



GIVE 5 NAPKIN BURGER A HIGH-FIVE

By Mat Schaffer

The New York City-based chain 5 Napkin Burger recently expanded to the Hub. It's taken over the former Daily Grill location at the Shops at Prudential Center, hoping to wow us locals with its double-fisted sandwiches and thick shakes.

Though none of the burgers we tried was messy enough to warrant the apocryphal five napkins from which the restaurant takes its name, it's hard not to like 5NB.

Even when the fare doesn't quite live up to its promise, the overall over-the-top experience is a hoot. Decorated in shiny white subway tiles with meat hooks and track lighting meant to conjure up a butcher shop, 5 Napkin Burger is loud and fun.

Go with a crowd. Bring the family. But be advised that the leather booths are a close fit for more than two — larger parties (and bodies) will feel cramped.

Abandon all food snobbishness, ye who enter here.

I've never seen chicken soup as neon lemon-yellow as the chicken, noodle and matzo ball soup (\$7.75) served at 5NB. Though the soup doesn't taste very chickeny, the matzo ball is outstanding — light, airy and big as a billiard ball.

The BLT salad (\$9.25) is a satisfying mix of crisp iceberg, tomatoes and bacon under a ladle of carnation-pink, Thousand Island-like dressing. There's something oddly winning about deep-fried, battered pastrami-wrapped dill pickles (\$7.50). Salty and sour, they rest on a bed of sauerkraut drizzled with honey mustard oil.

I preferred the batter on the pastrami pickles to the coating on the cornmeal-crust onion rings (\$4.25/\$6.75). The larger-portioned rings are dramatically presented in a vertical tower with an accompaniment of dipping sauces.

5NB offers a small assortment of sushi. The double tuna maki (\$13.95) — an inside out roll of minced spicy tuna and rice, wrapped in tuna and avocado — is as fresh and expertly rolled as you'd find in any sushi bar.

The three burgers we tried were excellent. Especially the "original" 5 Napkin Burger (\$10.95), a monster 10-ounce patty tucked into a spongy roll with gruyere, caramelized onions and rosemary aioli. We liked the thyme-scented Italian turkey burger (\$9.95), covered with melted mozzarella, vinegar peppers and tomato sauce on a brioche bun.

The flavorful veggie burger (\$7.95) — made from shredded beets and carrots, lentils and brown rice — is garnished with lettuce, tomato, onion, bread-and-butter pickles and a dollop of Thousand Island. The sweet, house-cured pickles are also available as a side for \$2.75.

Customize a half-pound Pearl all-beef hot dog (\$13.50) with your choice of sauerkraut or sweet and sour sauteed peppers and onions. Not that the meaty frank needs anything more than a generous schmear of Dijon mustard.

Macaroni & cheese (\$12.75) was a huge dis-appointment, a soupy mish-mash of limp pasta and gruyere-intense cheese sauce that's more like macaroni & fondue. But we loved the lobster roll sliders (\$17.50) of lobster salad and lettuce on three soft rolls.

5NB has a sizable beer list plus a selection of wines by the glass. (There is a wine list, but you must request it — ordering a bottle is cheaper than ordering by the glass.)

The beverage of choice is undoubtedly the milkshake (\$5.50), so thick it's more solid than liquid. "The best damn shake I've had in 20 years," declared my friend Nancy. Try the peanut butter and chocolate or salted caramel.

Desserts (\$7) were dis-appointing. Ineptly reheated "old-fashioned" apple pie was pedestrian. A seven-layer "blackout" cake of devil's food and chocolate icing wasn't any more memorable.

Service needs a booster shot of attentiveness. Once you place your order, you'll hardly ever see your waiter again.

Hours: Sun.-Thurs., 11:30 a.m.-11 p.m.; Fri. & Sat., 11:30 a.m.-midnight Bar: Full Credit: All Accessibility: Accessible Parking:

