

Daniel Holzman talks meatballs, the old SPQR and popping up at Oakland's Hopscotch

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Daniel Holzman. Photo: Will Sterns

Next Monday (12/3), New York's popular **Meatball Shop** will pop-up for a one-night appearance at Oakland's months-old **Hopscotch**. It goes down from 5pm until midnight (or the last ball), and you can see the menu by [clicking here](#).

For **Daniel Holzman**, the Meatball Shop's chef and co-owner, it's a bit of a homecoming as well. Holzman was the opening chef of SPQR back in 2007, alongside Nate Appleman during the Fillmore restaurant's first incarnation as a rustic Roman osteria.

"I remember how nervous and scared and how excited I was to open SPQR," he reminisces. "I remember getting on my hands and knees and nailing down the floorboards. I remember the first day we were doing the training and I tasted the pasta from the extruder, and I understood it."

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Of course, Holzman left SPQR soon thereafter and eventually found himself in New York, where he and Michael Chernow opened the Meatball Shop. Meanwhile, following the departure of Appleman, SPQR completely transformed itself a few years ago under Matthew Accarrino.

"I think it was a really good decision," says Holzman, praising both Accarrino's skill and the business decision. "If you're gonna be really inexpensive, you can't have formal service and longer turnover and still be small. Unfortunately it doesn't make money. At the end of the year, you have a passion project, but it's a zero-sum equation."

It would appear that the Meatball Shop is not a zero-sum equation. There are currently three branches open in New York, with two more currently in the works there. Part of the opening team for the first shop was **Kyle Itani**, the chef-owner of Hopscotch.

At the time, Itani was taking a six-month "break" in between gigs. Holzman and Itani actually first met when Holzman came into Yoshi's — down the street from SPQR — and had an omakase meal cooked by Itani. Fast forward a few years, and Itani is the first alumnus of the Meatball Shop to open his own restaurant. Now, with this Oakland pop-up, Holzman sees it as an opportunity to pay it forward.

"We've had so much help from restaurateurs who have given us their time and advice — everyone from the founder of the Cheesecake Factory to Danny Meyer," says Holzman. "When you're part of the community, it's important to give back as well."

"I haven't been to San Francisco or Oakland in forever and would love to support this guy. I think he's the real deal."

The million-dollar question, of course, is whether the Meatball Shop guys will make a permanent leap across the continent. Holzman isn't ruling it out, but they're a little busy right now.


"My greatest dream would be to have a Meatball Shop on 18th and Valencia," he laughs. "But we made a promise to each other is we're not even going to *think* about another restaurant until we get these two others open."

Hopscotch: 1915 San Pablo Avenue, (at 19th Street), Oakland; (510) 788-6217 or hopscotchoakland.com

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