



Open! Open! Open!
Checking in on The Meatball Shop's New Upper West Side Branch

By Zachary Feldman Thu, Jul 17 2014 at 9:02 AM 1 Comment
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Photos by Zachary Feldman

Families and eaters with young-at-heart palates rejoice: Michael Chernow and chef Daniel Holzman have opened the sixth outpost of their monstrously popular meatball-centric eatery **The Meatball Shop (447 Amsterdam Avenue, 212-492-1722)**. Just how popular is it? Enough that people were willing to brave quoted hour-long waits in the rain on day two, shielding themselves with umbrellas or loitering in apartment doorways. After launching on the Lower East Side in 2010, Chernow and Holzman have made a rapid push outward, colonizing neighborhoods like Chelsea, Williamsburg, and the West Village with their ball-proselytizing ways.

Their newest location, in the works since the beginning of the year, is an ample, dual-roomed space outfitted in the group's signature faux-fancy style, with crimson walls showcasing a mishmash of period photographs. Bass booms, maxed out on the stereo. The ball boys have gone full-Fallon with cutesy jokes, installing a sign over the bathroom alcove embossed with the words "WASH BALLS HERE." And thanks to the split dining room, this location's sign follows suit, so that the second half simply reads "Ball Shop." See what they did there?

The goofy fun continues with beverages like 'Fool-Aid,' a rum and brandy punch, and a tequila-spiked Cajun iced coffee that seemingly commits the offense of mixing multiple breakfast liquids (oranges, sweetened milk, cold brew coffee) and Cajun seasoning, like something a tantrum-throwing child would create. But it turns out to be a grownup version of Dominican morir soñando, a summertime favorite that melds only orange juice and milk.

The Meatball Shop menu is relatively unchanged from shop to shop, save for daily specials. On the night we went, there were crescents of summer squash glistening with herb butter and a serviceable Mexican-inspired salad with lime crema dressing, roasted corn, and cherry tomatoes. In honor of Bastille Day: coq au vin meatballs with red wine mushroom sauce, which we put over polenta. Sheltered from the storm, the messy plate was nearly as comforting as the dish it referenced.

A week hasn't even passed, but Holzman and Chernow are pros at this point. Service was efficient despite finished drinks that weren't cleared to make way for the food, which arrived all at once, crowding the table. I also don't understand why they withhold knives, making diners ask for them. It's a restaurant, not a metal tube hurtling through the sky at hundreds of miles per hour. They even have some local competition from chef/restaurateur Nicky Mormando, proprietor of Polpetta, who opened down the block on Amsterdam Avenue this past April.

The restaurant is also test-driving an ice cream cart at this location. Open from 2 to 5 p.m. and then again from 10 p.m. to close, it doles out cookie sandwiches with seasonal ice creams like corn and sour cherry lambic. Should you find yourself hoisting a pint at one of the nearby watering holes, it's worth keeping in mind for satisfying a midnight sweet tooth. Hit the next page for pictures.

