



THE HUNGRY PALATE

BY SUSAN DYER REYNOLDS

Newly Notable: Burger Meister

I remember stumbling upon the original Burger Meister, located at 86 Carl Street near my home in Cole Valley, shortly after it opened in 1999. I knew instantly that owner Paul Mogannam had something special when I saw the Niman Ranch meat statement in the window. At the time, no one was doing a high-quality fast burger – it was \$3.50 McDonald's God-knows-what's-in-them or a fancy restaurant's \$10 ground chuck on a sourdough roll. Not that burgers served on sourdough rolls don't have their place, but it's not Burger Meister. This is a classic burger – a whopping 8-ounce beef patty on a soft sesame seed bun with pickles, lettuce, onions and tomatoes on the side. You can garnish this masterpiece to your liking with the traditional condiments – mustard, ketchup and mayo, or my favorite, Thousand Island dressing. You get a choice of crispy fries or cool coleslaw for a reasonable \$7.15. The lunch special is quite possibly the best deal in town – a cheeseburger served with fries (or salad) and a drink for \$5.50. Since I can't manage the 8-ouncer, I was thrilled when the wonderful guy at the counter of the Carl Street store told me that it was the smaller kid burger served with the special; now I order it all the time. If you're expecting an A&W Baby Burger, though, think again... the kid burger is plenty big at a quarter of a pound, and plenty satisfying.

Mogannam says that at the time he approached Bill Niman about using his

products, Niman Ranch was only servicing fine dining establishments. But Niman liked the Burger Meister concept and agreed to lend his name, and his natural, small-farmed meats, to the project. Less than 10 years later, Mogannam operates three Burger Meister locations – the original on Carl Street, 138 Church Street, and his new shop at 759 Columbus Avenue – and has what I consider to be the best classic burger in The City.

You can get the burger with a variety of toppings – bacon, avocado, chili, sautéed mushrooms and onions – and you can also get a seasoned white breast turkey burger. If you're not in a burger mood, try a Niman's hotlink, a bread bowl full of chili or the grilled chicken breast sandwich. If you want to skip the meat altogether, Mogannam serves the original Garden Burger, a Portobello burger and my personal favorite, the vegan Boca Burger. For years I've been saying that a burger joint should team with the Boca folks because, in my opinion, they taste more like a real burger than any of the other meatless alternatives. In fact, they taste more like a burger than anything at McDonald's. Burger Meister also has killer milkshakes made with Mitchell's ice cream, and they serve soft drinks, juices, and six beers on tap. Burger Meister is open Monday through Sunday, 11 a.m. to 12 midnight. Call (415) 296-9907 or visit the Web site at www.burgermeistersf.com for more information.

— S. Reynolds