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A trio of sliders from the Meatball Shop; crinkle-cut fries (inset below) at Potatopia.



SINGLE-MINDED RESTAURANTS

Some places pride themselves on variety. Not these



BY JUSTIN ROCKET SILVERMAN
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The potato is no longer an afterthought. Once consigned to side status, the lowly spud is being billed as the main course at Potatopia — set to open in Greenwich Village this week, and just the latest in a trend of hotspots focusing on a single food item.

The tater temple will offer thousands of possible combinations of potato, toppings and sauces. "It's truly the perfect meal," says Allen Dikker, the 34-year-old founder of Potatopia. "Everyone eats potatoes. Every culture and every place. Now we're saying, 'Don't eat it as a side dish, eat it as a meal.'"

And some of Dikker's creations are truly as filling as a full meal. His jumbo yams are each nearly the size of a football, while Kennebec, russet and red bliss varieties are more moderately sized. The potatoes can be baked, fried, skinned or mashed, and there are eight cheeses and as many vegetable options to pile on. Then there's a choice of protein, like chicken, steak or eggs.

Where Potatopia really shines is the sauce selection. That's because Dikker first got involved in cooking through his family's love of home-made sauces. A dozen options are on the menu, and each is made from scratch, in house. Customers can choose from truffle aioli, chipotle aioli and savory bacon aioli. For the more traditional, ketchup is always an option.

The original Potatopia opened two years ago in Edison, N.J., and Dikker plans to open the second location at 378 Sixth Ave. in Manhattan Wednesday.

And he'll have plenty of competition from other single-item servers.

Just this month, New York City's (and maybe the world's) first shop dedicated to Rice Krispies Treats opened on the upper West Side. Treat House takes the iconic bake sale staple to another level, with variations like red velvet, s'mores and blueberry pie.

There's even a bubble gum flavor with a real piece of gum on top.

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Cheez-it-coated chicken nuggets from the Nugget Spot.



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"It's a very recognizable dessert item that people use," says Treat House founder Chris Russell. "It's something most people have familiarity with. I can't tell you how many dozens of treats went out last Friday to the Hamp-tons for people to serve to their weekend guests."

Russell doesn't necessarily like to call his Treat House a one-hit wonder, saying, "We're not serving meatballs. It's not just one item or one flavor. This is one base that we are interpreting in ways that haven't been done before."

That meatball reference is to the city's most iconic single-item restaurant, The Meatball Shop. This eatery, selling all things circular and meat-based, just opened its fifth location last week, on the upper East Side. It's the largest one, and perhaps evidence that meatballs are more than a trend popular with the downtown set.

"When we opened our first shop in 2010, it was a pipe dream that we would ever be able to reach so many people," says co-founder Michael Chernow.

The shop's most popular meatball is a buffalo chicken wing variety, and Chernow says the concept works so well because "you can essentially turn any dish into a meatball."

The Meatball Shop is built on the concept behind all single-item restaurants — that customers are willing to focus their meal on a single theme if that meal is done

Treat House, r., is all about goodies made from Rice Krispies Treats, below.



right.

"Simple is best," says Chernow. "The more energy you put toward one thing, the better that one thing will be. Rather than being the jack of all trades, be the master of one."

It's a lesson that Jason Hairston hopes will work for him with The Nugget Spot, an eatery he plans to open later this year. As the name implies, it will serve all things nugget, whether it be chicken, fish, pork, tofu or vegetables. He wants to add beef, but hasn't found a

recipe he's happy with yet.

"Originally I wanted to do wings," says Hairston. "But my siblings told me that girls are not going to eat wings. So we settled on nuggets, which are nice and neat and sweet nostalgic fun."

One new place that has a fairly large menu but still focuses squarely on a single item is the Sugar Factory, a restaurant that opened last February in the Meatpacking District. There's a candy store in front, and the bar serves up massive goblets of sugary cocktails with names

like "Lollipop Passion" and "White Gummi." True to their names, these \$36 concoctions have lollipops and other candies popping out the glass. Martinis come in varieties like the Jolly Rancher and (rather delicious) Almond Joy.

"It's always been a dream for me to be in the confectionery businesses," says Sugar Factory founder Charissa Davidovici, who is based in Las Vegas. "I love candy and I love baking. I wanted it to be something more than just an ordinary restaurant."

Davidovici's candy shops have proven so successful that she recently opened an outlet in Bahrain, and another is planned closer to home in Brooklyn, at the Barclays Center later this year.

Expansion is a common goal for many of the single-item restaurant founders. The eateries' simplistic focus makes recreating the experience easy.

Russell already has expansion plans in the works for Treat House, and The Meatball Shop is well on its way to world domination. Dikker hopes his Potatopia is next.

"If you can do one thing and do it in the best way, people really appreciate that," he says. "People are going to try us and realize we make the best potato."



The Sugar Factory garnishes its sizable cocktails with candy.