

New York City Wine & Food Festival

Donatella ekes out win over Meatball Shop dudes



The competition was fierce at last night's "Meatball Madness" event at La.venue. It was a hot event -- and not just because Giada De Laurentiis and Katie Lee were flitting about. The room was sweltering. No matter. There were dozens of meatballs to try and we didn't even come close to sampling them all -- including the winning ball from siren Donatella Arpaia ([check out images from her new Donatella magazine on Eater.com](#)). "I am completely shocked -- there was a lot of great competition," said Arpaia (above), who whipped up her mother's recipe involving a mixture of veal and bread. OK, well maybe not *all* that shocked: "Personally I thought they were the best," she continued. "Because they're my mom's." Hey, who can argue with mom's meatballs?

This year's winner was decided by the crowd and every attendee was given a cute meatball poker chip from sponsor Eater.com to vote with. Apparently, Arpaia's entry beat out the ever adorable guys from the Meatball Shop by a mere four chips. Although stuck in a back room, Daniel Holzman (below left) and Michael Chernow (below right) gamely worked the crowd with such come-ons as "Hot balls available for your consumption!" and "Our balls are your pleasure!" Though the duo were reportedly working on a new recipe for the competition, in the end, they decided on a Meatball Shop mainstay: spicy pork balls with spicy pork meat sauce on a bed of polenta. "We had a whole plan to do something new but Mike told me -- he's the smart one and the good-looking one and the charismatic one -- he was like, 'Why don't you not be stupid and do something people are going to like. You can make your goat balls some other time,'" laughed Holzman.



And there were plenty of other winners in the room, too, including our personal favorites: Jim Lahey of Co.'s mini meatball hero; Nate Appleman of Pulino's pepperoni meatball with pizza bianca and fonduta; and Fortunato Nicotra of Felidia's "naked" ravioli meatballs -- a delicate, well-balanced plate featuring a salad of frisee and arugula with king oyster mushrooms, topped with veal, beef and pork meatballs with spinach and rice, Grana Padano fonduta and a sprinkling of puffed rice.