

Harlem's Answer to Shake Shack

The American foodscape is in the middle of a Burger Renaissance. New York is Florence, Danny Meyer is Rafael and a legion of inspired followers is producing delicious art.

On the corner of Lenox Ave. and W. 124th Street in New York City, surrounded by the comforts of old school and modern soul food, a burger and milkshake joint seemingly plucked out of California in the 1950s opened up in Harlem in May 2013. At a glance, the place is an enigma. Outside is a bustling intersection coordinating loud traffic, inside are green vinyl-covered booths and chrome-lined countertops displaying nostalgic Americana and in the bathroom are walls lined with African-American pinups from the 1950s and *JET* magazine covers from the 1980s. It is a hodgepodge of designs that seems to clash. But in the paradigm of tasty comfort food, Harlem Shake makes perfect sense.



Harlem Shake counter (Courtesy of Harlem Shake)

The menu captures the greasy spoon goodness of the past and capitalizes on the Pat LaFreida-supplied beef of the present (LaFreida designed a personal blend of short rib, brisket and chuck for Harlem Shake's 2 oz.-patties). As has become the style of all new and popular quasi-fast food burger restaurants, Harlem Shake utilizes fresh and all-natural ingredients. There is no mystery behind the "all-beef natural casing" hot dog. Milkshakes are made from Blue Marble Ice Cream. Salads taste like they were piled up at a Whole Foods salad bar.



Me, pigging out on the BBQ burger with a red velvet cake milkshake.

On warm evenings, the line of customers stretches out the door, suggesting the place monopolizes the neighborhood's burger scene. The clear move is to arrive early enough to score a booth and place an order that mixes the menu's conventional and inventive options.

Get the Harlem Classic Burger (two thin patties that offer the right balanced between meat, veggies and cheese) with sweet yam fries and a red velvet cake milkshake. Although the shake is simply red velvet cake blended with vanilla ice cream, it's a combination you must have since you would be too guilty to concoct it at home. Or go for the Barbecue Onion Burger (with homemade barbecue sauce that is not overly-sweet) with a black-and-white shake. And order the Mediterranean-inspired chickpea and lentil salad (seriously) to cut through the meal's fried decadence.

When deciding where to eat in New York, ditch the traditional choices and spring for burgers in Harlem. If you cannot wait to try the food in person, Harlem Shake ([@HarlemShakeNYC](#)) has provided these recipes (including the custom burger blend) to recreate the fare at home:



The Harlem Classic with fries and a red velvet milkshake (Courtesy of Harlem Shake)

Harlem Classic Burger (Serves 4)

Ingredients:

- 7.5 ounces beef sirloin, trimmed of gristle, and cut into 1-inch cubes
- 4 ounces well-marbled beef chuck, trimmed of gristle, and cut into 1-inch cubes
- 3 ounces well-marbled beef brisket, fat cap intact, trimmed of gristle, and cut into 1-inch cubes
- 1.5 oz rib meat, trimmed off the bone, diced
- 2 tablespoons non-salted butter, at room temperature
- 4 Martin's Potato Rolls
- 4 tablespoons Special Sauce (recipe follows)
- 12 slices homemade pickles, or substitute with your favorite Kosher Dill pickle slices
- 1 Sweet Vidalia onion, sliced very thin (or substitute for Maui sweet or Walla Walla onion)
- Optional: 8 center-cut slices Campari tomatoes (or substitute for another medium sized, juicy tomato with low acidity and high sugar content)
- Optional: 1/4 head of iceberg lettuce, shredded into 1/8 inch thin strips
- 1/2 teaspoon vegetable oil
- Kosher salt and fresh-ground black pepper
- 4 slices yellow American cheese (substitute with Swiss or sharp cheddar to taste)

Special Sauce Ingredients:

- mayonnaise
- ketchup
- yellow mustard

- sweet relish
- fresh ground black pepper

Instructions:

Combine meat in large bowl and toss to combine. Place on rimmed baking sheet and place in a freezer for 10 min or so, until firm, paying great attention not to freeze the meat. Using the kitchen timer/alarm is highly recommended. You can also chill the meat grinder blade at the same time. When ready, remove from freezer and pass meat through grinder twice. Form into eight pucks of 2 oz each. Refrigerate until ready for use.

Open buns, but do not split hinge. Spread lightly with butter, then place under broiler or in toaster oven until golden brown, about 1 minute. Place onions to taste on the bottom part of the bun, and follow with 3 pickle slices. Spread 1 tablespoon Special Sauce on top

of the pickles. If desired, follow with lettuce and 2 tomato slices. You may improvise with the above ingredients for variety.

Using a paper towel, rub inside of heavy-bottomed 12-inch skillet with a small amount of vegetable oil, then place over medium-high heat until just beginning to smoke. Season beef spheres on top side with salt and pepper, then place, seasoned side down, in skillet. Using back of heavy, flat spatula, press down on beef firmly to form 4-inch round patties, being careful not to let it stick to bottom of spatula. (For each Harlem Classic you will need 2 patties). Season top side with salt and pepper. Cook without moving until crisp, about 2 minutes. Now scrape the patties and flip, for each Harlem Classic top one of the patties with one slice of cheese, and place the other patty on top of the cheese. Cook until the cheese is melted, about 1 min longer, paying attention not to over cook and dry out the meat.

Transfer the meat to top of the sandwiches, close sandwiches and serve.

Special Sauce: Combine all ingredients in blender until smooth, scraping down sides of blender with rubber spatula as necessary.



The Sonoran Dog with fries (Courtesy of Harlem Shake)

Sonoran Dog

Ingredients:

- 1 all beef hot dog
- 1 slice bacon
- .5 ounce chopped onion

Bacon-Cherry Pepper Relish (yields 3 quarts; use 1 ounce per serving)

- 1 pound bacon, finely chopped
- 2 quarts pickled cherry peppers (drained and chopped)
- 1 cup white vinegar
- 3 cups sugar
- 1 quart sweet pickle relish

Chipotle Mayonnaise (yields 1 gallon, use 1 tablespoon per serving)

- 3.5 quarts mayonnaise
- 1 cup canned chipotles in adobo
- 1 cup lime juice
- 4 ounces grated fresh garlic

Instructions:

Bacon-Cherry Pepper Relish

Cook bacon until crisp. Combine remaining ingredients with bacon; cook until reduced.

Chipotle Mayonnaise

Blend all ingredients in blender until smooth.

Hot Dog

Wrap bacon around hot dog and secure with one toothpick on each side. Deep fry hot dog until crisp. Toast top and bottom (not sides) of the bun and fill with chopped onion. Place hot dog on top of the onion and top with the Bacon-Cherry Pepper Relish, followed by Chipotle Mayonnaise.