



Food Courting

By Michael Nagrant

WILL DMK BURGER BAR STEAL YOUR HEART?

MAYBE I'VE BEEN LOOKIN' FOR LOVE IN ALL THE WRONG PLACES, but DMK Burger Bar, the new Lakeview burger joint from Michael Kornick (MK) and David Morton, says its meat patties are made from "grass-fed beef with love" and all I'm finding is a strong sense of like. You could be friends with the pillowy-soft

toasted potato buns, but the floury residue on top is a deal-breaker for any long-term relationship. All beef patties here are grilled to a medium-well, but if I were to commit to something bigger, I need mine medium-rare.

The NY pastrami burger topped with grand cru gruyere, sauerkraut and "Leroy's remoulade" reads like the Match.com girl of my dreams, but as anyone who's been on an uncomfortably silent date knows, some people just give good profile. The gruyere lacks funk, the pastrami exhibits little pepperiness or punchy garlic and the sauerkraut has no tang. You don't want a topping to overpower, but like any good partner you want it to complement and challenge. The pastrami-burger toppings are like a devoted trophy wife, "Mad Men"'s Betty Draper (before the affairs), who never says a damn thing.

The turkey burger, which my waitress refers to as an "alternative" burger (less like it's a seven-inch single from Sub Pop Records and more like it's a dirty patchouli-scented hippie), clucks along with a righteous juiciness, albeit displaying little inherent flavor, and the same dusty bun. The eggplant topping shows a touch of subtle fruitiness, like a good Jane Lynch performance. But, alas, Lynch is gay, and I'm a straight beef-eating fool.

The DMK burger is Sandra Bullock to Kuma's Angelina Jolie. You'd look at the pictures of the burgers in a magazine, but you wouldn't hang them on your wall. You certainly wouldn't want to spend an hour waiting for a DMK Burger, which on weekend nights is what you have to do right now. This isn't chef Michael Kornick's first rodeo. I know he knows this burger is good, but that it's not great. If he's really the big-time chef, why isn't he opening with a burger as good as or better than Kuma's? He knows the proper ratios of meat to fat and he's got a solid palate. A particular phrase used in corporate America to speed the rollout of a product is "good enough" and certainly this burger is good enough for a national franchise, and maybe that's all that matters. Then again, maybe Kornick just doesn't believe in soul mates. I do, and whether it's the fried chicken at Gus's World Famous in Memphis, the beefy soup at Pho 888 on Argyle Street, or the haute Denny's Grand Slam-like Plogue à Champlain topped with foie gras at Montreal's Au Pied de Cochon, I'd wait for a lifetime. With these burgers I'm hoping I can get away with a hug and an empty promise to call back in a few days.

Though, one rule of dating, or hook-ups anyway, is with much good drink, everything looks a little better, and on that count, DMK's got a cocktail program that includes a Death + Company Whirling Tiger featuring a splash of bourbon lifted by bright apple, lemon and ginger and silky foam that would have you sucking down factory-farmed beef topped with slices of Kraft American singles with guilt-free devotion.

If Kornick doesn't know love, his partner David Morton certainly knows lust. Morton's father is the late Arnie Morton, Hef's boy, founder of the defunct swinging Playboy key clubs and slinger of porn-worthy fleshy steak and plump potatoes at his namesake steakhouses. On that count, the fries at DMK are some serious come-hither carbs. The crispy sticks sport the occasional spot of Jack Palance-like wrinkled leathery skin, steamy interior fluff, and a blizzard of grated parmesan. You'd don't even need the money-shot drizzle of pheromonally funky truffle cream served on the side, but it sure doesn't hurt.

The sweet-potato fries at DMK are both sugary and sexy, the Anne Hathaway of Chicago-area spuds. Any potential toothache is tempered by the spice of lemon-Tabasco aioli, and the crispness here is a welcome respite from the limp sweet taters slung most at other places.

Though not everything fried flies off the plate. The fried dill pickles and okra swaddled in crispy panko were cooked well, but the lack of salt and flavorless veg certainly wouldn't make Elvis thrust his pelvis.

Despite some of my misgivings, there's something about this place that I like. Maybe it's the long black church-pew seating, the Harry Potter-worthy candelabra-style chandeliers, or the lush red banquettes that swaddle you like a good bar should. Or maybe it's the Picasso-esque black-and-white drawings on the west wall, which look like an arty riff and remind one of the celebrity caricatures that line the walls at the famous Palm steakhouse. I'm not sure, but I want to find out, which I guess means that at the very least, DMK Burger Bar is second-date material.

DMK Burger Bar, 2954 North Sheffield, (773)360-8686, dmkburgerbar.com

TIP OF THE WEEK
JAMES MCMANUS



Mark Bazer's monthly Interview Show at Hideout continues to feature first-class guests, and this installment is no different. James McManus, author of the 2003 bestselling poker book "Positively Fifth Street," returns with yet another book about the storied game, titled "Cowboys Full: The Story of Poker." McManus ambitiously attempts to tell the full story of poker, its importance throughout history as both a social activity and a game of uniquely equal competition. He argues that, from the Wild West to today, poker is truly America's pastime. (It should come as no surprise, McManus being a poker fiend himself.) Having only read excerpts myself, I can't speak for the entire work, but I can say that having spoken with McManus on a couple of occasions, he's a hell of a storyteller. As a bonus for this event, Audrey Niffenegger discusses her new, and best, novel, "Her Fearful Symmetry." Rhymefest and Stephanie Izard also appear. (Tom Lynch)

The Interview Show takes place December 4 at Hideout, 1354 West Wabansia, (773)227-4433, at 6:30pm. \$5.

READINGS

THU/3

→ Poetry Off the Shelf

Reginal Gibbons reads "Oidipous Tyrannos: Oedipus the King," with music by Fulcrum Point New Music Project. **See 411 for more.** National Hellenic Museum, 801 W. Adams, (312)787-7070. 6pm.

FRI/4

→ The Interview Show

Mark Bazer's monthly show features James McManus, Audrey Niffenegger and Rhymefest, plus Stephanie Izard. **See Tip of the Week.** Hideout, 1354 W. Wabansia, (773)227-4433. 6:30pm. \$5.

Nona Willis Aronowitz

The author reads from "Girldrive: Criss-crossing America, Redefining Feminism." *Women and Children First Bookstore, 5233 N. Clark, (773)769-9299. 7:30pm. Free.*

SAT/5

Amy Krouse Rosenthal

The author discusses "Sugar Cookies: Sweet Little Lessons on Love." *Women and Children First Bookstore, 5233 N. Clark, (773)769-9299. 10am. Free.*

WED/9

Danny's Reading Series

Featuring poets Alan Bernheimer and Karyna McGlynn. *Danny's Tavern, 1951 W. Dickens, (773)489-6457. 7:30pm. Free.*

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