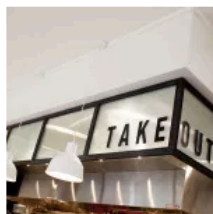
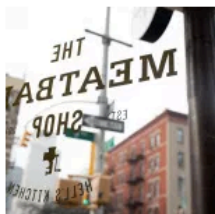


Feast for The Eye: Sidepiece Bar Opens With The Meatball Shop

"The idea was let's just throw away our inhibitions and really try and reinvent the whole thing," said co-owner Daniel Holzman.

By **Kristen Tauer** on March 3, 2017



A few hours before the Hell's Kitchen location of The Meatball Shop and its accompanying bar Sidepiece opened their doors to the public in Manhattan, co-owner Daniel Holzman was eager to show off the artistic touches of the new space.

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He pointed out a neon sign hanging in the hallway connecting the two establishments, which lights up to depict a pig being turned into meatballs. (It's cuter and less morbid than it sounds.) He also stopped to discuss the elaborate dollhouse diorama inserted in the wall of the hallway, positioned several feet below eye level. Some guests may miss it as they walk by — which would be a shame, since it's a rewarding detail for anyone who peeks inside.

"I got really excited about dioramas," said Holzman, stooped and peering into its many rooms, decked with furniture and various animal figurines. "[The artist] is just so great, and just took it to the next level — there's all kinds of weird stuff. There's an octopus in a spaceship serving meatballs," he continued, gesturing to a whimsical scene in the miniature attic.



An elaborate diorama is installed in the wall connecting Sidepiece and The Meatball Shop.
Lexie Moreland/WWD

Located on 9th Avenue, the seventh location of The Meatball Shop takes an airier, lighter approach than some of the more cavernous spaces. After a burst of rapid expansion, Holzman's team took a step back to reflect on what they'd built. "We took a couple of years off and decided that we really needed to regroup and concentrate on making sure that we were happy with the teams, and not moving too quickly and losing sight of what our goals were," Holzman explained from Sidepiece. "People get burnt out when you open restaurant after restaurant."

The Meatball Shop sits on a corner of the south-facing avenue, a dream location for a restaurateur. "I'm always looking for real estate everywhere I go," he said. "It's the funniest feeling, you walk into a space and you immediately know. You find a place that would work and you walk in and are like, 'This feels like a meatball shop.'"

The team approached their new location with the mentality of if starting from scratch; what would a meatball shop look like? “The idea was let’s just throw away our inhibitions and really try and reinvent the whole thing,” Holzman said. “What would we do if we could start from scratch, knowing what we know?” Reevaluation of the menu led to them removing less popular items, but aesthetics and menu changes aside, the vibe of the establishment restaurants is still intact. “I feel very strongly that what makes a meatball shop feel like a meatball shop are the people, the culture of the place, the **food** and the fun that we have,” he added.

With the new location and Sidepiece, they’re hoping to appeal to the wide demographic of the neighborhood, which isn’t a stretch given the versatility of other locations. “We’ve had 80-year-old birthday parties, 5-year-old birthday parties, and hipsters who are still drunk from the night before, and everything in between at our restaurants, always,” Holzman said. “I’m hoping that we have all of the people that make this neighborhood really exciting and vibrant.”

At Sidepiece, the menu features bar **food** through the filter of the meatball — meatball nachos, meatball sloppy joe sliders, meatball fondue for two. As Holzman showed off the menus, he pointed out the illustrated meatball characters decorating the white space. “This little meatball character is terribly cute. We call him ‘Z.’ And it secretly is inspired by me,” he said, popping over to the bar’s door to pose with one arm akimbo to mimic the drawing.

It’s been seven years since the original Meatball Shop location opened on Stanton Street on the Lower East Side. In that time, what’s the foremost lesson that Holzman has learned?

“Meatballs are a pain in the ass to roll.”



The bar at Sidepiece, with art by Holzman’s mother. Lexie Moreland/WWD