



September 20, 2011

Noshing Down Mulberry Street

By LIGAYA MISHAN

IN Little Italy it is time for deep-fried Oreos, for mozzarepas and banana daiquiris in tubular cups like bongos. Above, a tinsel bower of red, green and silver. Underfoot, oily napkins and the scent of Peronis.

This is the Feast of San Gennaro, beloved, despised. (“I hate this feast with a passion,” Robert De Niro’s Johnny Boy pronounced in “Mean Streets,” back in 1973.) What started with one block in 1926 now engulfs Mulberry Street for 11 days each September. The crowds are as bad as you remember. But the food has undergone a transfiguration, at least at the north end of the fair, just below Prince Street.

For this, give thanks to [Mario Carbone](#) and [Rich Torrasi](#) of [Torrasi Italian Specialties](#), who recruited fellow chefs to come up with dishes to serve at two booths — one in front of Torrasi, the other on the opposite side of the street — through Sept. 25.

Bless them for bringing us a taste of Byggyz, a sandwich shop that does not yet exist. It is a project of Dewey Dufresne, the father of Wylie, of [WD-50](#), and, on the basis of his short-rib sandwich (\$9), a culinary force in his own right. The meat, slow-braised in pomegranate juice and molasses, is rendered so tender it falls apart, then is put back together with transglutaminase (thanks, son!). What makes it extraordinary is the combination of American [cheese](#) and pickled vegetables. It is Philly cheese steak meets banh mi. Sublime.

Then there is a slider of roast pork nearly subsumed by an unctuous, briny, tuna-infused sauce (\$8). It is from April Bloomfield, the chef behind the Spotted Pig, the [Breslin](#) and the [John Dory Oyster Bar](#). It reeks, enticingly, of sin. But her roasted red peppers with [tomatoes](#) and goat cheese on bread (\$7) is a farmers’ market shopping list, nothing more.

Across the street at the [Little Wisco](#) counter, representing the restaurants Joseph Leonard, Fedora and Jeffrey’s Grocery, goofy improvisations include featherweight falafels with molten Cheddar hearts (\$8) and sriracha-doused chicken meatballs on a potato pancake with the perfect ratio of spring and sponge (\$10). “This is the kind of stuff we make for ourselves at the end of the night,” explained the scruffy young man taking orders.

Do not snub the Frito pie (\$5). This Tex-Mex snack, recreated from childhood memories by Gabe Thompson, the chef of [L'Artusi](#), should be the feast's sleeper hit. It comes in a Fritos bag, which is snipped open so that chili con carne can be ladled inside. You think it is a joke, and then your eyes go wide.

Frankies Spuntino goes beyond its red-sauce brief, dousing calamari with Peruvian aji amarillo or Thai chile sauces (\$8).

But you wanted Italian. [Rubirosa](#), a local pizzeria, plays it straight with a mini bracirole sandwich (\$5). In one bite is the essence of a spaghetti dinner, garlic bread included.

In a wink at Little Italy's ever-encroaching neighbor, Chinatown, the men from Torrisi have cooked up scarlet spare ribs (\$8). Served in a Chinese takeout box, they taste no better than if they were bicycled to your door. Chinese "nachos" consist of crisp won-ton skins, drizzled with hot mustard and duck sauce (\$3). Nothing but mustard registers.

Desserts are scattered among the vendors: a peppermint ice-cream sandwich from Byggyz that makes you feel as if you just brushed your teeth (\$3); a surprisingly meek jelly doughnut from Ms. Bloomfield (\$3).

Only Stellina, a gelateria on the Lower East Side, understands that carny fare must have a touch of madness. Thus the Dita di Bura, a caramel-and-peanut-butter gelato studded with broken housemade Butterfingers (\$3). And the carnival blondie, a wedge of caramel in which slivers of apple are entombed — a candy apple turned inside out (\$3). Above all: the bomboloni (\$3.50), an all-out war of salt vs. sweet, a doughnut with salt-laced sweet-corn cream in its guts and a crust of kettle corn. It is not quite a miracle. But close.

The Torrisi Italian Specialties booths at the Feast of San Gennaro, 250 Mulberry Street (Prince Street); (212) 965-0955; [piginahat.com](#); [sangennaro.org](#). Food and drinks are \$2 to \$10, cash only; open Wednesday to Friday, 5 to 11 p.m.; Saturday and Sunday, 11 a.m. to 11 p.m., through Sunday.



OPEN

MORE IN DINING & WINE (12 0)

**Produce Importer
Safety Fight**

[Read More »](#)