

the **CrossFit**

JOURNAL ARTICLES

Fit to Eat

Autumn Dinner

Benjamin Sims

AUTUMN DINNER

Spicy Albacore Polpettes with Tomato Sauce, Olives, and Capers

Arugula Salad

Four 4-block servings



Although the change in season is only starting to show small signs of happening where I live, the world of food is starting to change rapidly. Late summer crops that have been soaking up the sun in the past few months are producing faster than we can keep up. The most noteworthy is the tomato. Only two weeks ago, tomatoes were two dollars a pound; now, farmers are literally knocking on the back door of the restaurant with over a hundred pounds a day for dirt cheap prices for the best, most flavorful tomatoes of the year. Time for tomato sauce! The season for one of the best local fish,

albacore tuna, is also beginning right now. So, here is a surefire recipe from the south of Italy via northern California that combines those two ingredients. I made this dish for the first time eight years ago at Chez Pansse in Berkeley, and I bring it back every autumn to the delight of my friends and, now, my customers at Avanti in Santa Cruz.

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Spicy Albacore Polpettes with Tomato Sauce, Olives, & Capers

1 lb. fresh albacore
1 medium onion, diced small
1 tsp. fresh jalapeño, diced fine
1 Tbsp. chopped fresh oregano
1 Tbsp. olive oil
2 Tbsp. toasted pine nuts, chopped
2 Tbsp. currants
1/2 cup fresh breadcrumbs
1/4 cup milk
Salt and black pepper
Flour for coating
Olive oil for frying

Boil one cup of water and add currants to soften for about 10 minutes; then drain and cool. Soak the breadcrumbs in the milk; stir every few minutes so the bread soaks up all the milk. Over medium heat, sauté the onions, jalapeño, and oregano in the olive oil until soft but not browned; season with salt and pepper. Once cooked, put the onion mixture into a large mixing bowl and chill. Dice the Albacore as finely as you can. This is easiest when it's cold: first slice it thinly, cut

the slices into strips, and then mince (dice into the smallest pieces you can make). By the time you are done cutting the fish, the onions and currants should be cool enough to mix together. Put the albacore and chopped pine nuts in the mixing bowl with the onion mixture, season again with salt and pepper, and mix. Add the breadcrumbs and mix vigorously to form a sort of emulsified dough. This can all be done in advance and put in the refrigerator.

When you are ready to eat, heat about half an inch of oil in a sauté pan over medium heat. Form the albacore mixture into balls, about as big around as a silver dollar, or a little bit more than one ounce each. You should have 16 balls (polpettes). Roll the polpettes in a little bit of flour to coat them evenly and then drop them into the hot oil. You want a nice golden color, so make sure the oil does not get too hot. Roll the polpettes around to brown all sides, about 4 minutes. Remove them from the oil using tongs or a slotted spoon and place on a paper towel to absorb excess oil. Serve hot on a plate of tomato sauce.



Roasted Tomato Sauce

There is no sense in making a small batch of tomato sauce, as it takes hours and freezes well; I roast a 20-pound case of tomatoes at a time at the restaurant and about half that at home.

- 10 lbs. ripe or, even better, overripe tomatoes (I like the “Early Girl” variety)
- 4 sliced red onions
- 2 bulbs sliced fennel
- 1 bunch basil
- 1 bay leaf
- 1 Tbsp. crushed red pepper
- Handful of salt
- 1 cup olive oil
- 2 cups white wine

- 2 Tbsp. capers
- 2 Tbsp. pitted olives, torn into quarters
- 1 Tbsp. chopped parsley

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Core the tomatoes and cut in half, put them in a roasting pan, season with salt, add bay leaf

and basil, stem and all. Scatter with sliced onions and fennel, add crushed red pepper, season again with salt, drizzle with olive oil, and put in oven. Check every half hour and shake the pan to settle the juices. After two hours or so, the onions and fennel should be nice and caramelized; at that point, stir the pan and add the wine. Continue roasting for another hour to concentrate the flavors a bit. Once I feel satisfied with the sweet roasted flavor of the tomato and caramelization of the vegetables, I take them out of the oven. My favorite way to puree the sauce is in a food mill, but a blender or electric food processor is fine. Then pass the sauce through a fine strainer to remove all the seeds and skins, pressing all the juices through using the bottom of a ladle. Discard the skins and seeds, taste for seasoning, and your sauce is ready. Refrigerate or freeze what you want to save for later.

For the polpettes, heat about a cup and a half of the tomato sauce and add the capers and olives. Divide the hot tomato sauce onto four plates, put four polpettes on each plate, sprinkle with chopped parsley, and serve hot.

Arugula Salad

- 1 lb. arugula, washed and dried
- 2 Tbsp. extra virgin olive oil
- Salt and pepper

In Italy, this type of very simple preparation is typical for a side salad. It cleanses the palate, and the slight bitterness of the arugula contrasts nicely with the sweetness of the tomato and the richness of the albacore. Right before eating, simply toss the arugula with the olive oil, sprinkle with salt and pepper, and serve in the center of the table. In place of bread you can use forkfuls of greens to mop up the tomato sauce from your plate.

