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AT THE TABLE | THE MEATBALL SHOP

Male Bonding, Over Meatballs

Located at 84 Stanton Street, on a busy block of the Lower East Side, this month-old restaurant likes to keep things simple: It serves meatballs — naked meatballs, sauced meatballs, meatballs pressed on buns, meatballs on the side — but, only and exhaustively, two-ounce, spicy, homemade balls of meat. “People love meatballs,” said Michael Chernow, a co-owner, stating what to many is the obvious. “They’re simple, fun, familiar, and they bring you back to home.”

ALAN FEUER

IN THE SEATS Four guys — three of them bearded, according to the current style — who used to live in the same building on East Third Street in Manhattan: Forrest Barnett, 29, the beverage director at Mia Dona restaurant; Tim Sheehan, 28, a manager at Spitzer’s Corner restaurant; Jeff Gravagna, 29, who owns a recycling business (precious metals, catalytic converters) in St. Louis; and Adam Hall, 30, a filmmaker.

ON THE PLATES Four of the house’s so-called smashes (\$8 each): meatballs squeezed between the bookends of a bun with a choice of sauce and cheese. Mr. Barnett got the beef smash with a can of P.B.R. (\$3); Mr. Sheehan got the spicy pork with a pint of Brooklyn Lager (\$5); Mr. Gravagna got the lamb smash with a glass of Sangiovese (\$6); and Mr. Hall

The one and only offering, in beef, lamb or pork.

partook of the “classic smash,” beef meatballs in meat sauce, with a Newcastle Ale (\$4.)

WHY THEY CAME Another buddy from the place on Third Street was celebrating his 30th birthday Wednesday night, and the crew — as old friends do — had convened for lunch on Tuesday for what amounted to a preparty party. Mr. Gravagna (self-description: short, round and Italian) had flown in from Missouri literally an hour before and, as he explained, “My nickname is Meatballs — so here we are.”

WHAT THEY TALKED ABOUT Whether it would be rakishly hip or just unclassy to show up at the friend’s party — dinner at Craft restaurant (a solid 8.2 on the Richter scale of fanciness) — with their own booze. Decision? “I think we’ll just go over to Astor liquors after lunch and buy a bottle of Scotch,” Mr. Hall said.



HIROKO MASUIKE FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

BUDDIES From left, Jeff Gravagna, Tim Sheehan, Forrest Barnett and Adam Hall at the Meatball Shop.