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This burger beats Chicago's favorite



Could Labriola Cafe's Richie Burger entice burger fans away from a longtime favorite, the Kuma Burger? (Tribune photo by Bill Hogan)

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- Radio buttons for: Kuma's Corner, The Grafton, Carmine's (Rosebud Burger), Paradise Pup, The Capital Grille, Schoop's, Sola, Hot Chocolate, Sweets & Savories, Top Notch

Kevin Pang
Cheeseburger Bureau Chief
August 27, 2009
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The mythology and pedestal that Kuma's Corner built up then perched on, high above Chicago's burger scene, has been well-earned. Publications, blogs, Yelp enthusiasts -- anyone with a keyboard and a stomach lining -- are quick to proclaim the burgers at this 5-year-old Avondale metal bar the best around. And they wouldn't be incorrect: The pretzel bun behemoths are so, so tasty.

I can pinpoint the day three years ago when it became my favorite burger (specifically, the Kaijo, with bacon, crispy onions and blue cheese). I converted friends and co-workers, turning even burger agnostics into burger believers.

Then I was elevated in a sword-tapping ceremony to cheeseburger bureau chief, and production began on "The Cheeseburger Show." And something changed. I found better burgers at places without Kuma's notoriously long wait.

Before the angry e-mails and voice mails accusing me of heresy pour in, I need to make this clear: I do not think burgers at Kuma's Corner (2900 W. Belmont Ave., 773-604-8769) are anything less than delicious. But before people hastily label something "the best," I humbly suggest they expand their field of vision.

Exhibit A is the Richie Burger at Labriola Bakery Cafe in Oak Brook (3021 Butterfield Rd., 630-574-2008). On appearances alone, both pretzel-bun burgers (Labriola's and the Famous Kuma's Burger) offer similar compositions. Upon closer inspection:

Pretzel bun: It's a tossup. Kuma's get its buns from Highland

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Baking Co. in Northbrook. Labriola's makes its buns in-house - though off-site.

Bacon: Labriola wins. Nueske's bacon from Wisconsin, smoked with apple wood, is arguably the best bacon in the world.

Toppings: Labriola's can claim caramelized onions. Kuma's has a fried egg (and about 21 other varieties of burgers). Advantage: Kuma's.

The beef: Here's where the scales tip. The Angus beef patty at Labriola has nearly twice the fat content as Kuma's ground chuck (80/20 lean-meat-to-fat, versus about 87/13 at Kuma's). Translation: juicier, more butterlike flavors with Labriola. Speaking of which, the meat is cooked on a griddle with about a quarter-stick of butter at Labriola. In essence, beef confit. The first time I tasted Labriola's, I almost invoked the Lord's name in vain.

I love both, like two beautiful women vying for my affection. But the new gal just looks at me differently. Maybe it's the butter in her eyes.

Kevin Pang weighs in on 10 more worthy burgers.

Watch a new episode of "The Cheeseburger Show."

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That looks like someone vomited on a bun . . .

azdaddie (08/27/2009, 6:33 PM)

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Um, going from 13% fat to 20% fat is nearly 50% higher fat content, not twice the fat content. Twice would, of course, be 26%.

"The Angus beef patty at Labriola has nearly twice the fat content as Kuma's ground chuck (80/20 lean-meat-to-fat, versus about 87/13 at Kuma's)."

ConradP (08/27/2009, 5:55 PM)

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