

FRANKS 'N' DAWGS ENTERS THE GOURMET SAUSAGE GAME



North Side Dog Show

By Michael Nagrant

“OY THINK SHE’S A LITTLE MAW, SHALL WE SAY, ENHANCED THAIR.”

It may not be the jovial wise-cracking of Hot Doug’s owner Doug Sohn, but Frank ‘N’ Dawgs owner, the Australian-born Alexander Brunacci, cracking here about a photo of Kim Kardashian, is doing fine with his own brand of cash-register-side smart-assery.

I hate to even bring up the whole Hot Doug’s thing, because I know everyone else will too. But, frankly (so punny, I know), it’s impossible not to. Frank ‘N’ Dawgs with their “5-Star Dining on a Bun” tagline and by virtue of its similarities to Doug’s, has the encased-meats emporium in its cross hairs.

But Frank ‘N’ Dawgs, more often than not, is not like Hot Doug’s. It’s not a pop-culture-kitsch-laden dining room filled with mustard-and-ketchup-colored bric-a-brac or sexually charged mustard-covered Britney Spears’ photos. It doesn’t serve duck-fat fries, and the Buzzcocks aren’t snarling in your ears. Frank ‘N’ Dawgs also makes some of its own sausages.

These are, on the whole, generally good things. For example, if your aesthetic tastes are informed by *GWAR* or the Vampire Lestat is one of your heroes, you will totally dig the black-paint-and-studded-metal-lined walls. If you don’t just skew fashionably goth, but are really depressed, or lovelorn, you will love the Smiths-laden soundtrack.

If you are like me, you will also like their pitch-perfect, well-salted deep orange-marigold colored French fries. Just make sure to mix the house-made aioli with a little salt before you dip them into it. Also, as a matter of perspective, which I know many wouldn’t agree with, I’ve always thought that Sohn’s regular fries were better than his usually limper duck-fat fries, and that frying them in the oil was kind of a gimmick. The pork-and-suet-fried fries at the Publican, now that’s an oil trick I can get behind.

Also, though Sohn is culinary-school-trained, he doesn’t make his own sausages. Who can blame the guy? He’s a one-man show who’d have no life if he did. Instead, he’s sourced sausages from some of the very best purveyors nationwide, and his selections are as satisfying as any charcuterie I’ve had.

Franks doesn’t make all their own sausages either, but when they do, as in the Chicken Caesar—a garlicky juicy chicken dog—it’s a really special thing. When others make theirs, as in a pork-loin sausage or a beef curry dog, the texture sometimes seems a little too fine and lean.

Franks’ split and toasted Texas-toast-thick buns have airy, though not eggy, brioche-like interiors, and while I wouldn’t want one for my basic Chicago dog, I prefer them over the general buns Sohn uses for his gourmet sausages.

I generally subscribe to the theory that there’s nothing dirty about hotdogs, pizza, bbq and sex unless you’re doing them right. That’s why I appreciate the delicate organic-topping-laden Great Lake pizza, but I’ll never hunger for it like an oozy dripping sausage-hunk-and-giardiniera-topped slice of Pequod’s.

As such, I’ve always loved that though Doug’s gourmet sausages might sound dainty, the reality is: dripping with melting foie gras, slathers of truffle-funked mustard, and sweet nests of caramelized onion, they were easily as dirty as the backstage green-room antics at a Tommy Lee/Kid Rock double-bill concert.

However, maybe I’ve changed, for I really like the architectural salad, the jewel-like curls of lacquered candied orange peel and blood-orange-oil-perfumed raisin slaw piled on the Franks ‘N’ Dawgs beef curry dawg. In some cases, the refinement of the condiment and balance of flavors on some of these hot dogs would be at home at Brunacci’s brother’s (Frank) kitchen at Sixteen in the Trump Tower.

I still retain my old ways, though, for my favorite thing at Franks ‘N’ Dawgs is the celebrity-chef-of-the-month offering from Chicago-lobster-dog-inventing chef Phillip Foss of Lockwood. The “Foss Hog,” a pork-loin sausage piled with cobb-smoked bacon, a runny fried egg and maple syrup, is a drippy satisfying sweet smoky mess and a wonderful edible representation of the smack-talking, occasionally ribald Foss.

Don’t get me wrong. I love Hot Doug’s. It’s one of those places I return to, where I happily spend my own money, forget about my profession and chow only for the love of the game. But, I think Frank ‘N’ Dawgs has got something worthwhile going on. And best of all, the only line you occasionally have to wait in to eat here is if you drive and must feed the city’s automated parking meter outside. That however is likely to change.

Frank ‘N’ Dawgs, 1863 North Clybourn, (312)281-5187

LITERARY DEATH MATCH

→ =RECOMMENDED

All events are free unless otherwise noted.

THU/1

→ 11th Annual Edible Books Show and Tea

Public is invited to design, cook, and bake edible books to be juried for various prizes. Admission \$10 or free with an edible book. Columbia College Library, 3rd Floor, 624 S. Michigan, (312)369-7027. 6pm.

Nerds at Heart’s Anecdote

Dating for Nerds teams up with 2nd Story for an evening of literary mingling. Holiday Club, 4000 N. Sheridan, (312)265-6085. 7pm. \$20 advance/\$25 door.

Story Club

Open mic for storytelling, featured readers Fred Reuland and Jennifer Peepas. Uncommon Ground, 3800 N. Clark, (773)929-3680. 8pm.

FRI/2

The Guantanamo Lawyers

Jonathan Hafetz, H. Candace Gorman, and Aziz Huq discuss the new book, “The Guantanamo Lawyers: Inside a Prison Outside the Law.” Babara’s Bookstore, 1218 S. Halsted, (312)413-2665. 6pm.

SAT/3

→ Red Rover Series

“Fairy Tales” theme, featuring Jenny Bouly and Kate Zambreno. Outer Space Studio, 1474 N. Milwaukee, (773)645-1853. 7pm. \$4 suggested donation.

TUE/6

Elif Batuman

Author reads from her book, “The Possessed: Adventures with Russian Books and the People Who Read Them.” 57th Street Books 1301 E. 57th, (773)684-1300. 6:30 pm.

Joyland vs. CellStories

Brian Joseph Davis of Joyland will be reading from “Ronald Reagan, My Fatherland,” and Dan Sinker of CellStories will present stories from cell phones. Quimby’s Bookstore, 1854 W. North, (773)342-0910. 7pm.

WED/7

John Green and David Levithan

Authors read from their new book, “Will Grayson, Will Grayson!” Theatre Building, 1225 W. Belmont, (773)293-2665. 7pm. \$25, includes copy of book.

→ Reading Under the Influence

Featuring authors Peter Schilling, Delphine Pontvieux, Kim Morris, and Brendan Detzner. Sheffield’s, 3258 N. Sheffield, (773)281-4989. 7pm.



Opium Magazine presents its fifth Chicago Literary Death Match at Hideout on this April Fools Day, featuring a panel of three judges presiding over four readers who read their work to the death, so to speak. Featherproof Books’ Zach Dodson, stand-up comic Cameron Esposito and Trap Door Theatre’s Tiffany Joy Ross are our judges for the evening, while the readers are The Encyclopedia Show’s Robbie Q. Telfer, Uncalled-for Readings’ Tim Jones-Yelvington, Green Lantern’s Caroline Picard and Kevin Leahy. Opium’s Todd Zuniga and Comedy Central blogger Dennis DiClaudio host the activities. A night of literary debauchery, Literary Death Match leaves some blood on the floor. It being April Fools and all, I wouldn’t be surprised if a few tricks were in store. (Tom Lynch)

April 1 at Hideout, 1354 West Wabansia, (773)227-4433, at 8:30pm. \$5-\$8.

