

## TABLES FOR TWO SHAKE SHACK



Madison Square Park, at E. 23rd St. (212-889-6600)—Since reopening for a second season last month, Danny Meyer's snack stand has had nearly interminable lines, first stretching toward the temptation of a McDonald's across Twenty-third Street and, recently, with the addition of a gate, in the direction of Sol LeWitt's new installation, a kind of upside-down Stonehenge. Students from the School of Visual Arts sit cross-legged on the paths, sketching the scene. The Shack itself has corrugated sides of zinc and a sloping roof of ivy-tangled chain link, which forms a broad brim around the booth. Menu items are announced by cutout metal letters—done in Richard Neutra-inspired mid-century-modern cool—that wrap around the building. It's drive-thru America recast as Manhattan elegance.

The Shack Burgers are the small West Coast, In-N-Out kind. The single patty is too thin to stand up to the grilled potato roll, the tomato, the American cheese, and the Shack Sauce (like all secret sauces, it tastes like Russian dressing). But the doubles and triples are pure messy pleasure, with dripping juices that encourage fast eating. And although the meat has a three-star pedigree—ground fresh from sirloin

and brisket at Eleven Madison Park, the nearby restaurant also owned by Meyer—the best part is biting through each seared edge of the stacked patties. The rest of the menu is satisfying: hot dogs, including the unwieldy Chicago-style, and crisp, crinkle-cut fries. One nice oddity, the Shack Stack, adds a fried portobello mushroom to the double burger, giving a crunchy counterpoint to the tender meat. And the eponymous shakes are classic—thick, without any tricks.

The crowds keep coming, through fair weather and foul; but, while the ivy overhead provides some shade on sunny days, it does nothing for those hungry chumps who hang on through the rain. That might be for the best, because the Shack needs to get rid of some fans if it's going to survive. No burger stand can handle this kind of volume. Even if you make it through the line, the wait at the pickup window can kill you. The only answer is to expand immediately—first stop, the sordidly provisioned Bryant Park. (Open daily for lunch and dinner. Dogs and burgers \$2.31-\$7.60.)

—Owen Phillips