

Late-Autumn Falafel Project November 2011

Me and Paolo had wanted to make falafel together for a while. Since it was November, we also wanted to cook some warm, winter food. So, we set out to cook a late-autumn falafel dinner, incorporating seasonal foods from the Monterey Bay area that would warm us up when evening came and the weather got chilly.

The menu, based on what we had in the house and what sounded good: Falafel in sourdough pita bread, winter squash vegetable soup, butternut squash gnocchii with sage cream sauce. But really it was all about filling the kitchen with heat from the oven and the smell of autumn harvest, drinking good wine, and enjoying each others company.



Pita



Making pita is a serious business, and should not be attempted without a purple headband and fairy wings.

I made pita from a sourdough starter. Not essential, but sourdough adds a lot to the flavor. I started the “mother” the night before from the starter I keep in the refrigerator. In the morning it was nice and risen, and I prepared the pita dough from that to be ready for the afternoon. Ginger insisted on rolling out the pita, and many of them bore her mark.

Falafel

The falafel were very standard: Soaked garbanzos, parsley, cilantro, onion, garlic, cumin, hot pepper, salt, and some flour to hold it together. We blended the mixture first in the food

processor, then added the flour to get the right texture. We fried them in canola oil, I think. The texture was beautiful - crispy outside, light and steaming inside - like a Tel Aviv kiosk at the peak of lunch time.

For the finished product, we made a standard tehina (sesame paste, water, garlic, lemon, salt) and a salad. In summertime, this would obviously be tomatoes, cucumber, pepper, and parsley. Autumn called for another approach. I remember seeing many types of pickled vegetables used as condiments in the falafel places in Israel (why didn't I try them?), something we always have around in the winter. We took a fresh sauerkraut and augmented it with arugula from the garden, lemon juice and olive oil. Yeah, it was awesome.



For autumn falafel, we knew we couldn't rely on summer staples like tomatoes and cucumber. The salad we made from red cabbage sauerkraut and arugula. Here is the finished product with salad, falafel, and tehina in a sourdough pita.



Our beloved late-autumn salad. No cucumber, no tomatoes - no problem!

Dance Break



Baked Soup



Clockwise from left: Kabocha squash vessel, vegetable stock, Ella cleaning seeds, baked soup.

The soup was simple and very satisfying. We took a nice Kabocha squash, cut the top off, and scooped out the seeds. We made a nice vegetable stock with some bits I'd been saving in the freezer: fennel stalks, onion peels, celery leaves, along with bay leaf, parsley, and carrot. For the soup, we sauteed onion, carrots, celery, and fennel root in a deep cast-iron skillet, then added the vegetable stock. After it was seasoned and pretty much ready to eat, we ladled the soup into the hollow squash and baked it at 350 F for about an hour. When we served it we scooped out a little of the squash flesh into each bowl - amazing.

Note: We cleaned and roasted the squash seeds, but found that the shells of kabocha seeds are far too thick. We had better luck with the seeds of a butternut squash (the squash was used for the best gnocci we ever had).