

## eat &amp; drink

MINI-REVIEW  
Bareburger3357 N. Lincoln Ave.  
773-697-3079

Give it some time

ALMOST  
THERENEW YORK IMPORT BAREBURGER  
HAS A MEAN CHICKEN SANDWICH,  
BUT WHAT ABOUT THE BURGERS?Hot Honey Chicken with a side of  
sweet potato fries and onion rings  
LENNY GLIMORE/REDEYE PHOTOS

By Michael Nagrant | FOR REDEYE

**T**he only thing I find more suspect and unnecessary than a new steakhouse is a new burger franchise. I mean, I get it. Everyone loves pizza, tacos, sushi and, yeah, burgers. There can never be enough of these major food groups. And that might be true if you're making something unique or top-notch, but the proliferation of a particular food concept is often marked by a glut of mediocre players riding a trend.

As far as boutique burger chains go, Chicago has Epic Burger, M Burger, Umami Burger, Good Stuff Eatery and Shake Shack—just to name a few. The competition to sling grilled beef around here is fierce. The folks behind New York-based Bareburger, which planted its first foothold in Lakeview last month, know this. Their CEO is named Euripides Pelekanos. And if you know anything about Euripides the Greek playwright, it's that he was a controversial, innovative badass. And Bareburger does have an innovative shtick. It's "bare" in that the company pursues a no-hormone, no-additive, no-pesticide approach to ingredient

sourcing. They stick to fair-trade, non-GMO stuff whenever possible. In other words, they're trying to build a better burger. But do they?

**The local franchisee**

Apparently you can go home again. Bareburger's Chicago franchisee (three more Chicagoland locations are in the works) Jerry Brunton grew up in Woodridge, Lisle and Naperville, Ill., but spent the past 20 years in London and New York working in consulting. Of the switch to the restaurant industry, Brunton said, "I don't know that I chose this as much as it chose me."

While living in New York, Brunton and his wife walked by Bareburger and wondered if they'd ever been, so they tried it on a whim. Brunton enjoyed the experience so much that he did some research and called up the owners and told them he thought the concept would do well in Chicago. "They said, 'Well, you're the guy to do it.' I said I have no restaurant experience," Brunton said. "But we share a similar philosophy of not rushing things and doing stuff to get it right, so it made sense."

**The scene**

If the name Bareburger strikes you as a little hippie, you're right. The logo, which features a wavy font and a bear riding a big-wheel bike, looks like it was cribbed from a Grateful Dead tour poster. The menu touts stuff like "crops" and "greens," and the dining room has a Chicago flag made out of flower prints. A hodgepodge of colorful lampshades hangs from the ceiling. In other words, it's totally groovy.

**The food**

Though I understand the cutesy abbreviation "wiches" topping a section of the Bareburger menu, seeing the word gives me flashbacks of Anjelica Huston peeling off her face to reveal her wrinkled beak-nosed witch countenance in the movie "The Witches." Despite the horrifying memory, I still ordered something called Hot Honey Chicken (\$9.75) from that section.

What arrives is a golden-crisp wedge of poultry, the flesh tangy with buttermilk and juicy to its core, dripping with chili-spiked honey. The whole thing is topped with shaved Brussels sprouts and grilled pineapple and enrobed in a whole-wheat bun crusted with crispy sprouts. There were also fried crunchy lotus root circles hanging from a toothpick on top of the burger. Like a late-night talk show sidekick, the lotus root was extraneous and cumbersome. Its crispness would be better deployed within the burger. But other than that, the interplay of sweet, spicy and tangy was balanced, making this a top-notch fried chicken sandwich.



**RATINGS KEY** \*\*\*\*\* DEAD UPON ARRIVAL \*\*\*\*\* PROCEED WITH CAUTION \*\*\*\*\* GIVE IT SOME TIME  
 \*\*\*\*\* TAKE IT OR LEAVE IT \*\*\*\*\* OFF TO A GOOD START \*\*\*\*\* HEATING UP \*\*\*\*\* ALREADY HOT



But this place is called Bareburger, not Barechicken, so what of the patties? The burgers ain't cheap, but they're fairly priced relative to the competition. The cheapest beef burger clocks in at \$9.95. For reference, a Shake Shack double ShackBurger, which is hormone- and antibiotic-free, clocks in at \$8.09 in Chicago.

My favorite beef option here was the Buckaroo (\$13.65) topped with aged cheddar, brisket, wild mushrooms and house barbecue sauce and served on a custardy brioche bun. The thin slices of smoky brisket are barbecue joint quality, while the cheddar is sharp and the mushrooms savory and earthy. The only problem is that the patty is supposed to be cooked medium, but mine arrived well-done, bordering on dry. The same problem plagued a wild boar burger called the Hog Wild (\$11.25). There was some moisture resurrection provided by a runny fried egg from Harrison's Poultry in Glenview, Ill. Despite the dryness, spicy pimiento cheese and pickled green tomatoes on top offer a delightful acidic punch.

The meat is high quality. The grind is thick and has a loose pack. The beef has a mineral kick, and the pork a bit of funk. It's procured from farms that use the Temple Grandin method of humane slaughter, and you can taste the focus on quality. Once the cooks find their grill rhythm, these should be one of the better burgers in Chicago.

The sides fared more consistently than the meat. Sweet potato fries (\$4.25) were cut thick and had a touch of skin and soft, fluffy interiors, and onion rings (\$4.50) featured a flaky panko crust dotted with herbs (a side

combo of both is available for \$5.90). The kimchi slaw was fizzy and spicy (\$3.85). My only quibble here is the slaw could use a touch less mayo.

### The drinks

Unlike most burger spots, Bareburger has a full bar. (This is fitting as the Bareburger founders started out running a club. When the club closed, they knew the burgers they served there were good, so they resurrected the recipe to start the chain.) The beer list features 12 local brews on tap, including a coppery-colored Temperance Beer Co. Smittytown extra special bitter (\$5), which drinks like a clean, punchy lager and paired well with the burgers. Bareburger's raspberry shake (\$5.95) is life-changing. If I ever become an actor and do one of those roles where I need to gain 100 pounds like Robert De Niro did for "Raging Bull," this shake would be my

secret weapon. It's a simple mix of raspberry preserves and organic Blue Marble ice cream from Brooklyn, but it bursts with farm-fresh raspberry essence and closes with a comforting creamy finish.

**Bottom line:** Whether it's top smoked brisket or pickled green tomatoes, the condiment and flavor combinations happening at Bareburger are a cut above. While the meat quality is high, my burgers were a little overdone. If the cooks make this adjustment, they will achieve true burger nirvana in a crowded field.

MICHAEL NAGRANT IS A REDEYE CONTRIBUTOR.  
 REPORTERS VISIT RESTAURANTS UNANNOUNCED,  
 AND MEALS ARE PAID FOR BY REDEYE.



Raspberry shake

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