

The Meatball Shop serves comfort food favorites in Chelsea

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Rachel Kaplan/WSN

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From his seat in the basement-level bar of The Meatball Shop, dubbed Underballs, executive chef and co-owner Daniel Holzman expressed his optimism about the restaurant's new Chelsea location, which opened in mid-February.

"This restaurant has been our most successful opening," Holzman said, as a constant flow of servers and managers moved in and out of the room.

As would be expected from such a successful enterprise, Holzman and his general manager, co-owner and life-long best friend Michael Chernow are no strangers to the restaurant industry. The pair made a very specific choice in starting meatball-themed chain restaurants.

"My partner and I were basically looking for something that would fit into the idea of healthy, inexpensive, comfort food," Holzman said. "We wanted to have a fast-food restaurant based on our generation's values, so we wanted to use all-natural food, organic meat and local sources, but we also didn't want to charge a lot of money."

Of their four New York City locations, the Chelsea restaurant is the only one with a liquor license. Designed as a space where customers can wait comfortably and have a drink while tables open up, the bar can also be rented out for parties or dinners. Only one of the locations takes reservations for large parties, so waiting is expected at such a small, hip spot.

"[The cocktail list] is an opportunity to showcase American spirits," Holzman said. "We like to introduce people to the local brews through specialty cocktails, so we can sell a lot of them and support the local manufacturers."

NYU freshman Tori Holbrook is excited about the new opening.

"While the location is a little far from campus, there are a lot of attractions over there, so you can have a casual, fun and really good dinner before going out," she said.

Holbrook recommends the Smash — a warm sandwich with spicy pork balls, hot meat sauce and mozzarella cheese served on a toasted brioche bun. She calls it good comfort food that is not too heavy.

The Meatball Shop is known for its unique ordering style, as customers use a dry-erase marker to check off boxes on the laminated menu to select their meal. The full selection of meatballs includes classic beef, chicken, pork, vegetable and the daily special. One particularly memorable special, the Cordon Bleu balls with chicken, ham and Swiss cheese, is best described by its menu caption as "frustratingly good," especially when paired with the Parmesan cream sauce.

While this location still settles in, Holzman and Chernow are already in full swing towards opening another location on the Upper East Side. From the ordering style to the comfortable yet classy atmosphere to the house-made iced tea and the meatballs, the restaurant certainly offers an incredibly unique dining experience.