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**eat&drink**



Potter's cheese curds.

**worth a trip**

**FRIED CHEESE CURDS AT POTTER'S BURGER BAR IN THE LOOP**

By **Michael Nagrant** | FOR REDEYE

Never mind the beef, here's the cheese curds. I came to the new incarnation of Potter's Chicago Burger Bar in the Palmer House hotel seeking burgers topped with shaved A5 Kobe beef, truffle aioli, edible gold leaf and foie gras (\$49), a patty befitting a historic hotel whose fresco-covered lobby rivals the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel. But I found no nirvana.

All three burgers I tried, though requested medium rare, were cooked well done and bone dry. Named after Chicago neighborhoods (the aforementioned burger was naturally dubbed the "Gold Coast"), many of the flavor combinations were abominations. The Hyde Park (\$13) featured a slop of cole slaw, smoked cheddar, BBQ sauce and, oddly, a fried green tomato. Except it was not a fried green tomato, but a pickled ripe red one. I know this because the tomatoes' fried crust had sloughed off and fused to the soggy bun.

But I hardly minded any of this, precisely because of the cheese curds (\$9).

They're not just some pedestrian Northwoods greasy curds either. They were popcorn light, the Wisconsin cheddar, not oozy, but gossamer and enveloped in a fluffy, fried-well-salt and peppered tempura jacket. The accompanying dip was also balanced. Peppadew peppers blended into a creamy aioli added tangy zing and a touch of fiery spice and lightened the overall load of what could have been a gut bomb.

While the curds were elegant, they also had a little Logan Square casual hipster in them, i.e. the tempura batter was spiked with fizzy Pabst Blue Ribbon.

"The cheese curds are a nod to Wisconsin and the Midwest," said Franz Schuback, director of food and beverage for the Palmer House. "With Wisconsin being in close proximity to Chicago and given its affinity for cheese, we saw a fit to incorporate the cheese curds into the burger bar concept ... The PBR is a nod to the Palmer House's ties with the 1893 World's Fair in Chicago, where the PBR received its award."

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