

As Seen In

LONG ISLAND
PULSE
MAGAZINE

RESTAURANT REVIEWS

words: richard jay scholem



"You get no bread with one meatball."

THAT MEETBALL PLACE

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MEATBALLS WARM THE SOUL. They are one of the ultimate comfort foods, conjuring nostalgic memories of shared family dinners. It was only a matter of time before someone came up with the bright idea of opening a meatball-centered restaurant.

It happened in late December in the rapidly developing village of Patchogue where four enterprising partners opened That Meetball Place and joined the list of restaurants that feature a single dish like mussels, lobster or pasta. And why not meatballs, a humble dish to be sure but a popular everyman, down-to-earth one?

That Meetball Place is a rollicking, rustic establishment boasting a one-of-a-kind milieu that has a wall of old bricks from New York City and reclaimed wood from a Pennsylvania barn. There's a long communal table at the center of the room, booths, tall bar stools, wall lantern lighting, four jumbo TV sets and live music three days a week. Patrons

who want to avoid the pub-like action and noise of the main dining area can retreat to the quietude of a rear room that is available when it's not in use for private parties. Three distinct groups seem to have discovered That Meetball Place: Local businessmen at lunch, families at dinnertime and a college age crowd later in the evening.

More funky than fancy, That Meetball Place and its bare, wood tables and floors, delivers utensils wrapped in paper napkins and offers almost twice as many beers as wines. The "meet" in Meetball accurately stamps it as a meeting place, a hangout and the "ball" refers to fun, as in party. But don't let the atmosphere and attitude lead you into thinking it's all about the surroundings and not the food.

The extensive menu's eight medium sized meatballs are tender, flavorful, moist marvels. The fresh salads are first rate and the blackboard's ever-changing specials (usually a risotto, a polenta, a soup and a vegetable dish) are interesting. The seven meatball sauces run the gamut from a lush, soothing mushroom cream to a spicy Asian with some admirable zing. Add 10 or so additional meatballs offered as specials and all the possible presentation styles materialize: In a bowl (\$9), over pasta (\$5), slider (\$3), slider with cheese (\$3.50), French baguette (\$9) and multi-grain artisan roll (\$8)— an almost infinite number of possible combinations arise. There's also an off-the-menu sampler of 3 meatballs and 3 sauces (\$10). Obviously, with sliders for \$3, soups for \$5 and the \$10 sampler, That Meetball Place doesn't break the bank.

What to eat? Try the sprawling entrée size arugula salad alive with goat cheese, beets and onions (\$14), or the Brooklyn-born Burrata, a creamy centered mozzarella (\$14), and the house version of Italian wedding soup with mini meatballs (\$5). The Moroccan lamb ball generates some welcome, subtle heat and the panko-breaded lobster and risotto balls are a unique treat rarely duplicated elsewhere. The four meatballs with focaccia bread in a bowl for \$9 are also an outstanding bargain.

The only minor misstep here involved reservations. I was told on the phone that they don't take them, but the hostess on the premises said they are available for parties of four or more.

RATING EXPLANATION:

EXTRAORDINARY ★★★★★ EXCELLENT ★★★★☆ VERY GOOD ★★★☆☆ GOOD ★★☆☆☆ SATISFACTORY ★☆☆☆☆ POOR ☆☆☆☆☆