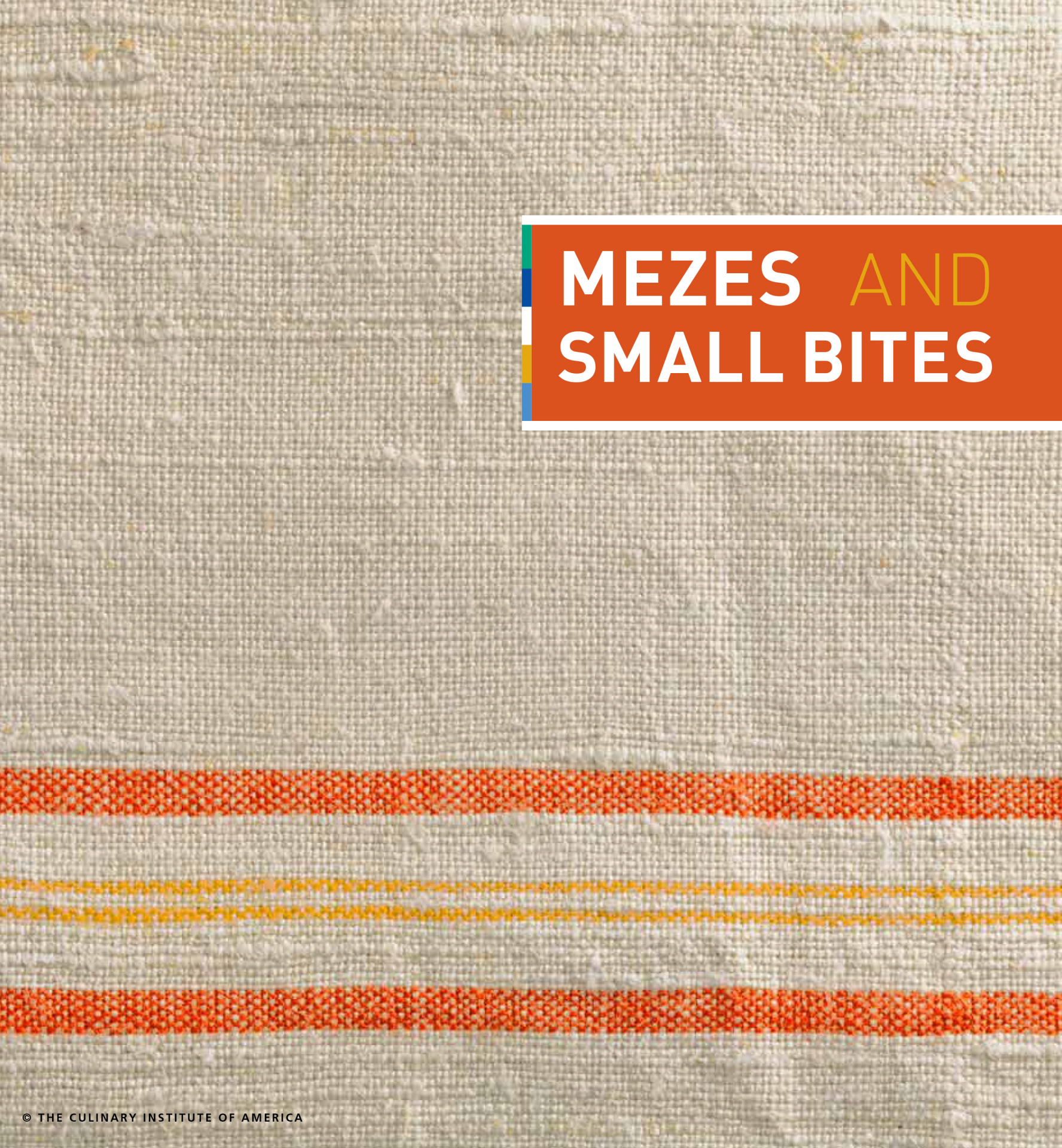




MEZES AND SMALL BITES

In the Middle East, you might hear small dishes referred to as *meze* and in Spain as *tapas*. Since different regions have slightly different definitions, the term *meze* is somewhat ambiguous. For example, in Persian, the word *maza* means “taste,” but in Arabic it means “table.” Likewise, a meze table may be the heart of a meal in Lebanon or Cyprus, while it is a number of small dishes served before the main meal in other parts of the Middle East. What you will find universally is an assortment of simple dishes including vegetables, cheeses, legume-based dishes, and seafood, but geographical location, culture, and seasonality will determine exactly what items you will find on a meze table.

In Spain, tapas originally consisted of simple slices of bread placed on top of a sherry glass as a sort of lid to keep flying critters out. Now it has evolved into a culture in and of itself. Stroll down the street at the end of any workday for a glass of wine at one of the many tapas bars in Spain and you will find a real communal event, as much about the social aspect as the food and wine. In France you may enjoy hors d’oeuvre in the afternoon before a later dinner, while in Italy you will find an antipasti table in most restaurants.

All the recipes in this chapter may be served as meze, tapas, hors d’oeuvre, or antipasti. Try the dishes on their own as small bites, or incorporate them with heartier items from other chapters for a true Mediterranean feast. If you are planning on serving a meze table or having a tapas party, the question is: How much should you make?

One thing you don’t want to do is run out of food, so remember that all of these items are great as leftovers and can be enjoyed for several days after they are made. A meze table can really be the entire evening, so you need not follow with an entrée—think variety. A proper meze table should have at least ten items on it, and if you start with the standards—baba ghanoush, hummus, falafel, cucumber salad, fattoush, and fresh pita bread—you already have six items. It is easy to take it further to ten items; simply add zucchini patties, chorizo cigars, feta dip, and some spanakopita and you’re there.

How do you decide what to put on the table? Think about contrasting flavors, colors, and textures and make sure you have a good variety. Creamy, crispy, rich, lean, sweet, sour, bright colors, neutral colors—these are all things to consider when designing a meze or tapas party. If you are considering tapas, consider all the little plates you are going to need, or consider having each of your guests bring an item along with their own small plates. How much to make? Well, think about how much you can eat over a certain period of time. If your event is to last a few hours, you might be able to eat about a pound of

food, so if you are planning on six guests, try to think about making that much per guest plus a little extra so that you have leftovers. If each guest brings something, be sure to trade after the party and send everyone home with something that they did not make. That way they each get a different leftover. Regardless of what you do, the main thing to remember is to stay organized, think ahead, prep ahead, and have fun with it.

PREPARING FRESH FAVA BEANS

Fava beans are encased in a large, spongy, inedible pod and each bean inside also has an outer skin that needs to be removed prior to using the beans in a recipe. This additional step can be intimidating because of the extra work, but the flavor and texture makes it well worth the effort. When purchasing fava beans, look for pods that are not yellow or wrinkled; they can have some dark spots but the beans inside should be pale and plump.

To prepare the favas, shell the beans as you would peas in a pod. Prepare an ice bath. In a large pot, bring enough water to cover the shelled fava beans to a boil. Lower the favas into the water and quickly bring it back to a boil. Allow the favas to boil for about 1 minute, then drain the beans and immediately submerge them into the ice bath to stop the cooking process. Drain the favas and, using a paring knife, make a little cut along the side of each bean so that you can either peel it or squeeze the bean out.

MINTED FAVA BEANS

My friends Richard and Jen Gaskins have a wonderful farm in Connecticut. They grow just enough fresh favas to keep themselves happy. On one of my visits, I unknowingly picked half their crop to make dinner. I only found out after the meal that I had violated the “fava code,” but as soon as they tasted this dish, they gave me full access to their crop. **MAKES 5 SMALL-BITE SERVINGS**

2 lb fresh fava beans

¼ cup extra-virgin olive oil

3 shallots, thinly sliced

**Finely grated zest and juice of
1 lemon**

Salt, to taste

**Freshly ground black pepper,
to taste**

**1 tbsp shredded or chopped
mint leaves**

- 1.** Prepare the fava beans according to the directions on page 35.
- 2.** In a medium sauté pan, heat the olive oil over medium heat. Add the shallots and cook until tender and aromatic, 1 to 2 minutes. Add the favas and lemon zest, remove the pan from the heat, add the lemon juice, and season with salt and pepper. Fold in the mint and let the mixture sit for a few minutes to allow the flavors to combine. Serve immediately or refrigerate until ready to serve.

Chef's Note *This dish pairs well with a bottle of Sancerre.*

ZUCCHINI FRITTERS

One of the keys to successful fritters is to squeeze the moisture out of the shredded zucchini so that the batter is not too loose. Another is not to crumble the feta too much because larger pieces will look better and add more flavor to the fritters. And be sure not to stack them when they come out of the pan, or they will become soggy. **MAKES 8 SMALL-BITE SERVINGS**

**2 zucchini (about 1½ lb),
coarsely grated**
½ tsp salt
¾ cup crumbled feta
1 cup chopped flat-leaf parsley
½ cup chopped scallions
1½ tbsp chopped dill
1 large egg
1 large egg yolk
½ cup all-purpose flour
**Pinch of freshly ground black
pepper**
1 cup extra-virgin olive oil
¾ cup plain Greek-style yogurt

1. Toss together the zucchini and the salt and let stand for 15 minutes. Place in a strainer or small colander and press out the excess moisture.
2. Combine the zucchini, feta, parsley, scallions, dill, egg, egg yolk, flour, and pepper and mix well, adding additional flour, if necessary, to achieve a batterlike consistency.
3. Heat the oil in a sauté pan to 350°F. Test the mixture by dropping a heaping tablespoon of the batter into the oil and frying it until golden brown. If the batter spreads a lot and will not hold its shape around the zucchini, adjust the consistency of the batter by adding more flour.
4. To fry, drop heaping tablespoons of batter into the hot oil and fry until golden brown on one side, 2 to 3 minutes. Turn the fritters over and fry until golden brown on the opposite side, 2 to 3 minutes.
5. Drain the fritters on paper towels and reserve in a warm oven until all the batches are fried.
6. Serve with the yogurt.

DATE AND ALMOND CAKE

Although this is not a baked cake per se, it is formed into a cakelike log. It is a great little snack out of hand, but it is also one of the tastiest accompaniments to cheese that I have ever had, so it makes a fantastic addition to almost any cheese tray. This “cake” gets better with age, so you can make a large batch and it will keep in the refrigerator for two months, tightly wrapped. **MAKES 4 TO 6 SERVINGS**

SPICE MIX

1 tbsp ground cardamom

1 tbsp ground cumin

1 tbsp freshly ground black pepper

1 tbsp ground cinnamon

CAKE

1 lb pitted dates, roughly chopped

½ cup pomegranate molasses

¼ cup honey

3 tbsp Spice Mix (see above)

1 lb whole almonds, peeled and lightly toasted

1. To make the spice mix: Toast the spices in a sauté pan over medium heat for 2 minutes, combine in a spice grinder, and grind for 1 minute.
2. To make the cake: Combine the dates, pomegranate molasses, honey, and spice mix in a small saucepan. Slowly cook over very low heat until the dates are soft. Immediately place the mixture in a food processor and process until smooth; the mixture will be extremely dense, so it is easier to work with if it is still warm.
3. Return the date mixture to the pan and, using a wooden spoon, fold in the almonds. Remove the mixture from the pan, place on a greased sheet pan, and, working quickly, form it into a log approximately 2 inches in diameter. Place the log on a piece of plastic wrap and roll it up tightly, leaving enough plastic wrap free on either end to grab at both ends. Holding the ends of the plastic wrap in each hand, have someone else twist it in one direction until it tightens up completely. If no one is available, just roll the log on the countertop in one direction to compact it.
4. Let the log cool to room temperature, then refrigerate it until you're ready to serve. Cut the log into small pieces to serve.



TORTILLA DE PAPAS

Tortilla de papas is also known as a Spanish omelet. It is an egg dish made with fried potatoes and, despite the name, only shares the shape of Mexican-style flour or corn tortillas: In Mexico a tortilla is a flat, round style of bread, while in Spain, a tortilla is a flat, round omelet of sorts. Traditionally, it may be eaten at any time of day and makes a great tapas dish when served in small pieces. It does not have to be served hot; it is just as delicious at room temperature.

MAKES 5 TO 10 SMALL-BITE SERVINGS, DEPENDING ON SIZE

**1 lb 4 oz russet potatoes,
peeled**
½ cup olive oil
**1¾ cups small-dice Spanish
onion**
**¾ cup small-dice green bell
pepper**
10 large eggs, beaten
1 tbsp salt, plus as needed
**2 tbsp chopped flat-leaf
parsley**

1. Preheat the oven to 325°F.
2. Boil the potatoes until tender in salted water and allow to cool until they can be handled. Slice the potatoes into ¼-inch-thick slices.
3. Heat the olive oil over medium heat in an oven-safe, large skillet or sauté pan. Add the onions and bell peppers and sweat until tender, about 5 minutes.
4. Stir in the potatoes, cover, and cook over low heat for 3 minutes.
5. Meanwhile, stir together the eggs, salt, and parsley in a bowl.
6. Add the egg mixture to the potato mixture and lower the heat.
7. Cook the omelet slowly on the stovetop, shaking the pan, until the egg starts to set up. Finish cooking the omelet in the oven for 5 to 7 minutes; the tortilla should be set like a custard.
8. Flip the omelet out of the pan and cut it into wedges or squares.

FATTOUSH

Fattoush is a broad term for Middle Eastern bread salads that use leftover pita bread. If you don't have any leftover pita, don't worry, just rip up some fresh pita and toast it to replicate the stale pita in the traditional version.

MAKES 6 TO 8 SMALL-BITE SERVINGS

4 pieces store-bought or leftover homemade Pita Bread, cut into small wedges

¼ cup extra-virgin olive oil

2 tsp salt

½ tsp freshly ground black pepper

½ tsp za'atar (see Chef's Note)

DRESSING

1 tbsp freshly squeezed lemon juice

¼ cup red wine vinegar

2 garlic cloves, finely chopped

¾ cup extra-virgin olive oil

1 tsp salt

¼ tsp freshly ground black pepper

2 tbsp chopped thyme

½ tsp cayenne

1 tbsp sugar

SALAD

1 bunch scallions, chopped

1 cup chopped flat-leaf parsley

6 plum tomatoes, seeded and diced

1 hothouse cucumber, peeled, seeded, and diced

1 cup sliced radishes

1 yellow bell pepper, seeded and diced

1 red bell pepper, seeded and diced

1 head romaine lettuce, chopped

1. Preheat the oven to 350°F.

2. Toss the pita wedges with the olive oil, salt, pepper, and za'atar to coat. Arrange in a single layer on a sheet pan and bake in the oven until the pitas are crisp but not crumbly, about 15 minutes, turning halfway through the baking. Reserve.

3. To make the dressing: In a bowl, stir together all the ingredients for the dressing.

4. To assemble the salad: Combine all the vegetables with the dressing and toss to coat. Add the reserved pita bread and toss to coat. Taste and adjust the seasoning, if necessary.

Chef's Note Za'atar is a spice blend that is popular in Middle Eastern cuisine. There are many different regional recipes for it. You can buy it online, but it is simple to make it at home. Place ¼ cup imported sumac, 2 tablespoons dried thyme, 1 tablespoon toasted sesame seeds, 2 tablespoons dried marjoram, 2 tablespoons dried oregano, and 1 teaspoon coarse salt in a spice grinder and pulse to combine.

STUFFED GRAPE LEAVES

After grapes are picked for the crush, there are lots of leaves still on the vines. Although many wineries compost this by-product, the leaves can be put to a delicious use. Generally you can find stuffed grape leaves anywhere you find vineyards, but the fillings vary by region. Some fillings are strictly vegetables and rice, while others contain meat or fish. Grape leaves are most often purchased already cooked or pickled in jars. If you choose to use fresh grape leaves for this dish, briefly plunge them into boiling salted water and, using a skimmer, immediately transfer them to a bowl of ice water to stop the cooking. I find it easier to stuff the leaves if you shingle several of them together so that the leaf is not too thin around the filling. **MAKES ABOUT 10 SMALL-BITE SERVINGS**

STUFFED GRAPE LEAVES

½ cup long-grain rice

2 cups plus 2 qt water

½ cup plus 2 teaspoons salt

60 grape leaves, stems trimmed off

2 scallions, finely chopped

½ cup trimmed and finely chopped fennel bulb

1½ cups finely chopped onion

½ cup chopped dill

½ cup chopped mint

1 cup olive oil

Juice of 2 lemons

¼ tsp freshly ground black pepper

GARNISH

1 lemon, cut into wedges

1 cup plain Greek-style yogurt

1. To prepare the grape leaves: Put the rice in a sieve and rinse under cold running water until the water runs clear. In a sauce pot, bring the 2 cups water and 1 teaspoon of the salt to a boil over high heat. Add the rice and continue to boil until the rice is tender, about 7 minutes. Drain the rice and reserve.
2. In a pot, bring the 2 quarts water and ½ cup salt to a boil over high heat. Add the grape leaves in batches to avoid overcrowding the pot. Blanch each batch of leaves for 45 seconds to 1 minute. Drain and immediately rinse under cold running water. Drain again and reserve.
3. To make the filling: Mix the cooked rice, scallions, fennel, onion, dill, mint, ½ cup of the olive oil, lemon juice, remaining teaspoon salt, and pepper to combine well.
4. Lay one grape leaf flat on a work surface. Place 2 tablespoons of the filling on top of the leaf. Roll the leaf over once to enclose the filling. Fold the sides of the leaf in and finish rolling the leaf. Roll the filled leaf in one more grape leaf using the same rolling technique. Repeat with the remaining leaves.
5. Tightly pack the rolled grape leaves, seam side down, in a single layer in a high-sided pan. Pour in the remaining ½ cup olive oil and just enough water to cover the grape leaves. Cover the pan with a lid and cook at a gentle simmer over low to medium heat. After 15 minutes, check the water level and add more water to cover, if necessary. Cook until the leaves are tender, about 30 minutes total. Carefully remove the grape leaves from the pan and drain the cooking liquid.
6. Serve at room temperature with Greek-style yogurt and lemon wedges on the side.

Chef's Note *If the heat is too high during cooking, the grape leaves could explode—be sure to keep the heat at low to medium.*

KIBBEH

Kibbeh is a favorite in the Levant area of the Middle East. It is traditionally ground lamb mixed with green wheat, mint, and various spices that is formed into little patties. It can be made in a cake form or breaded and fried. I like to pan roast the little patties and eat them with a yogurt and mint sauce. You can purchase ras el hanout online or in specialty shops. **MAKES 5 TO 6 SMALL-BITE SERVINGS**

FILLING

2 cups water

½ cup bulgur wheat

1 tbsp olive oil

4 oz ground lamb

2 tbsp finely chopped onion

1 tsp finely chopped garlic

1½ tsp ras el hanout

½ cup beef, lamb, or veal broth

¼ cup pine nuts, toasted and chopped

1 tbsp chopped mint

Salt, to taste

Freshly ground black pepper, to taste

KIBBEH

2 cups water

1 cup bulgur wheat

½ tbsp olive oil

¼ cup chopped onion

2 garlic cloves, finely chopped

¾ tsp ras el hanout

¾ cup ground lamb

3 tbsp all-purpose flour

Salt, to taste

Freshly ground black pepper, to taste

Vegetable oil, as needed for frying

1. To make the filling: Bring the water to a boil. In a bowl, cover the bulgur with the boiling water and allow to soak for 20 minutes. Drain the bulgur well and reserve.
2. In a large sauté pan over medium heat, heat the olive oil, add the lamb, and sauté until cooked through, about 8 minutes. Add the onion and garlic and cook until soft and translucent, about 4 minutes.
3. Add the ras el hanout and cook until aromatic, about 2 minutes. Add the broth and simmer gently until the liquid thickens enough to coat the back of spoon, about 8 minutes.
4. In a bowl, combine the lamb mixture with the pine nuts, mint, salt, and pepper.
5. To make the kibbeh: Bring the water to a boil. In a bowl, cover the bulgur with the boiling water and allow to soak for 20 minutes. Drain the bulgur well and reserve.
6. In a large sauté pan over medium heat, heat the olive oil, add the onion, and sauté until soft and translucent, about 4 minutes. Add the garlic and ras el hanout and continue cooking until aromatic, about 2 minutes. Remove from the heat and allow to cool.
7. Place the lamb, flour, bulgur, and cooled onion mixture in a food processor and pulse until well incorporated. Season with salt and pepper.
8. Portion the mixture into walnut-size balls. Roll each ball into an oval (torpedo) shape, dipping your hands in cold water, as necessary, to facilitate rolling. Using your index finger or the back of a spoon, make a cavity in the center of each oval. Fill each cavity with filling, packing it in gently. Seal the filling inside by crimping the kibbeh mixture around it at the ends. Remold each piece into the oval shape as necessary. Refrigerate for 1 hour.
9. In a high-sided pan, heat ¼ inch of oil over medium-high heat. When the oil reaches 350°F, add the kibbeh. Cook on both sides until each piece is golden brown on the outside and fully warmed through, about 2 minutes per side. Remove from the oil and drain briefly on paper towels. Serve immediately.

SHRIMP AND GARLIC

This recipe can be found in any coastal area where shrimp is abundant. It also is made with prawns or langoustine in some areas. For the home cook, shrimp is widely available and easy to prepare. Be sure that your shrimp is nice and fresh with no discernible “fishy” smell. Serve this with some crusty bread to dip in the sauce. **MAKES 4 TO 5 SMALL-BITE SERVINGS**

¾ cup extra-virgin olive oil
1 tsp red pepper flakes
10 garlic cloves, very thinly sliced
20 (31/35 count) shrimp, peeled and deveined
1 tsp salt
⅔ cup white wine
¾ cup freshly squeezed lemon juice
½ cup roughly chopped flat-leaf parsley

1. Heat the olive oil in a large sauté pan over high heat.
2. Add half the red pepper flakes, garlic, and shrimp and season with half the salt. Remove the shrimp from the pan when just cooked through, 2 to 3 minutes. Reserve on a platter or in a bowl.
3. Add half the wine and lemon juice to the pan and reduce by three-quarters. When the oil and the liquid are at an even volume, you will be able to shake and emulsify it like a glaze. Finish the glaze with half of the chopped parsley and pour over the shrimp.
4. Repeat steps 1 through 3 with the remaining ingredients, but be sure to serve the first batch warm.

Chef's Note *Try combining the shrimp and garlic with pasta for a new dish.*

GRAPPA MUSSELS

My restaurant in Atlanta was called Grappa. We needed a few signature dishes and these Grappa Mussels were one of our best sellers. If you don't have any grappa, just use more dry white wine. The combination of garlic, shallots, fennel, and saffron is one of my favorites. **MAKES 12 SMALL-BITE SERVINGS**

¼ cup extra-virgin olive oil
2 fennel bulbs, trimmed and thinly sliced
4 shallots, sliced
1 head garlic, cloves peeled and crushed
Finely grated zest of 2 lemons
¼ tsp saffron threads
1 cup grappa
1 750-mL bottle white wine
1 qt fish broth
Salt, to taste
Freshly ground black pepper, to taste
3 lb Prince Edward Island or rope-cultured mussels, cleaned and debearded
1 cup unsalted butter, cubed
1 cup chopped flat-leaf parsley

1. Heat the olive oil in a large pot over medium heat. Add the fennel, shallots, garlic, and lemon zest and cook until the shallots and fennel are tender and translucent with no color, about 5 minutes. Add the saffron, grappa, and wine. Continue cooking until the liquid has reduced by half. Add the broth and continue cooking until the liquid has reduced by half. Season with salt and pepper.
2. Add the mussels, cover the pan, and allow to steam until the shells open, 3 to 4 minutes. Discard any unopened mussels. Remove the mussels from the pan and hold in a covered bowl with a small amount of the cooking liquid to keep them moist. Continue cooking the liquid over medium heat until it has reduced by half. Remove the pan from the heat and whisk in the butter until completely emulsified.
3. To serve, portion about ¼ pound of mussels per bowl and cover with the cooking liquid. Sprinkle each portion with the parsley. Serve immediately.



CATAPLANA CLAMS

A *cataplana* is a hammered copper, hinged pot of Portuguese origin that resembles a clam shell. It is used to steam shellfish and can be used on the stovetop or in the oven. Besides being fun to cook in and a bit unusual, it also looks great hanging on a kitchen wall. I bought my cataplana in Portugal in 1986 after eating numerous versions of cataplana clams. **MAKES 5 SMALL-BITE SERVINGS**

6 large garlic cloves, peeled and crushed

1 tbsp pimentón (smoked Spanish paprika)

1 tsp red pepper flakes

1 cup olive oil

8 oz pancetta

1 medium yellow onion, diced

2 cups dry white wine

20 Manila or other small clams

½ cup chopped flat-leaf parsley

Salt, to taste

1. In the bowl of a food processor fitted with the metal blade, process the garlic, pimentón, red pepper flakes, and ½ cup of the olive oil until it forms a paste.
2. In a bowl, pour the paste over the pancetta and allow it marinate for at least 1 hour; you can marinate it overnight, if you wish.
3. Heat the remaining ½ cup olive oil in a large sauté pan over medium heat. Add the onion and cook until tender and translucent, about 4 minutes. Add the marinated pancetta, cover, and continue cooking for 10 minutes more. Remove the lid and add the white wine. Replace the lid and continue cooking until the liquid has reduced by half. Add the clams and cook, covered, until all the clams have opened, 4 to 5 minutes. Discard any unopened clams. Sprinkle with the parsley and season with salt. Serve in warmed bowls with lots of crusty bread.

TABBOULEH

Tabbouleh is very popular in the Levant area of the Middle East. In Lebanon, it is soaked bulgur wheat mixed with parsley, mint, tomato, and scallions. I love the Lebanese version because it contains more herbs than grain and is particularly refreshing on hot summer days. **MAKES 10 SMALL-BITE SERVINGS**

½ cup bulgur wheat
2 cups chopped flat-leaf parsley
½ cup chopped mint leaves
1 cup diced tomato
1 cup peeled and diced cucumber
¼ cup good-quality olive oil
½ cup good-quality red wine vinegar or lemon juice
½ cup chopped scallions
Salt, to taste
Freshly ground black pepper, to taste

Soak the bulgur in warm water for 30 minutes and drain. Combine the drained bulgur with the remaining ingredients and season with salt and pepper. Chill the salad for at least 30 minutes in the refrigerator before serving.

Chef's Note *For a slightly different flavor, replace the red wine vinegar with a combination of freshly squeezed lemon and orange juice and some finely grated zest.*

SPICY CARROT SALAD

This carrot salad is easy to make and has a cooling effect on the body in the summertime. Use the same ingredients, but slice the carrots, then cook briefly and you have an excellent side dish in the winter as well. **MAKES 5 SMALL-BITE SERVINGS**

3 cups carrots, finely grated
½ tbsp sugar
½ tsp cumin seeds, toasted
Juice of 1 lemon
½ tbsp extra-virgin olive oil
3 tbsp chopped cilantro
Salt, to taste
Freshly ground black pepper, to taste

1. Combine the carrots, sugar, cumin seeds, and lemon juice in a bowl.
2. Add the olive oil and cilantro, stirring to combine. Season with salt and pepper. Serve immediately or reserve in the refrigerator for up to 2 days.

SPICED ROASTED ALMONDS

Almonds are thought to have originated in Central Asia centuries ago. They got to Europe and the Mediterranean via the spice trade and became a staple product because they grew well in the climate. Almonds are loaded in nutrients and so have been an important staple in the diet of the Mediterranean basin. They make an amazing addition to a tapas or cocktail party. **MAKES 2 CUPS**

2 cups whole raw almonds
1 tbsp unsalted butter, melted
1½ tsp curry powder
¼ tsp garlic powder
¼ tsp onion powder
Cayenne, to taste
Salt, to taste

1. Preheat the oven to 350°F.
2. Toss the nuts in the melted butter until evenly coated.
3. Combine the curry powder, garlic powder, onion powder, cayenne, and salt. Toss the nuts in the spices until evenly coated.
4. Place the nuts in a single layer on a sheet pan and bake until golden brown and slightly aromatic, 8 to 10 minutes.
5. Remove from the oven and allow the nuts to cool completely before serving. The nuts can be stored in an airtight container for up to 10 days.

Chef's Note *Make this recipe with olive oil instead of butter if you are watching your cholesterol.*

Variation

PIMENTÓN ALMONDS: *Replace the melted butter with 1 tablespoon olive oil and replace the spices above with 2 teaspoons pimentón (Spanish paprika). Smoked and sweet paprika both work well in this dish.*

SCALLOP CARPACCIO WITH VERJUS

In French, *verjus* literally means “green juice.” It is juice squeezed from unripe grapes, and its use has been documented as far back as ancient Rome. It is usually squeezed from the grapes that need to be picked to thin out the crop, so it is a natural outgrowth of many wine-making regions. It is commonly used in Middle Eastern countries and is a delicious substitute for, or addition to, citrus juice. Verjus can be purchased in both green and red varieties and should be refrigerated after opening. If not refrigerated, it will ferment and you will end up with a bottle of vinegar before too long. **MAKES 6 SMALL-BITE SERVINGS**

6 dry-packed fresh sea scallops, muscle tabs removed (see Chef's Note)

2 tbsp extra-virgin olive oil

¼ cup verjus

½ cup finely chopped chives

1 cup green grapes, thinly sliced

1 cup red grapes, thinly sliced

1 shallot, finely chopped

Freshly ground black pepper, to taste

Sea salt, to taste (see Chef's Note)

¾ cup frisée lettuce

1. Slice each scallop horizontally into 6 thin rounds. Arrange the rounds from each scallop in a circle on an individual piece of plastic wrap and cover with another piece of plastic wrap. Using a light, flat mallet, lightly pound the scallops until they are all a uniform thickness of about ⅛ inch. Refrigerate until ready to serve.
2. Combine the olive oil, verjus, and chives and toss the grape slices in the mixture to coat. Marinate in the refrigerator for 10 minutes to allow the flavors to meld. Meanwhile, chill six flat plates in the refrigerator.
3. When ready to serve, peel the top layer of plastic wrap off the scallops, invert each portion of scallop rounds onto a chilled plate, and peel off the remaining piece of plastic wrap. Evenly distribute the finely chopped shallot among the six plates, sprinkling it on top of the scallops. Grind some pepper on top and sprinkle with sea salt.
4. Place about ½ cup of frisée in the center of the plate. Divide the grape mixture evenly among the plates, arranging it in the center of the frisée. Drizzle the remaining verjus “dressing” over the plates and serve immediately.

Chef's Notes *This recipe requires no cooking, so the freshness of the ingredients is absolutely critical.*

Try to find U-10-size sea scallops, meaning 10 scallops to the pound. Use only dry-packed fresh scallops, not the ones that come packed in brine.

This dish lends itself to some of the fancy finishing salts available. They add flavor, color, and a really nice crunch; it can be fun to experiment with the different flavors and textures. You may want to just use fleur de sel, from the Brittany coast in France, or try the red Hawaiian sea salt, which adds a very earthy, almost claylike taste to the dish. Pink Himalayan sea salt comes in flakes, which add texture contrast to the dish. The best way to decide which one to use is to experiment. There are small samplers that you can buy at Artisansalt.com.





FALAFEL WITH TAHINI

The place you are from in the Middle East will dictate whether you use chickpeas, fava beans, or a combination of both for this dish. Since dried legumes are easily transportable and last forever, falafel was a constant, convenient staple food for nomadic tribes. Today, it remains a tasty and inexpensive source of protein. If you don't have time to soak your beans, you might try canned, but they will require some prep. Canned legumes have a much moister texture, so you may want to add some chickpea flour to the mixture. Be sure to rinse, drain, and dry canned chickpeas or favas well on paper towels before using. **MAKES 4 SMALL-BITE SERVINGS**

SAUCE

2 tbsp tahini
2 tbsp plain Greek-style yogurt
2 tbsp freshly squeezed lemon juice
¼ cup water
1 tbsp honey
1 tsp salt
¼ tsp freshly ground black pepper

FALAFEL

1 cup dried chickpeas or fava beans
2 tbsp chopped flat-leaf parsley
¼ cup finely chopped scallions
3 garlic cloves
2 tsp salt
¼ tsp cayenne
1 tsp ground cumin
1 tsp ground coriander
1 tsp baking powder
1 cup olive oil, or as needed for frying

1. To make the sauce: Whisk all the ingredients together until smooth; the mixture will be slightly runny.
2. To make the falafel: Place the beans in a large container and cover with cold water by at least 2 inches. If using chickpeas, soak for 48 hours; if using fava beans, soak for 24 hours.
3. Drain the beans and mix thoroughly with the remaining ingredients except for the olive oil.
4. Run the beans once through a grinder fitted with the coarse die, and then run the mixture twice through the grinder fitted with the fine die. Make sure all the wet paste comes out of the grinder. If you don't have a meat grinder, just use your food processor; it works just as well.
5. Mix thoroughly to combine; the paste should resemble very wet coarse sand.
6. Form the mixture into tight 1½-inch disks that are about ½ inch thick and reserve.
7. Heat the olive oil over medium heat in a large, flat-sided sauté pan. When the oil is hot, working in batches, add the falafel and cook until they are golden brown on both sides, about 4 minutes per side.
8. Drain on a baking rack and serve hot with the dipping sauce.

CHEESE AND POTATO CIGARS

These crispy little bites are attractive on a meze table and excellent as a passed hors d'oeuvre. We suggest using egg roll wrappers for ease of assembly, but feel free to use phyllo dough instead. It is a bit harder to work with, but once you get used to it, it's a breeze. **MAKES ABOUT 20 SMALL-BITE SERVINGS**

FILLING

1 lb 8 oz russet potatoes, peeled and diced

Salt, to taste

4 large eggs

1 lb feta, crumbled

4 tsp ground turmeric

Freshly ground black pepper, to taste

Freshly grated nutmeg, to taste

EGG WASH

1 large egg

2 tbsp whole milk

CIGARS

20 egg roll wrappers

Vegetable oil, as needed for frying

1. To make the filling: Place the potatoes in a medium sauce pot with enough cold water to cover and sprinkle with salt. Bring to a boil over high heat, reduce the heat to establish a simmer, and cook until fork-tender. Drain, allow the potatoes to dry, and set aside until cool enough to handle. Mash the potatoes or, if desired, run them through a ricer.
2. Whisk the eggs in a bowl and add the mashed potatoes, cheese, and turmeric. Season with salt, pepper, and nutmeg. Mix by hand until the mixture is well combined.
3. To make the egg wash: Whisk the egg together with the milk to combine.
4. To make the cigars: Lay an egg roll wrapper out on a clean work surface. Add 2 tablespoons of the filling. Roll the wrapper over once, enclosing the filling. Fold the sides inward and finish rolling the wrapper. Brush the edges with the egg wash to seal.
5. In a deep fryer or a large, heavy-bottomed pot over medium heat, heat the oil to 350°F. Line a plate with paper towels. Working in batches so as not to overcrowd the pot, fry the cigars until golden brown, 1 to 2 minutes per batch. Using tongs or a skimmer, remove the fried cigars from the oil and transfer to the plate to drain briefly. Serve immediately.

Chef's Note *When frying, it is important to always use a thermometer to regulate the oil's temperature. To avoid getting burned, always use extreme caution when adding and removing items from the oil.*





PROSCIUTTO WITH PEACHES AND BALSAMIC VINEGAR

Of course the classic combination is melon and prosciutto, but peaches are my favorite fruit. In the middle of peach season, this fresh approach to an old standard will blow you away. If your peaches are not perfectly ripe, or it is not peach season, try it with mangos for something different. **MAKES 8 SMALL-BITE SERVINGS**

16 slices prosciutto, very thinly sliced

16 chives

2 perfectly ripe peaches, peeled and cut into 8 wedges per peach

Freshly ground black pepper, to taste

Extra-virgin olive oil, as needed

2 tbsp good-quality aged balsamic vinegar

1. Preheat the oven to 325°F.
2. Wrap 8 pieces of the prosciutto around the bottom of the wells of an inverted standard muffin pan and bake until crispy. Remove the prosciutto from the muffin wells and break into large shards. Reserve until needed for the final plate.
3. Lay the remaining slices of prosciutto out flat on a serving plate and then put a crispy piece at the end of each piece of prosciutto.
4. Finely chop the chives and mix with the peaches. Grind some pepper onto the prosciutto. Arrange the seasoned peaches on the piece of prosciutto on a platter and drizzle with the olive oil and balsamic vinegar. Serve at room temperature.

ORANGE AND ONION SALAD

This salad is simple and refreshing. It is all about the ingredients. The most important step is to soak the onions in salted ice water to remove any trace of sulfur. Also be sure to use a good-quality olive oil. For a twist, you can add some shaved fennel to the onions and dress the salad an hour before serving.

MAKES 5 SMALL-BITE SERVINGS

2 oranges, peeled, pith removed, and sliced crosswise into 1/8-inch slices

1/2 red onion, sliced paper thin and reserved in 2 cups of ice water with 1 tbsp salt

1 1/2 cups black Kalamata or Niçoise olives

Extra-virgin olive oil, as needed

Cayenne, to taste

Combine the oranges, onions, and olives in a bowl and toss with the olive oil to coat. Season with cayenne. Serve at room temperature.

PANISSE

In this classic dish of southwestern France, chickpea flour is cooked like polenta and poured into a dish to firm up. You can then slice and sauté it like crispy polenta. It makes a great hors d'oeuvre or side dish for an entrée. In this recipe, I have introduced onions, cumin, and cayenne to give it a fresh, earthy flavor. Experiment by adding some fresh basil or your favorite herb to make it even more interesting. **MAKES ABOUT 15 SMALL-BITE SERVINGS**

1 tbsp extra-virgin olive oil
3 medium yellow onions, finely chopped
1 tsp ground cumin, toasted
¼ tsp cayenne, toasted
1 qt hot water
Salt, to taste
2 cups chickpea flour, sifted
Olive oil, as needed for frying

1. Heat the extra-virgin olive oil in a large pot over medium heat. Add the onions, cumin, and cayenne and cook until the onions are tender and translucent, about 4 minutes. Add the hot water and season with salt. Increase the heat and bring the mixture to a full boil. Reduce the heat to low and whisk in the chickpea flour. Cook the porridge for 15 minutes, stirring constantly with a wooden spoon.
2. Line a sheet pan with plastic wrap. Pour the porridge into the pan and spread it out into an even layer. Cover with another sheet of plastic wrap and refrigerate until it is firm enough to cut into pieces, about 30 minutes.
3. Transfer the panisse from the sheet pan to a cutting board and cut it into 1-inch squares.
4. In a deep fryer or large, heavy-bottomed pot over medium-high heat, heat the olive oil to 350°F. Working in batches to avoid overcrowding, pan fry the pieces until golden brown, about 5 minutes for each batch, flipping them halfway through the cooking time. Serve immediately.

GOAT CHEESE AND SWEET ONION TOASTS

Ingredients you may have lying around your kitchen can be turned into delicious little antipasti or hors d'oeuvre. A day-old baguette, sliced and toasted; some sliced onions slowly caramelized...yes, you might have to go out and purchase some goat cheese...but you get the picture. **MAKES 5 SMALL-BITE SERVINGS**

½ baguette

⅓ cup unsalted butter, at room temperature

1 whole garlic clove, plus 1 finely chopped garlic clove

1 sweet onion, diced

1½ tbsp olive oil

¼ cup chopped sun-dried tomatoes

2½ tsp sugar

1 tbsp red wine vinegar

1 tsp salt

¼ tsp freshly ground black pepper

¾ cup goat cheese

1. Preheat the oven to 400°F.
2. Slice the baguette on the diagonal into fifteen ⅛-inch-thick slices. Brush each slice with the butter and toast in the oven until crisp and lightly browned around the edges, 8 to 10 minutes. Remove the toast from the oven and immediately rub each piece with the whole garlic clove. Reduce the oven temperature to 350°F.
3. Toss the onion in 1 tablespoon of the olive oil. Place on a sheet pan and roast in the oven, stirring every 10 minutes to prevent burning, until tender and translucent, 1½ to 2 hours. Cool and reserve.
4. In a sauté pan over low to medium heat, cook the sun-dried tomatoes in the remaining 1½ teaspoons olive oil until slightly tender, about 10 minutes. Gently stir the mixture with a wooden spoon to prevent breaking up the ingredients. Add the finely chopped garlic and reserved onions and continue to cook over low heat until the ingredients are warm and the flavors have blended together, 12 to 15 minutes. Add the sugar and vinegar and season with the salt and pepper.
5. Spread ¼ ounce of the goat cheese on each slice of toast, top with 1½ teaspoons of the relish, and serve.

CHEESE AND ONION TART

Who doesn't love a flaky pastry crust with creamy custard baked in it? This is much like a quiche, if you will. Cheese and onion is a favorite combination of mine. Gruyère is a classic ingredient, but try substituting some of your favorite cheeses for variety. Add some lightly caramelized apples and you will be in heaven. **MAKES ONE 10-INCH TART**

TART DOUGH

2½ cups all-purpose flour

½ tsp salt

7 tbsp unsalted butter, cubed and chilled

7 tbsp ice water

FILLING

1 qt water

3 thick slices bacon

¼ cup unsalted butter

5 cups finely sliced onions

Salt, to taste

Freshly ground black pepper, to taste

Freshly grated nutmeg, to taste

2 tbsp all-purpose flour

1 cup Gruyère, diced

½ cup heavy cream

½ cup whole milk

1 large egg, lightly beaten

- I. Preheat the oven to 400°F.
2. To make the dough: Place the flour and salt in a mixing bowl and work the cold butter into the flour until the mixture resembles fine crumbs. Add the cold water and mix just until the dough forms a ball; do not knead or overwork the dough. Wrap the dough in plastic wrap and refrigerate for at least 30 minutes.
3. On a board or work surface lightly dusted with flour, roll out the dough into 12-inch circle with a thickness of ⅛ inch. Line a 10-inch tart pan with the dough and chill the tart shell for at least 30 minutes in the refrigerator.
4. Prick the bottom and sides of the tart shell with the tines of a fork and then line with parchment paper or aluminum foil. Weight down the paper with some dried beans, lentils, or rice to keep the dough from puffing up as it bakes.
5. Blind bake the tart shell until the dough sets and the edges look dry, 10 to 12 minutes. Remove the paper or foil and the beans and set the shell aside to cool. Reduce the oven temperature to 350°F.
6. To make the filling: Bring the water to a boil in a pot over high heat. Add the bacon slices and blanch for about 10 seconds. Remove the bacon from the water and allow to drain completely. When cool, cut into a ¼-inch dice.
7. In a sauté pan over low to medium heat, melt the butter. Add the onions and season with salt, pepper, and nutmeg. Cook until the onions are a rich golden brown and smell sweet, about 50 minutes. Do not hurry this process; the onions should cook slowly to attain a rich golden color.
8. Sprinkle the flour onto the onions and cook for another 5 to 7 minutes, stirring to avoid burning the onions. Remove from the heat and allow the mixture to cool.
9. To fill the tart: Place the onion mixture and cheese on the bottom of the prebaked and cooled tart shell. In a bowl, whisk together the cream, milk, and egg. Pour the milk mixture into the tart shell. Sprinkle the pieces of blanched bacon on top.
- IO. Place the tart on a sheet pan on the lowest shelf of the oven and bake until the crust is golden brown and the filling is completely set, about 25 minutes.

Chef's Note To facilitate removing the finished tart from the pan, line the bottom of the tart pan with parchment paper and grease with butter before lining with the dough.

GNOCCHI FRITTI

My favorite type of gnocchi are made with potatoes, but they are not the only game in town. Make this simple dough with “00” flour and fry the gnocchi for a wonderful little snack. You can make a sauce to dip them in or just simply sprinkle with sea salt. They are easy and delicious. Keep the dough covered and refrigerated. After you make the gnocchi, you should also let the dough rest before attempting to roll it out. You don’t want to overwork it because they will be tough.

MAKES 5 SMALL-BITE SERVINGS

1½ cups “00” flour
½ tsp salt
¼ tsp baking soda
1 tbsp olive oil, plus more as needed for frying
7 tbsp whole milk, warmed
¼ cup water

1. In a mixing bowl, combine the flour, salt, and baking soda. Add the olive oil and mix to incorporate. Add the milk and water and mix until incorporated. Knead until the mixture forms a dough; be careful not to overwork. Form the dough into a ball, wrap in plastic wrap, and allow to rest at room temperature for 1 hour. If you are not using the dough the same day, refrigerate or freeze it until ready to use.
2. When the dough has rested, roll it into logs ¼ inch in diameter. Cut the logs on the diagonal into ½-inch-thick slices.
3. In a deep fryer or large, heavy-bottomed pot, heat the olive oil to 350°F. Line a plate with paper towels. Fry the dough pieces, in batches to avoid overcrowding, until golden brown, 2 to 3 minutes. Transfer the gnocchi to the paper towel-lined plate to drain briefly. Serve immediately.

Chef’s Note *A drizzle of reduced balsamic vinegar or a simple marinara sauce for dipping is the perfect accompaniment to this dish.*

BRANDADE WITH RED PEPPER COULIS

Salt cod is found in some form or another in almost every culture that borders the sea. Because it is so well preserved, you must soak it several times before using it. I recommend dicing the cod before soaking. When you are done soaking it, simmer it in a mixture of half milk and half water. The lactic acid in the milk will take that salt bite out of the cod. My ex-husband is also a chef and, hailing from the south of France, he made the very best brandade croquettes with red pepper coulis.

MAKES 4 TO 6 SMALL-BITE SERVINGS OF BRANDADE; 1 PINT COULIS

COD

2 oz salt cod

SACHET

1 garlic clove

4 parsley stems

1 tsp black peppercorns

1 bay leaf

1 thyme sprig

BRANDADE

1 qt whole milk

8 oz russet potatoes

4 garlic cloves

½ cup extra-virgin olive oil

½ cup heavy cream

Salt, to taste

Freshly ground black pepper, to taste

1 cup vegetable oil, as needed for sautéing

2 cups all-purpose flour, or as needed

COULIS

1 lb red bell peppers, seeded and diced

¼ cup finely chopped shallots

2 tbsp olive oil

⅓ cup dry white wine

⅓ cup Vegetable Broth (page 4) or Chicken Broth (page 6)

1 tsp salt, or to taste

Freshly ground black pepper, to taste

1. Soak the cod in water for 2 days, changing the water twice per day.
2. To make the sachet: Cut a piece of cheesecloth large enough to hold all the sachet ingredients. Place the garlic, parsley, peppercorns, bay leaf, and thyme into the cheesecloth, gather it into a bundle, and tie it securely closed with a piece of kitchen twine.
3. To prepare the brandade: In a high-sided pan, heat the milk and sachet to 165°F to 180°F. Drain the salt cod and rinse it well. Add the cod and poach until the fish is opaque and tender but firm to the touch, about 10 minutes. Be watchful to keep the milk at the proper temperature. Using a spatula, carefully remove the cod, discard the sachet, and reserve the cooking liquid.
4. Place the cod in the bowl of a food processor fitted with a metal blade and pulse until it reaches the consistency of a coarse paste. If necessary, use some of the reserved cooking liquid to adjust the consistency.
5. In a medium sauce pot over medium heat, simmer the potatoes and garlic in just enough water to cover. Cook until the potatoes are fork-tender, about 8 minutes. Drain the potatoes in a colander and allow to dry by placing them back in the pot over low heat for 1 to 2 minutes. Process the potatoes through a food mill or ricer to make a purée and reserve.
6. Blend the olive oil into the cream until a homogenous texture has formed. Taste the mixture as you go and season with salt and pepper, if necessary. Fold in the potato purée and cod paste just until combined. Form tablespoonfuls of the mixture into little round cakes with straight sides as you would form a crab cake.
7. In a large sauté pan over medium heat, heat a small amount of oil. Lightly flour the cakes and shake off any excess flour. Carefully add the floured cakes to the oil. It is best to work in batches to avoid overcrowding the pan. Cook until golden brown on both sides and warm throughout, about 10 minutes.

8. To make the coulis: In a covered sauté pan over medium heat, cook the bell peppers and shallots in the olive oil until tender, 15 to 20 minutes. Deglaze the pan with the white wine and continue cooking until the wine has bubbled and cooked out. Increase the heat to medium-high. Add the broth and continue cooking until the liquid has reduced to half of its original volume, 10 to 15 minutes.
9. Place the mixture in a food processor fitted with a metal blade and blend until smooth. Season with the salt and pepper. If not serving immediately, store in the refrigerator and rewarm before serving.
10. Serve the brandade cakes warm on a pool of the red pepper coulis.



FRIED CALAMARI

Any place where squid swim you will find a different version of fried calamari. Be sure to rinse and dry the squid thoroughly before seasoning it. You can use both the tubes and the tentacles, but you may want to fry them separately. Sprinkle with sea salt and chopped parsley and serve with lemon wedges. Keep it simple and let the calamari speak for itself. **MAKES 6 SMALL-BITE SERVINGS**

2 lb squid, cleaned and cut crosswise into rings

6 large egg whites, beaten

Salt, to taste

½ cup cornstarch

½ cup all-purpose flour

5 cups olive oil for frying

1 lemon, cut into 8 wedges

1. Soak the squid in the egg whites and ¼ teaspoon of salt for 10 minutes. Drain the squid in a colander.
2. Combine the cornstarch with the flour. Dust the squid with the mixture and shake off any excess. The squid rings should be fully, but lightly, covered.
3. In a deep fryer or large, heavy-bottomed pot over medium-high heat, heat the oil to 350°F. Line a plate with paper towels. Carefully place the squid into the oil and fry, in batches to avoid overcrowding the pot, until golden, about 1 minute. Transfer to the paper towel-lined plate to drain briefly.
4. Give the squid another light sprinkling of salt and serve immediately with the lemon wedges.

PANZAROTTI

Panzarotti are stuffed fried gnocchi. You can use leftover gnocchi dough or make the dough fresh. Think of them as miniature calzones and serve with a drizzle of olive oil or a simple marinara sauce for dipping. **MAKES 8 SMALL-BITE SERVINGS**

FILLING

1 large egg

2 tsp salt

½ cup diced mozzarella

¼ cup ricotta

2 tbsp shaved Parmigiano-Reggiano

½ cup diced salami

Freshly ground black pepper, to taste

PANZAROTTI

14 oz Gnocchi Fritti dough (page 61)

5 cups olive oil for frying

1. To make the filling: Whisk the egg with the salt, add the cheeses and salami, and season with pepper. Combine well.
2. Roll the dough out into an even layer ⅛ inch in thickness and, using a 2-inch round cutter, cut into circles.
3. Place 1 teaspoon of filling in the center of each circle of dough. Fold one side of the circle over the filling to make a half-moon shape. Use your fingers to crimp the edges together, making certain that they are tightly sealed.
4. In a deep fryer or large, heavy-bottomed pot over medium-high heat, heat the olive oil to 350°F. Line a plate with paper towels. Carefully place the panzarotti into the oil and fry, in batches, until golden and crisp, 2 to 3 minutes per batch. Transfer to the paper towel-lined plate to drain briefly and serve immediately.

PIQUILLOS STUFFED WITH TUNA

Piquillo means “little beak” in Spanish. These flavorful little peppers are grown in northern Spain. They are roasted and packed in their own juices, and they are readily available canned. They are quite sweet and not at all spicy. Piquillos can be stuffed with numerous fillings, and the tuna in this particular filling is easily interchangeable with cooked salt cod. It makes a great tapas dish, drizzled with some good-quality olive oil. **MAKES 5 SMALL-BITE SERVINGS**

1 Yukon Gold potato
1 hard-boiled egg, chopped
4 scallions, thinly sliced
1 cup canned tuna, drained
12 green olives, pitted and chopped
3 anchovies, finely chopped
½ cup Aioli (page 28)
1 tsp freshly squeezed lemon juice
Salt, to taste
Freshly ground black pepper, to taste
10 canned piquillo peppers

1. Preheat the oven to 350°F.
2. Place the potato in a medium sauce pot with enough water to cover it by 2 inches. Bring the water to a boil over medium heat, reduce the heat, and cook at a gentle simmer until the potato is tender enough that a skewer goes through it easily, about 10 minutes. Drain and set aside until cool enough to handle. Peel and dice.
3. In a mixing bowl, combine the potato, chopped egg, scallions, and tuna. Use a potato masher to mash the mixture until the texture is creamy with a few chunks. Fold in the olives and anchovies. Fold in the aioli and lemon juice. Season with salt and pepper.
4. Fill a pastry bag with the tuna salad and pipe about 2 tablespoons into each of the piquillo peppers.
5. Place the peppers on a parchment paper-lined sheet pan and bake in the oven until the filling is heated through, about 15 minutes. Serve immediately.