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Meatballs

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Rocco DiSpirito might have started the whole meatball rolling when his mother first made her version at Rocco's, but since then, meatball mania has taken over. Competitions are being held (last fall, nearly 30 restaurants took part in "Meatball Madness," with Andrew Carmellini of Locanda Verde claiming top honors with his lamb-meatball sliders). Menus are rife with the things. And now, there's even a Lower East Side restaurant called the Meatball Shop, featuring six variations on the theme. Our favorites, though, are the lush, juicy, complexly flavored duck meatballs chef Cesare Casella frequently serves on his Tuscan-inspired tapas menu on "Meatball Fridays." He grinds the whole duck—meat, fat, and organs—then seasons it with a Tuscan spice mix and stuffs the center of each ball with a cube of Pecorino Toscano. The meatballs are baked and then braised in a spicy tomato sauce spiked with raspberry-flavored Chambord.

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