NYC's meatball madness

The popularity of downtown rivals the Meatball Shop (84 Stanton St.) and the Meatball Factory (231 Second Ave.) has led to an explosion of interest in the classic Italian staple.

The Meatball Shop is helmed by chef Daniel Holzman (formerly of Le Bernardin, Paladin and Jardinière), who uses ingredients ranging from spicy Heritage pork shoulder and beef ground with prosciutto and ricotta to venison and orange zest.
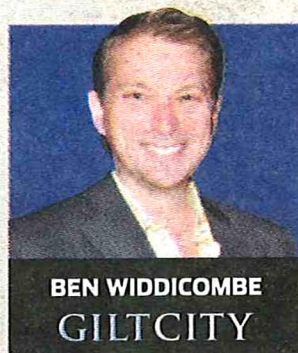
Its recently opened competitor, **The Meatball Factory,** employs similar attention to fresh ingredients (Pat LaFrieda turkey, Bell & Evans chicken). Its menu also includes strikingly original options like a turducken ball and a green-curry peanut sauce.

But while these two may be flashy new arrivals, New York City's old-school Italian restaurants have been perfecting the meatball-as-art-form for more than a century.

Bamonte's (32 Withers St., Brooklyn) opened in 1900, and its black-tie waiters still serve some of the best 'balls in the borough.

Meatball lovers can go with traditional or creative versions of the classic dish at The Meatball Shop.

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My first dinner of the new year was meatballs in red sauce at **Frankie's 17** (17 Clinton St.), one of the three well-regarded Frankie Spuntino restaurants. They also come in rosemary bread for a creamy and satisfying meatball Parmesan.

The meatballs from TriBeCa restaurant **Pepolino** (281 W. Broadway) are made from ground veal and fluffy ricotta, served simply with pearl onions and caramelized carrots. Opened in 1999 by two native Italians, Patrizio Siddu and Enzo Pezone, the restaurant has been hailed by Mario Batali, who recently told Food & Wine magazine that Pepolino is one of his favorite Italian spots in the city.

Meatballs cover the menu of old-school favorite **Don Giovanni** in Chelsea and Times Square. Have them on top of a brick-oven pizza, nestled in rigatoni and smothered in cream sauce, or starring in a Parmigianino hero, which is my favorite meatball sub in the city.

—Additional reporting by Ariel Kanter