

PLUS
Kurt Andersen:
In Defense of Political Elitism

FEBRUARY 15, 2010

NEW YORK

TREND

One-Stop Meatball Shopping

An old food gets a new stage.

BY ROBIN RAISFELD AND ROB PATRONITE

UNLESS YOU'RE living in a red-sauce-free bubble, you must know we're having a bit of a meatball moment. The omnipresent orbs have been entered into hard-fought contests like Meatball Madness and the Meatball Slapdown, glamorized on glossy-magazine covers, and reinvented by upscale chefs with luxe ingredients like duck and foie gras. But this week, the humble foodstuff truly rolls into the spotlight, with the opening of the Meatball Shop on the Lower East Side. It makes perfect sense: Burgers, pizza, and fried chicken have all enjoyed recent resurgences and remakes. But it took a couple of nice Jewish boys from the Upper East Side to recognize the potential of the meatball as a single-subject attraction, a comfort food that could appeal to carbophobes, late-night revelers, and everyone in between.

Daniel Holzman and Michael Chernow grew up in the East Eighties, were delivery boys for the (meatless!) Candle Cafe, and played wind instruments at La Guardia high school of performing arts (flute and tuba, respectively). Most of all, they ate at Gino's pizzeria, almost incessantly. "They had the best chicken parm and meatball heroes," Chernow says dreamily. Holzman became a chef, Chernow a bartender, but all the while, they fantasized about opening a place together. An early plan to serve meatballs out of a takeout window evolved into an obsession to focus on meatballs exclusively. And thus was born the idea for the Meatball Shop: a counter-service operation with a build-your-own-meal menu, featuring five kinds of two-ounce, house-ground balls (plus a weekly special), various sauces, and a range of options (slider flights, heroes, pastas, and sides). As befits a chef who's worked at San Francisco's Campton Place and SPQR (whose sister restaurant, A16, is known for its Meatball Mondays, incidentally), ingredients are well-sourced, including beef from Creekstone Farms and prosciutto from La Quercia. The look is Olde New York, with reclaimed wood and antique milk bottles. Chernow's wife makes ice-cream sandwiches. The cumulative effect: a retro vibe for a thoroughly modern meatball (84 Stanton St., nr. Allen St.; 212-982-8895).



All the balls:
Vegetarian,
salmon, chicken,
beef with
tomato sauce,
spicy pork.

Photograph by Hannah Whitaker

51