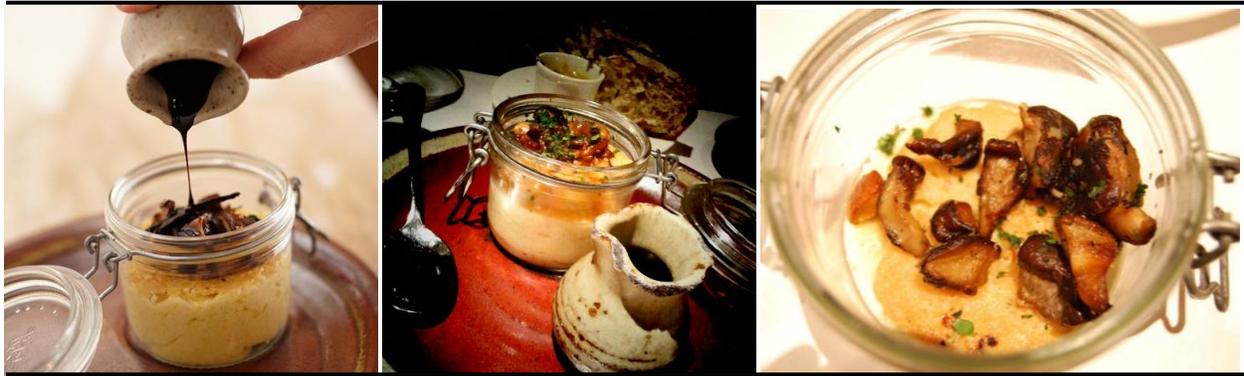


Michael Chiarello's Polenta "Under Glass," with Mushrooms & Balsamic Sauce

Serves: 6



Ingredients

BALSAMIC SAUCE

2 c. balsamic vinegar
1 shallot, chopped
1/4 c. extra-virgin olive oil
2 c. coarsely chopped yellow onions
1 c. coarsely chopped carrots
1 c. coarsely chopped celery
2 bay leaves
3 c. dried red wine
8 c. chicken, veal or rabbit stock
6 black peppercorns
4 tbsp unsalted butter

ANIENT-GRAIN POLENTA

1 1/2 C. heavy cream
3 c. cold water
Pinch of sea salt, preferably gray salt

1 c. fine-ground polenta
1/2 tsp freshly grated nutmeg
1/2 c. shredded fontina cheese
1/4 c. freshly grated Parmesan cheese

MUSHROOMS

3 tbsp extra-virgin olive oil,
plus more if needed
10 oz cultivated or wild mushrooms
such as shiitakes, chanterelles, morels,
cleaned and trimmed (stem shiitakes)
Pinch of sea salt, preferably gray salt
Freshly ground black pepper
1/2 tsp minced garlic
1/2 tsp minced fresh thyme
1 tsp minced fresh flat-leaf parsley

PARM CROSTINI

1 c. freshly grated Parmesan cheese

Directions

FOR THE BALSAMIC SAUCE: In a small sauce pan, combine the vinegar and the shallot. Bring to a simmer over med heat and cook until reduced by half, about 10 min. (Watch this, because at the end, the reduction process speeds up.) Remove from the heat and set aside.

In a large saucepan, heat the olive oil over medium-low heat and add onions, carrots, celery, and bay leaves. Cook, stirring occasionally, until the vegetables are deep brown, about 20 min. Add the red wine and reduce heat to medium-low. Cook to reduce by half, about 10 min.

While the vegetables are cooking pour the stock into a stock pot, add the peppercorns, and cook over high heat until the liquid is reduced by half, about 15 min. Pour the reduced stock into the pan with the red wine and vegetables. Cook for 5 min over medium heat. Add the reduced balsamic vinegar. Remove from heat, stir in butter, and set aside.

FOR THE POLENTA: In a large, heavy saucepan, combine the cream, water, and salt. Bring to a boil over high heat and then reduce heat to medium. Gradually whisk in the polenta in a slow, steady stream. Whisk until the liquid boils again and the grains are suspended in the liquid. Keep whisking so the polenta doesn't scorch. Once it comes to a simmer, switch to a wooden spoon and stir every few minutes until the polenta is creamy without any hint of grittiness, 15 - 20 min. Remove from the heat and stir in the nutmeg, fontina, & parmesan.

FOR THE MUSHROOMS: Heat a large sauté pan or skillet over high heat, add the 3 tbsp oil, and heat until it shimmers. Add the mushrooms but no more than two deep anywhere in the pan; if you pile them on, they will steam instead of brown. Cook the mushrooms in two pans if you have to, using about 2 tbsp oil per pan. Mushrooms over heat can be temperamental, don't stir them, don't salt them, and don't turn them until the bottom layer is brown, about 2 min. Reduce the heat to medium and season with salt & pepper. Stir in the garlic and sauté until garlic start to show a light brown color. Add the thyme, and listen to it crackle in the pan. Add the parsley and toss. Remove from the Heat and set aside. You can cook the mushrooms up to an hour before serving.

FOR THE PARM CROSTINI: Preheat the oven to 425F. Line a baking sheet with a silicone mat or parchment paper. If you have them, place six 3-inch ring molds on the prepared pan. Inside each ring mold, evenly spoon about 2 tbsp grated Parmesan. (To make without ring molds spoons 6 mounds of Parmesan about 2 inches apart, and spread into thin, even rounds. The free-form crostini won't fit as smoothly on the top of your polenta as the ring-molded ones, but just angle them in or trim to fit.)

Slide the pan into the oven and bake until the parmesan is melted into disks that are just beginning to brown, 3-5 min. Store these stacked in an airtight container for up to 3 days.

Spoon 1/2 c. polenta into each of 6 half-pint French glass canning jars with attached lids. Place one parmesan crostini on top, either neatly resting on the surface of the polenta or slide into the surface at an angle. Divide the mushroom among the jars. Serve the balsamic sauce at the table and let guest pour a few tablespoons of it per serving. Pour any remaining sauce into small creamers or pitchers so guest can pour on more sauce if they wish.

