



Currywurst Lenny Gilmore/Redeye Photos

# FOOD TRUCK TO DUNGEON

AT DMEN TAP, THE BEER IS FLOWING AND THE CURRYWURST IS POPPIN'

By Michael Nagrant | FOR REDEYE

I was afraid I might get murdered if I played Dungeons & Dragons. My mom, like so many other parents in the late 1980s, got caught up in a moral uproar about the popular role-playing game. She cited news accounts of dungeon masters supposedly committing suicide and murder as a result of playing the game and warned me I should stay away. So when I heard that Dungeons & Dragons influenced DMen Tap, a new Logan Square restaurant from Donermen food truck owners Shawn Podgurski and Phil Naumann, I was a little apprehensive to visit.

## THE ROOM

I assumed the place would be some kind of dark dungeon filled with 12-sided dice and budding Wiccans. The restaurant logo, which features a demon wielding scimitars amidst flames, didn't really disabuse me of this notion. But stepping inside from an onslaught of rain and sleet immediately banished those fears. The bar feels downright homey with a couple of golden repurposed church sconces casting their light against burgundy-colored walls and exposed brick. Sure, there's a painting of a Cyclops casting laser beam death rays toward the corncob-shaped Marina Towers, but DMen Tap was otherwise chill.

As bar culture has evolved in Chicago, it feels like every watering hole is now some kind of over-stylized room with a backstory ("The bar top was repurposed from an ocean liner stateroom we found at the bottom of the sea!"). DMen Tap was mostly black pleather banquettes, wood high-tops and the kind of flickering red candleholders you might find in a vintage Italian restaurant. The vibe reminded me of the early days of Map Room or Hopleaf. The focus was less on interior design and more on conversation and community.

## THE BACKSTORY

DMen Tap was more or less part of the plan Podgurski and Naumann had set when they first debuted their food truck, Donermen.

"We had hoped to eventually do this. Food trucking is hard," Podgurski said. "I mean, I'm not comparing it to people going through huge traumatic things, but the competition is fierce and the laws made it rough. Running a bar is stressful, but having things in one place is a lot easier."

The pair came up with the truck idea while they were in a band called Sybris, which played Lollapalooza in 2006.

"We had a lot of part time jobs. We did it for 11 years, but at some point as we got older, we knew we weren't going to be The Rolling Stones," Podgurski said. "I noticed that there was a switch in the city, and chefs were the new rock stars. Where we once had Jeff Tweedy, Liz Phair or Billy Corgan, people were talking about chefs that way. We used to go to Rainbo [Club] and people would ask what band you were in. But pretty soon, I noticed the question became, 'Where do you sous chef?'"

## REVIEW

**DMen Tap**  
2849 W. Belmont  
Ave. 773-961-8757  
★★

Chicken doner kebab



**THE FOOD**

Before they launched the truck, Podgurski and Naumann went to Germany, where they estimate they tried 30 different doner kebabs and nearly 70 currywursts. They returned to Chicago to scour Middle Eastern bakeries to find the right pita and sausage makers to craft the sausage for the currywurst. Podgurski developed a curry blend.

That attention to detail and research has paid off. The gas-roasted chicken doner (\$11) is juicy and flecked with char and pepper. The pickled salad and condiment zings through the richness of the chicken, and their toasted pita is crackling on the outside and pillowy inside. The currywurst sausage (\$9) is custard smooth and sits on a bed of golden French fries smothered in thick, lip-smacking curry paste.

Poutine (\$9) has become so popular in Chicago that it should probably be on the Banned Restaurant Food list along with pork belly and caprese salads. The DMen version, though, is something. Curds meld into the hot gravy bath, stretching and oozing like a never-ending mozzarella stick. And the fries stand up to the onslaught.

If I have any complaint at all about the food, it's that the fries, which are used for the currywurst and poutine, are notably a food service product and not hand-cut in house. I don't begrudge Podgurski this point. Their kitchen is small and they're making a lot of stuff themselves. The fries are good. There's just room for them to be great.

**THE DRINKS**

I mentioned Map Room earlier, but the beer list at DMen Tap isn't as encyclopedic. Still, it's a very well curated list. Penrose Raspberry dubbel (\$7) wafts a serious breadly perfume followed by a fruity (not sweet) top note. 3 Floyd's Yum Yum (\$6) tastes like the lovechild of a pale ale and wheat beer.

You don't expect good cocktails at a beer bar, but those are here too. I've sipped so many old fashioned in recent years that I'm expecting to transform in to Don Draper any minute. The Winter Old Fash-



Penrose Raspberry dubbel

ioned (\$10) served here is certainly boozy, but the cinnamon syrup and orange bitters in the mix lend a touch of fire and balance. The Caesar (\$6)—with its celery salt rim, picante Clamato juice and vodka—drinks like a satisfying liquid version of a Chicago dog, minus the hot dog. This might seem weird, but I can't ever get enough. Now, if they only spiked it with a sport pepper.

**THE SERVICE**

Guests order food from a separate take-out window at the back of the bar. The window is so high off the ground that you might feel like a hobbit supplicating to Gandalf. Or maybe like you're ordering from a food truck, thus replicating the Donermen truck experience indoors. The cool thing is you don't have to stand around and wait for your food. The cooks bring it out to your table and even bus the tables once you've finished.

**BOTTOM LINE**

Fans of classic Chicago bars like Map Room, Hopleaf and their ilk are going to really dig DMen Tap. Whereas so many bars these days are masquerading as baby clubs pulsing with EDM and serving as booty-call barns, DMen Tap is a place for grown-ups to gulp down high quality brews, chow on spit roasted meats and chill.

*Michael Nagrant is a RedEye freelancer. Reporters visit restaurants unannounced, and meals are paid for by RedEye.*

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