

cicchetti vari Venetian cocktail hour snacks



spritz

Ubiquitous cocktail served in bacari throughout Venice and enjoyed at all times of day: prosecco or spumante with Campari (an herbal bitter) or Cynar (a bitter made from artichokes), a splash of fizzy water, a slice of lemon or orange and a few cubes of ice.

baccalà mantecato on fried polenta

1 lb (500 g) baccalà

milk

olive oil

Soak the baccalà in fresh water for several days changing the water once or twice a day. Boil the reconstituted fish in water with a few cups of milk for about 20 minutes or until the flesh of the fish is soft and flakes but is not mushy. Remove the fish from the cooking liquid, reserve the liquid.

When the fish is cool remove the skin and the bones.

Whip the fish in a mixer with the whisk attachment slowly adding a fine stream of a lightly flavored extra virgin olive oil alternating with dribbles of the milky cooking liquid. You are making a thick emulsion, as soon as the mixture takes on a creamy aspect stop adding liquid. Taste for salt.

Serve on fried polenta or toast.



fried polenta

Prepare polenta following the proportions for polenta:water on the package. To avoid lumps, when the water boils, stir vigorously to get a centrifuge going and then slowly pour the polenta into the swirling water. Stir almost constantly at the beginning and then let it bubble until very thick, stirring often. Make it slightly thicker than you might if you were serving it right away.

Pour the polenta into a container and let it rest in the refrigerator over night. Unmold the polenta, slice it and fry until crispy (deep fry or pan fry with a good amount of olive oil) and sprinkle with salt while hot.

Fried polenta makes a good base for any kind of crostino, is good for snacking on as is or as a side dish to a piece of meat.

peperone in saor .. sweet and sour bell peppers

2 red bell peppers

1 onion

salt

olive oil

water

1 Tablespoon sugar

white wine vinegar (mead vinegar would be nice here too)

Finely slice the onions and cut the peppers into thick strips. Place them into a casserole with olive oil, salt and about 1/3 cup of water. Cook over high heat until the vegetables begin to wilt.

Add sugar and enough vinegar that you can see it on the bottom of the pan. Continue cooking until the whole thing reduces to a thick, tangy compote.

Serve on toast, on fried polenta or by itself on a plate.

uova sodo con acciughe .. hard boiled egg & anchovy

A classic served at all the Venetian bacari: half a hard boiled egg topped with a dab of mayonnaise and an anchovy filet (look for good quality, preserved anchovies that are rosy pink, have a compact texture and taste of the sea breeze).



individual eggplant parmigiane

eggplant

fresh mozzarella

tomato puree

salt

sweet basil

Slice the eggplant into rounds (leave the skin on) and let it sit in a colander sprinkled with very coarse salt for a couple of hours. After the eggplant has released its brown liquid, rinse the salt off the eggplant and dry it well by pressing it between two dish towels. Fry the eggplant with just enough olive oil until it is soft and cooked through, even letting it get toasty brown. The eggplant will absorb the olive oil like a sponge releasing the oil back into the pan when it nears doneness. When the eggplant is done let it rest on paper towels to remove any excess olive oil.

To avoid the parmigiane getting soggy in the oven from liquid released by the cheese and tomatoes slice the mozzarella and let it sit on paper towels until it has released all extra whey; if the tomato puree / passata is too liquidy cook it down by letting it bubble slowly until thick.

Top a slice of eggplant with tomato puree, a piece of mozzarella, a leaf of sweet basil and some salt, place another slice of eggplant on top with a bit of mozzarella and a bit more tomato puree.

Bake at 180C/350F for about 15 minutes, the longer it bakes the more the sweetness of both the tomatoes and the eggplant show up.

borlotti e bottarga .. beans with cured tuna roe

Boiled fresh cranberry beans are served warm or room temperature dressed with a bit of their broth, some spicy extra virgin olive oil, salt, fresh red pepper and a generous grating of bottarga.



polpette di baccalà e patate

multiples of

1/2 cup baccalà, desalted, deboned and flaked

1 boiled potato

egg, beaten

salt black pepper

fresh herbs like thyme or marjoram, optional

fresh bread crumbs

for the crispy coating:

egg, wash

flour

dried bread crumbs

Finely chop the baccalà, smash the potato with the back of a fork and salt, pepper and herbs to taste. Add an egg and enough breadcrumbs to make it all hold together. Form into small balls or patties, pass through flour, beaten egg and then bread crumbs. Fry in hot oil until golden.

polpette di tonno fresco .. fresh tuna fritters

tuna

fresh oregano

salt

vinegar (any good vinegar you have on hand, not balsamic)

flour

egg

fizzy water

Use sushi grade tuna, bonito or albacore, or any fish you would use for seafood patties or cakes.

Chop the fish into small dice, season with some salt, finely chopped fresh oregano or other herbs and a few drops of vinegar. Mix well, form into small balls, roll in flour and freeze for about 2 hours.

Make thick batter with an egg, some fizzy water and some flour.

Take the tuna polpette from the freezer, pass them through the batter and deep fry in oil heated to 170-180C / 340-350F just until the crust is golden but they are still pink in the middle, about 2-3 minutes.



The Apotheosis of Gluttony

tuorlo fritto .. fried egg yolk

egg yolks

bread crumbs

fresh marjoram

carrot

zucchini

salt

extra virgin olive oil

Flavor the bread crumbs as you like, I used finely chopped fresh marjoram, and use the back of a spoon to make a small depression for each egg yolk. Drop an egg yolk into each depression, cover with more bread crumbs and put them into the freezer for 2 hours.

Fry in hot oil, 170-180C / 340-350F, for 1 minute. Sprinkle with salt while hot.

Serve the fried yolk on a nest of fried vegetable strips.

fried vegetable nest:

Use a vegetable peeler or zester to make strips of carrot and zucchini, deep fry, separately, as above until they begin to stick together and get crisp.

Shape them into a little nest and top with a fried egg yolk to serve.

