



WEDNESDAY, MAY 30, 2007

pulse**food**

# Best burgers in N.Y.C.

By MICHAEL KANE

**T**IMES are lean, but not for me. These past weeks of May — National Hamburger Month — have been 78 percent lean with a minimum fat content of 22 percent.

My assignment was to dig into that most American of sandwiches, the almighty hamburger. I wasn't merely searching for the best beefwich in New York City. I was in search of the ultimate burger experience.

A much-hyped \$62 burger was waiting at French chef Laurent Tourondel's BLT Burger in the Village. That's \$62 for a burger, and yes, it's served with ketchup and mustard. No thanks. It wasn't making the list. A \$62 burger is un-American, and not just because it's made entirely of Kobe beef from Japan.

The hamburger originated in Texas in the early 1900s, where the beef — like the land — was plentiful but rough. Unlike their more tender bovine contemporaries in the Midwest that plumped up on feed lots, the cattle in Texas were free-range. The hamburger was born because less-exceptional cuts of beef were ground to make it more palatable.

The hamburger came to all of America's attention at the 1904 St. Louis World's Fair when a vendor, believed to be a Texan named

Fletcher Davis, served them at a walk-up called Old Dave's Hamburger Stand.

In 1904, burgers cost pennies, were made of not-so-sensational beef, and most importantly they were built to be mobile. You could eat it while walking around and marveling at the fair's attractions. In short, eating a burger was fun, which is why it became an American institution.

"I always say, the best sign of a great burger is if you finish it without once putting it down," says George Motz (inset), a Brooklyn filmmaker/writer/

wise man on all things hamburger.

Motz, a 38-year-old Brooklynite with ram's horn sideburns and the laugh of a well-fed carnivore, was my expert consultant for this assignment. He has traveled the country in search of great hamburgers, both for his 2004 documentary "Hamburger America" and its print follow-up "Hamburger America: The Book," due out early next year from Running Press.

Motz would be my guru, my teacher, my Hamburger Helper.

"If you are looking for a great burger experience, there are three non-negotiable criteria," he tells me, very seriously. "One, no frozen patties. Fresh-ground only. Two, an appropriate bun-to-burger ratio. A great hamburger is a package, not

something that falls apart. You shouldn't need a fork. And three, condiments will vary with interpretation, however — and I can't stress this enough — no Dijon mustard! It's yellow only. People who serve Dijon make me insane."

Operating off a list of Motz's favorites in the city, we ventured forth. I scored each joint from 1 to 5 in two categories — quality of the burger itself, and how well the atmosphere topped off and celebrated the burger.

The best in town? Close call, but Donovan's Pub in Woodside, Queens, narrowly edges the upstart Bgr in Chelsea. There's no beating the flavor at Donovan's, though the fun and fearless Bgr is practically a serenade to America's favorite sandwich.



## BRGR

287 Seventh Ave., (212) 488-7500

Pronounced "burger," this concept eatery opened late last year across Seventh Avenue from the Fashion Institute of Technology. At first glance, Bgr's clean-and-lean layout resembles a Chipotle or a Baja Fresh, but this place is one of a kind (for now). Owner and chef Chris Russell has adopted the transparency philosophy that appeals to modern youth, so diners sit and watch their burger being prepared in an open cooking space. It's like sitting at a sushi bar for burgers. The grass-fed Angus beef is delivered daily from Montana's Beartooth Mountains, and the bacon is from a boutique Tennessee smokehouse called Benton's. The specialty burgers feature combos like gruyere, avocado and herb mayo, and run between about \$7 and \$8.50.

Burger: 4  
Atmosphere: 5  
Total: 9

Michael Sforzacki