



Meatpacking Uncorked—New York Wine & Food Festival

by The Experimental Gourmand



For the fourth year in a row, the **New York Wine & Food Festival** brought a delectable array of food and drink events, panels, and demonstrations to the city this weekend. Hosted by the **Food Bank for New York**, 100 percent of the net proceeds of the festival will benefit this local organization as well as **Share Our Strength**, both of which are non-profits dedicated to fighting hunger. One popular activity is “**Meatpacking Uncorked**,” an eating and drinking tour of the Meatpacking District with shops hosting wine tastings and neighborhood restaurants and food trucks offering tastings of their specialties.



I checked in at the ticket booth located in the park at 10th Avenue and 15th Street right before 6:00 p.m., knowing from my volunteer stint at this event last year that the early bird gets the best treats. “Passport” in hand, I consulted the map and compared it to the bingo-card-like “Snack Stops” page. I was there for the food more than for the shopping, and I knew that I’d have to move quickly to cover a lot of ground and to avoid running into massive lines, like there were at some places last year.



My first stop was at **Luke's Lobster** for their mini Shrimp Roll. It was the perfect way to start off the evening with briny, delicate Maine shrimp tucked into a buttery, toasted roll, and dusted with a bit of seasoning; this is one of my favorite items on their menu.



Heading east to try to tackle the pocket of participating establishments on 9th Avenue, I caught sight of the interactive Iron Chef booth set up in the median.



The general public could sign up to do a taped introduction of a mystery secret ingredient in front of this live audience, attempting to see if they could unseat the Chairman.



Trying not to lose focus on my mission of getting to each of the food locations during the evening, I paused by the table for **Gaslight** to sample one of their Meatballs with Sauce. It was juicy and hearty, but I felt it lacked a bit of something. No matter, as the next place I visited was right next to them and involved dessert.



Knowing that I was going to have to pace myself so as not to be full on just a few places, I had to pass on **Sweet Street Desserts'** gorgeous-looking cupcakes and indulge in a miniature Key Lime Tart instead. It was a balanced bite-sized sweet with a creamy, tart filling in a crisp, buttery shell.



Down the street from these stops were two local eateries, a branch of the chain **Le Pain Quotidien** and **The Diner**. At the first, they had a refreshing Watermelon Cooler with slices of their savory Ricotta and Radish Tartine and their decadent mini Brownie.



The latter had slices of a Goat Cheese and Chicken Quesadilla to nibble on dressed with salsa and sour cream. This really hit the spot and gave me a boost to head back westward to find some other great places to try.



Shopping and wine tasting were also a component of this event, although I chose to focus on the food places. Some of the stores featured appearances by [Cooking Channel](#) show hosts. I saw posters for Mo Rocca of Food(ography) and Ben Sargent of Hook, Line & Dinner. I dropped by the Levi's store and saw Ben greeting his fans and posing for photos. Conveniently, this was located right near to where [Go Burger](#) had its truck parked. I'm going to have to track them down for the full-sized version, as this was delicious. Good-quality, perfectly cooked and seasoned meat with just the right proportion of bun and condiments, this was everything the idea slider should be, and I could have eaten several of them.



While I was waiting on line for my burger, I caught the first of several sets of street entertainers I saw during the evening. A nattily-dressed couple performed their quick-step, tap dancing routine to liven up the festivities. They couldn't distract me for long, however, as I was in search of the [Gorilla Cheese](#) truck, which has quite a following in the city. They had the right idea in giving us bite-sized portions of the ooey-gooey The Phil sandwich (cheddar, bacon, and tomato) in a to-go bag.



This made it easier for me to head over to my next destination, [Asellina](#), and get on that line for some more dessert. The wait for a taste of the herbal, milky Basil Panna Cotta with Candied Pine Nuts went quickly.



I had time to digest that while I lined up to get the spicy, smoky Grilled Shrimp Skewer from [STK-NY](#) next door. One of the volunteers had billed this as an appetizer as a complement to the sweet I'd just had. My next stop was definitely more of a main course option, and one I'd gladly have anytime.



I've only ever been to [5 Ninth](#) for drinks, which is something that I'll need to remedy soon. I'd heard a few other people raving about their offering this year, but they didn't do justice to how tender, moist, and succulent the Oxtail Ragu with Idiazabal Cheese Sauce on Flatbread was to taste. This was one of the few dishes where I could have gone back for another round.



Although I could have ended on that delicious note, I knew that it wouldn't be fair to the other participating venues to stop there. I went by **Macelleria**, which had been my favorite entry last year, to sample the Polenta Crostini with Bolognese Ragu. I was really disappointed. The sauce was dry and a bit flat tasting with the polenta circle being even drier. I headed around the corner to see what the next tasting would be.



At **Fatty Crab**, I decided to take a pass on the chicken wings as being too fiddly and messy to tackle at this kind of an activity. This took me to the next stop on that stretch at **Corsino**, where there were three different kinds of crostini to eat. I reached for the Squash and Mascarpone one, which had been pointed out to me. It was a sweet, creamy bite and kept me motivated to seek out the remaining places I had yet to try.



On my way to check out **The Frying Dutchmen**, a Belgian fry cart that has long been on my list of places to try, I bumped into the Cooking Channel truck being manned by **L'Arte de Gelato**. I thought that the sign said the flavor was Tiramisu, but to me, it tasted more like zabaglione. No matter, it was rich and cool, hitting the right taste notes, and I need to add them to my list of places to visit again to test some more flavors. I asked a blue-shirted volunteer where to find the fries truck. She delivered the sad news that they'd dropped out of the event.

After more than two hours of wandering the cobblestone streets and navigating around the crowded sidewalks, I was starting to flag, as were my tastebuds. With five spots on my card yet to visit, I wondered if I had room in my stomach for anything else. I passed by the **Treats Truck**, but decided I wasn't in the mood for more sugar, although their brownies looked tasty.



My eye spotted a lone food truck at the exit/entrance to the Highline. It was the folks at **Rouge Tomato**, a Michelin-rated, locally inspired eatery. I had heard whisperings that their offering was another one not to be missed. The Squash Soup with crunchy Pumpkin Seeds was made without using butter or cream, I was told, yet had a smooth, rich consistency that brought out all the flavor of fall.



Now home to more boutiques and dining establishments than actual meatpacking facilities, there is still a bit of a gritty edge to the area, as the sounds of “Freebird” streaming from Hogs & Heifers reminded me while I was enjoying my next bite, the [AsiaDog](#) Sidney hogdog combination dressed with a citrusy mango and red onion relish and topped with crunchy chopped peanuts. While waiting for my dog, I’d watched a group starting up a beat-box dance mix, trying to draw in the crowds. With all this great energy around me, I headed over to my last two places to try.



I had originally been on the fence as to whether I wanted to sample the Yuzu Marinated Fluke with Cucumber Mignonette from [Tanuki Tavern](#), as it didn’t seem to fit with the mostly meat-heavy bites I’d had all night. What a shame if I’d missed it. The fish was light and the sauce was full of refreshing, zesty lime flavors. This gave me a spring in my step to hit up my final destination.



The mini Shitake Mushroom Panini at [Zampa](#) was a great way to round out the event. Being greeted by a “Howdy!” from one of the staff, I was handed a square sandwich filled with meaty mushrooms and warm, melting taleggio wrapped up in the pungent, earthy perfume of truffle oil. It was a wonderful note on which to end a very busy, food-filled evening.