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North End Grill: Danny Meyer Does Battery Park City

Those of us who love Danny Meyer's restaurants are accustomed to thinking of him as a man who creates welcoming spaces, with stories and personalities and an intimate sense of place.

Restaurants very much tied to their neighborhoods, which you couldn't really pluck up and set down somewhere else. Restaurants you want to be at, not just eat at.

That's not quite the case at Meyer's newest, **North End Grill**, which he opened in January in Battery Park City.

It's not a restaurant that has you fall in love; not the kind where you say "For our anniversary, we're going to North End Grill" and your friends gasp in jealousy. Instead, it's a place to appeal to just about anyone—whether "pork sandwich" or "cod throats" is what catches your eye. It's a modern, energetic space that could be in Chicago or Atlanta, where you don't need to dress in any particular way but everyone around you will be in a suit. It's designed for a sort of sophisticated mass appeal, a place where everyone would be comfortable, while the discerning still find it to their liking. And, with chef Floyd Cardoz (formerly of *Tabla*) running the kitchen, it's a very fine place to eat.

In such a business-heavy neighborhood, it makes sense that North End Grill does a mean lunch business, with a menu just as developed as their dinner version—this is not a place of simple sandwiches. So we chose to visit at lunch, which, should you be in the neighborhood, we highly recommend.

North End Grill

104 North End Avenue. New York NY 10282 (at Vesey; [map](#)); 646-747-1600; [northendgrillnyc.com](#)

Service: Charming and professional

Setting: Spacious and modern

Compare It To: Riverpark,

Colicchio and Sons

Must-Haves: Berkshire Pork Chop, Butterscotch Budino

Cost: Starters around \$15, mains \$18-30

Grade: A-



Cardoz's menu meanders from updated comfort foods (there's a bacon-shrimp burger, a grilled clam pizza) to the more upscale (foie gras and caviar both make an appearance in the appetizers) to the more contemporary (at every meal, there's a whole section of the menu devoted to eggs—coddled, scrambled, slow poached). That sense of playfulness comes through first in the **onion rings**, using three different flours, along with toasted cumin, cayenne, and ground pomegranate seeds. Our table was divided on whether we liked them; I liked the spicing, but if you like batter and bold crunch on your onion rings, these won't be quite what you're looking for.

We have a hard time *not* ordering anything called "throat"; the **Cod Throats Meunière** (\$15) are coated in semolina before they're fried, with a Meunière sauce using browned butter, lime, and veal stock. Texturally, they didn't have quite the crisp we wanted, but the Meunière was rich and satisfying and paired beautifully. On the simpler side, **Roasted Beets with Orange Ricotta and Grilled Bread** (\$14) are made better than usual with their housemade ricotta, enlivened just enough by orange zest. On the **Grilled Clam Pizza** (\$18), Freshly shucked clams meet additional clam juice, olive oil, garlic, and chili flakes atop this pizza. We wanted a little more salt and a little more flavor from the dough, but the toppings work beautifully.



Eggs earn their own section of the menu. The **Slow-Poached Egg with Paddlefish Caviar, Celery Leaf Salad and Bottarga** (\$15) would be my first re-order on this menu. A base of kabocha squash that's roasted, then smoked is surrounded by a salad of celery leaves, pickled onions, and bottarga. The egg has been cooked for an hour at 62°C, to a perfect molten consistency, and topped with paddlefish caviar. It all essentially ends up stirred together in a vibrant chorus of smoky squash, rich egg, and the punctuation of caviar—it's strange to look at once de-composed a bit, but all in one mouthful is the way to get it. We found its flavors more vibrant than those of the **Coddled Egg with Peekytoe Crab, Bacon and Leeks** (\$15); the grits in the dish add substance and heft, but the incredibly desirable-sounding trio of crab, bacon, and leeks don't quite deliver in flavor.



So often we find mains and desserts lacking the creativity of earlier courses; but at North End Grill, it's the opposite. The **Berkshire Pork Chop with White Beans and Chorizo** (\$29) was beautifully done, brined for "at least six hours," according to the chef, before it's grilled; the white beans are rich and well-cooked (with ham hocks) and then paired with escarole, finished with grated apple and horseradish. Cardoz may be known for seafood, but pork was the winner at our meal.

We appreciate a spirit of adventure when it comes to sandwiches, so one with oork neck—of a Mangalitsa pig from Mosefund—was right up our alley. It's marinated overnight in cider, garlic, and rosemary before it's grilled slowly on a wood grill, "up to an hour and a half," says Cardoz. That smokiness comes through even with all the other elements of the sandwich. On Sullivan Street bread, it's a union of two excellent things.

And that spirit of adventure carries through to the "burger"—the **Bacon-Shrimp Burger with Spice-Dusted Fries** (\$18). We're generally skeptical of non-meat burgers, but this was fantastic. It's rock shrimp ground together with bacon, spiced up with Aleppo pepper and garlic, and then coated in an egg wash and panko breadcrumbs before it's cooked on the plancha. It gets nicely crusty and is smartly paired with a homemade pretzel roll, with quick-pickled fennel to top it off. Our only maybe-complaint? The flavors are so intense that we couldn't imagine eating a whole one. But that just means you should get one and share it. (The fries are great, too.)

I admire any chef who puts some effort into creative vegetarian dishes, like the **Roasted Mushrooms and Kale "Risoato"** (\$19)—risotto made with steel-cut oats (get it)? They're toasted with clove and cinnamon before they're cooked risotto-style with vegetable stock and white wine. It's finished with kale puree and topped with pan-roasted hen of the woods mushrooms and grated horseradish. It's almost breakfastlike in its creamy, soul-satisfying way, and the cinnamon and cloves contribute to that effect, but the kale flavor is vivid. As a proponent of savory oats and kale in *anything*, this is one I'd order again.



You skip dessert at the risk of extreme lemon meringue pie envy, when slice after slice is whisked by and deposited at every table but yours.

Pastry chef Alexandra Ray has a way, like Nancy Olson of Gramercy Tavern, of making classic desserts memorable. The **Butterscotch Pot de Creme** (\$9) would be incredible even without the salted caramel swirled in, or the "Single Maltmallows," actually made with Scotch, on top. But with them, it's a dessert we might make a point of returning for. A **Chocolate Pecan Layer Cake** (\$8) wasn't quite as exciting, but the **Lemon Meringue Pie** with Candied Almonds (\$8), which really does seem to land on every table, was superb—it looks like the ratio's out of balance, a 3-inch crown of meringue on a maybe half-inch layer of filling, but that filling is so powerfully tart, the meringue so supremely airy, that it works perfectly.

Both Ray and Cardoz show real skill here, and both seem to have fun with what they're doing; that said, there's no particular point of view that seems to be showcased. It's hard to deny that it all feels a bit deliberate, a restaurant designed from the calculation of a neighborhood and its needs, not from any particular creative impulse. But the kitchen doesn't suffer a bit. It may feel a bit like a hotel restaurant, but to say it feels like a hotel restaurant is to acknowledge how excellent many New York hotel restaurants have become. There's plenty to recommend North End Grill; whether it's enough to lure you to Battery Park City is a different question.

More than anything, North End Grill reminds me of **Riverpark**—the work of a highly respected restaurant group (Craft), headed up by a fine chef from that group (Sisha Ortuzar), in a somewhat remote location and without any particular focus that you could make an elevator pitch out of. And in both locations, the food is more than impressive, more than strong enough to carry the restaurant on its virtues alone. Have I been back to Riverpark? Well... no. But I would, were I ever in the neighborhood. And there's a neighborhood ready for North End Grill.

<http://newyork.seriousseats.com/2012/03/north-end-grill-danny-meyer-battery-park-city.html>