



The 'Flip' burger.



Vintage decor at Flip Burger.



Flip Burger's neon sign used to belong to a Rogers Park chili parlor that catered to celebrities.

FLIP OUT

Flip Burger rivals Au Cheval

By Michael Nagrant | FOR REDEYE

If the dudes from “American Pickers,” Mike Wolfe and Frank Fritz, opened a burger joint, it would probably look a lot like Flip Burger in West Town. The dining room behind the kitchen is a junk collector’s paradise, featuring a vintage Coke machine, a communal table ringed with reclaimed tulip-style diner stools and a vintage parking meter.

“I’m like a ‘Sanford and Son’ garbage collector. I like to go through the back roads in Indiana, finding stuff in small shops and old barns,” owner Felipe Caro said.

Maybe the coolest reclamation project is the restaurant’s white tile facade, promising 5-cent hamburgers and the “Snappy Service System,” a relic of when the building housed a White Castle-like burger stand. A neon sign promising chili and hamburgers beckons drivers on Ashland Avenue. It used to belong to a Rogers Park chili parlor that catered to celebrities like Marlon Brando, Clint Eastwood and Muhammad Ali.

Caro decided to close down his former project in the space, Authentaco, in favor of Flip because he said making burgers is much easier than making Mexican food. But beyond that, he was inspired by nostalgia for his own childhood experiences at the “Snappy” stand.

“I used to go with my old man when he visited the bar across the street,” Caro said. “I was 10 years old. My taste buds were not as selective then, but it was a good-ass burger, a greasy hangover remedy.”

The food

Chicago is in the midst of a burger renaissance. Arguably, this era was kick-started by the Au Cheval burger, which still inspires hourslong waits (a visiting friend from Austin told me he was quoted a four-hour wait on a Friday night a few months ago).

REVIEW

Flip Burger

1141 N. Ashland Ave.; no phone
★★★



Chili piled on a burger at Flip Burger.

Since Au Cheval's launch, there have been a lot of worthy best burger comers, often from chef-driven restaurants like Jason Vincent's City Mouse. If you love onions, you will even likely prefer the gooey juicy patty from John Shields at The Loyalist over the Au Cheval burger, and you likely won't have to wait for it. But you will pay \$16 for it.

If you don't want to wait or you only want to drop \$9.05 on a burger of similar quality, Flip is the place for you. Their basic "Flip" burger has a brioche bun featuring an egg-wash lacquer so shiny that it channels the hood of a showroom Porsche. In between that bun is a double patty made from ground short rib and chuck griddled on a flat top to medium rare.

Is it Chicago's best burger? Maybe. What's for sure is it weeps smoky beef juices that mingle with a dollop of lustrous aioli, creating a creamy gravy that drips over a blanket of gooey American cheese and spicy pickle shingles. Each bite of the burger unlocks something primal, channeling—in the same way the Au Cheval burger does—memories of your dad grilling in the backyard. Be forewarned: If you're one of those people who cuts monstrous burgers in half and has the willpower to save the other half for later, that's not likely to happen here. After the Flip burger is delivered, you are more likely to be knocked out in a beef coma, only to regain consciousness minutes later to an empty plate, your T-shirt dotted with suet spatter. You do not need the slab bacon or the fried egg additions, but they will, like the proverbial sundae with the cherry on top, make your

experience better.

Honestly, if you're on a diet, you're basically hosed at Flip. Even if you skip the burger, you will likely find yourself staring down a Monte Cristo (\$9.05), fried ham and cheese stuffed between French toast triangles dusted in powdered sugar. The whole thing comes with a cup of seasonal compote—blueberry when I dined, but also raspberry in a previous incarnation.

The french fries, costing a paltry \$1 up charge with your burger and featuring creamy interiors and crisp dappled exteriors, represent a tremendous value.

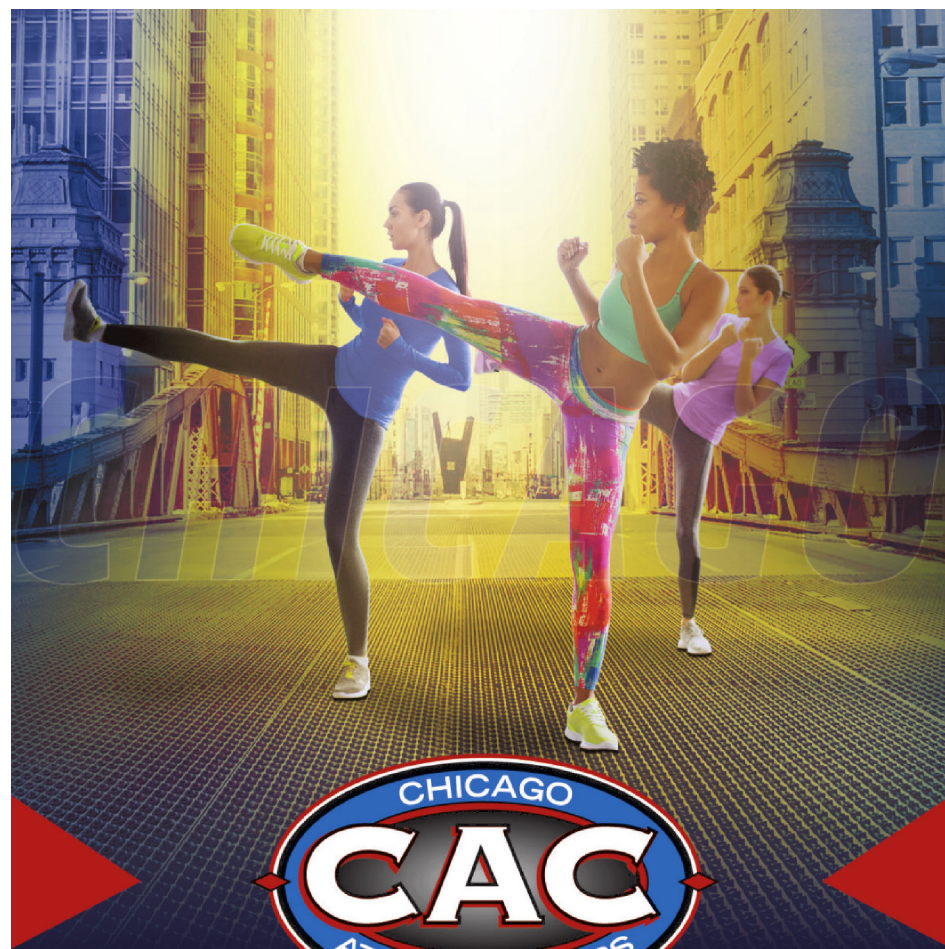
The chili, flavorful with red chili and cumin (\$3.95/16-ounce bowl), is lean and might represent a relative bowl of health food, were it not Jackson Pollock-swizzled with sour cream and a hefty sprinkle of deep-fried pork skin chicharrones. My only issue here is some of the chicharrones were chewy and stale.

Bottom line

It is currently very easy to walk into Flip Burger with no wait. However, because Flip is a killer cathedral of carbohydrates serving up blue ribbon burgers and soul-satisfying gourmet versions of traditional diner fare, people should soon be beating down the doors like they do at Au Cheval.

Open 4-10 p.m. Tuesday-Thursday, 4-11 p.m. Friday-Saturday and 11 a.m.-9 p.m. Sunday.

Michael Nagrant (@MichaelNagrant) is a RedEye freelancer. Reporters visit restaurants unannounced and meals are paid for by RedEye.



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