, so he got to work experimenting with his own creations in 2011.

With his fiancée trying to fit into a wedding dress, Neal started frying doughnuts in his apartment and got some positive feedback from family and friends, leading to him serving doughnuts at some small events. After his chance acquaintance with Polizzotto, the two were on the path to serving doughnuts to the public, with Polizzotto leading the charge on the business front and Neal being more of the creative voice.

"I'd still be [cooking] in my apartment if she wasn't here with me," says Neal.

"We pushed each other to make it actually happen," adds Polizzotto.

In addition to having the good fortune of meeting each other, The Doughnut Project also seems to have some destiny behind its location on Morton Street.

When Neal first moved to New York, he and his now-wife were walking around taking pictures and photographed a beautiful green door, the picture of which they put up in their own home. Yet Neal never remembered where that door was until a broker showed him the storefront The Doughnut Project would move into, which happens to be right next to that green door.



The green door next to The Doughnut Project

Fun colors like the green door are also present inside The Doughnut Project, such as with the street art style murals on the inside, along with framed urban art from New York artist [Tripp Derrick Barnes](#).

"We're framing it in gilded frames to match the motif of Paris art salon meets urban street art...it's the high brow and the low brow coming together," says Polizzotto. "A doughnut can be a low brow thing, but we elevate it to something much more high brow."

The Doughnut Project has plans to add more framed art and events where an artist curates a look for a signature doughnut.

As for the store's own signature doughnuts, they plan to feature 8-10, such as current staples like the beet with ricotta, for which they actually juice beets to use in the glaze (none of the doughnuts use food coloring), paired with ricotta on the inside that comes from [Murray's Cheese Shop](#) around the corner. Neal created the doughnut after being inspired by a beet salad he had at nearby Italian restaurant [Lupa](#).



Doughnuts clockwise from top left: chocolate, beet with ricotta, pineapple habanero, bacon maple bar

Other creations include innovative combinations like pineapple habanero, which is sweet with a hint of spice, and future varieties will likely include Elvis Has Left the Building, a blend of peanut butter, bruleed bananas and a touch of bacon. Neal even has plans for a tomato basil doughnut with a little balsamic vinegar on it. The flavors may seem a bit wacky, but Neal wants to serve ones that still have the yeast doughnut base shine through.

"I'm not trying to reinvent the wheel, no pun intended, I just want to make the best [doughnuts] we can with simple ingredients that are balanced right," he says.

Patrons will also have a chance to come up with their own varieties starting within the next week or so, as The Doughnut Project will have a make-your-own doughnut bar, where customers can pick a glaze and a variety of toppings such as seeds, fruit and meat. The prices will start at \$3.75 for a basic make-your-own creation (still to be determined what exactly that entails), the same as the cost for many of the signature flavors, and will vary based on toppings.

While the price is high compared to a run-of-the-mill doughnut shop, there's hardly a comparison to the taste, as it certainly matches the quality at [Dough and Doughnut Plant](#) and wins out on flavors like the bacon maple bar and the cinnamon glazed with toasted pepitas; full disclosure, the cinnamon with pepitas doughnut was provided complimentary to That's So Manhattan.

The Doughnut Project is still in its very early stages, but Neal and Polizzotto are not short on ambition, as they are working to expand their merchandise offering, cater to local businesses and events, and they hope to open another shop eventually, perhaps in the Upper West Side and even in other cities like Chicago.

Until then, the West Village shop will be serving up delicious treats daily and elevating New York's doughnut scene to the next level.



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