Cultural Daily

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Dinner and a Movie: Big Night

Pace Webb · Wednesday, October 29th, 2014

I'll admit it. I'm not always in a rush to see films about food. As the head of a catering company, the last thing I want to do at the end of the night is settle down into my sofa and watch a flick that reminds me of what I've been doing all day (or what I'll be doing tomorrow). That's why *Big Night* sat at the bottom of my Netflix queue for such a long time. Despite the fact that I'm a huge Isabella Rossellini fan, the story of two brothers trying to keep their authentic Italian restaurant afloat in 1960s Jersey sounded just a little…well, stressful. But eventually I realized that I could only put the movie off for so long. So I watched it. And you know what? I loved it.

The food in this film almost has a starring role itself. And as a chef, you can bet I appreciated the gorgeous shots of thickly sliced timpano, freshly-picked tomatoes, and sprawling antipasti. *Big Night* is really nice to look at, and it reminded me of all the things I loved about the cuisine when I lived in Italy for a year. It also reminded me of this pumpkin gnudi recipe, which is the perfect dish to serve while watching this film.

The diners depicted in this film were so unsure of real regional Italian cuisine, so they were balking at things like risotto and antipasti. They wanted breadsticks and spaghetti and meatballs, all very Americanized versions of Italian food. So, this dish is an homage to the brothers' passion for unapologetically real Italian food.

Like many of the meals served in *Big Night*, the prep work here is the most labor intensive. But to save some time, you can make the gnudi a day ahead of time and pop them into the freezer. You can also brown the butter a day ahead and then heat it up on a bain-marie (a bowl over a saucepan of simmering water) so as not to brown it further on direct heat. To serve this gnudi as an entree, I would add a bunch of parmesan cheese before garnishing with the fried sage.

Like a really amazing meal, *Big Night* is a film that won't be soon forgotten. If it's at the bottom of your Netflix cue, like it was mine, I'd highly suggest moving it to the top.

Pumpkin gnudi, brown butter, fried sage

Yields 60 pcs

Pasta:
6-8 oz. ricotta
10 oz. (approx) AP flour
6 oz. (approx) pumpkin, cooked

1/2 tsp. nutmeg
pinch cayenne
salt to taste

Sauce:
butter
salt

Garnish:
20 leaves fresh sage
fry oil

Method:
Mix dry ingredients together for pasta. Puree fresh cooked pumpkin with oil and water. Combine ricotta and pumpkin. Then add puree into flour. Season with spices to taste.

For the butter: Brown milk solids and season with salt to taste.

Fry sage and set aside for garnish.

Cook pasta and toss in butter. Plate and garnish with sage leaf.

Pace Webb’s pumpkin gnudi. Photo by Erin Hearts Court.

Top image: A scene from ‘Big Night’

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