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Off the Menu: The Meatball Shop

By FLORENCE FABRICANT



Chester Higgins Jr./The New York Times

Daniel Holzman, left, Donna Chernow and Michael Chernow at the Meatball Shop.

Andrew Carmellini made it safe for chefs to crank out meatballs. But it took Michael Chernow and Daniel Holzman, childhood friends who ended up working in restaurants, to open a cafe on the Lower East Side that revolves entirely around meatballs.

"We love old-fashioned New York meatball heroes so we thought, why not?" Mr. Holzman said. He is a veteran of the kitchens of Le Bernardin and of Fifth Floor in San Francisco; Mr. Chernow once ran Frank in the East Village. At first they planned nothing more ambitious than a window onto the street where they could dish meatballs to passers-by in jaw-breaking hero style, dripping cheese and sauce, or in daintier sliders. But they found a space large enough for a roomy kitchen along with table and counter seating.

The Meatball Shop, which will open next Wednesday, is all done with the requisite subway tiles, bare brick and recycled wood, with lanterns from Syracuse, vintage New York photos, an open kitchen and self-service counter. Beer is served in old quart-size milk bottles. And with this kind of approach you know they're locavores, too.

The meatballs come in beef and spicy pork as well as chicken, vegetable, salmon and a weekly special, all quite forcefully seasoned. The chicken? It doesn't taste like chicken. Sauce, cheese, starchy accompaniments and some vegetables round out the menu. Donna Chernow, a model turned pastry chef who is married to Michael, is churning fresh ice cream that she rolls up, meatball-style, and squashes between freshly-baked cookies. At prices that start at \$3 and rarely climb to double digits, it's meatballs for all.

The Meatball Shop: 84 Stanton Street (Allen Street), (212) 982-8895

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