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SUPERMARKET NEWS

MODERN COMFORT

Restaurants are putting a new spin on comfort food, reimagining meatballs, meatloaves and mac & cheese with premium ingredients and unexpected twists

By JENNA TELESKA

It's familiar, but new. Restaurants are taking well-loved comfort food — mac and cheese, grits, fried chicken, meatloaf — and reworking them with fresh ingredients and contemporary flair. The trend could influence the preparations and ingredients in supermarket prepared food departments.

For instance, even something as simple as a meatball has been reinvented and expanded. The Meatball Shop in New York's Lower East Side neighborhood offers a customizable menu of meatball-based dishes such as the Smash, in which customers receive two meatballs — made of beef, pork, chicken, vegetable or a special — smashed into a brioche bun with a choice of tomato, spicy meat, mushroom, parmesan cream, pesto, or a special sauce and mozzarella cheese, or provolone cheese with a side salad. Another dish, Everything But the Kitchen Sink, lives up to its name with three meatballs over the restaurant's greenmarket veggies and a salad.

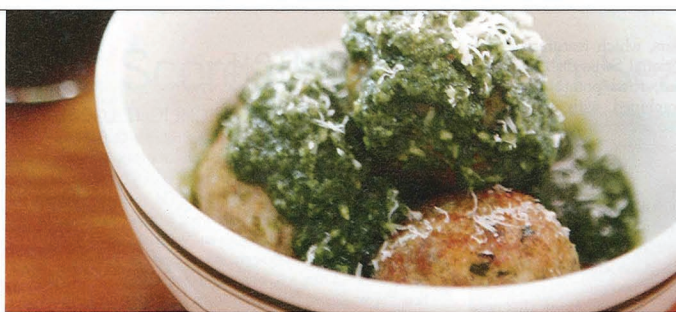
The Meatball Shop not only offers variety in its meatball offerings, but ingredients that its customers can feel good about. When asked about the importance of local and sustainable sourcing to the restaurant, Michael Chernow, co-owner and general manager said, "It's essentially where we start and end. We made sure to do the right thing as far as sourcing." In season, the restaurant gets the majority of its market vegetables from a local farmer, and lists the farm source of each of its protein items on its website.

"It's a humongous part of our concept. Everybody thinks that when you source locally and sustainably you have to charge an arm and a leg for a meal ... one of our main focal points is that that is absolutely not true," Chernow said. "You can do the right thing as far as sourcing ingredients, put them on a plate and charge a fraction of what a typical farm-to-table restaurant charges."

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The Meatball Shop offers beef, spicy pork, chicken and vegetable meatballs, along with a daily special and 5 different sauces.