

Party “Small Plates” From California’s Wine Country

(NAPSA)—A buffet featuring appetizers and small plates is a great twist for a holiday party. Chef Jeffrey Madura of John Ash & Co. Restaurant in Sonoma County, California, presents this trio of small plates for their elegance and ease of preparation. He uses California figs that have been dried for their convenience and exceptional flavor that says “California Wine Country.”

Fig and Blue Cheese Fritters, Figs in a Blanket and Oysters with Fig Mignonette play with old ideas (remember pigs in a blanket?) in sophisticated, new ways. According to Chef Madura, these dishes are nicely woven together with Ferrari-Carano’s 2003 Sonoma County Fumé Blanc. “This wine has a great balance of acidity and fruit—including fig flavors—that make it the obvious choice for each of these dishes,” he says.

Thanks to California dried figs, these handmade fritters are wonderful finger food that will fill your home with a welcoming fragrance that’s both sweet and savory. For the Figs in a Blanket and Oysters with Fig Mignonette recipes, visit www.californiafigs.com.

California Fig and Blue Cheese Fritters

- ¼ cup half-and-half**
- 8 tablespoons (4 ounces) unsalted butter, cut into ¼-inch cubes**
- ½ teaspoon kosher salt**
- ¾ cup plus 2 tablespoons all-purpose flour**
- 3 large eggs, lightly beaten**
- ½ teaspoon dried thyme**
- 1 teaspoon Dijon mustard**
- 3 ounces crumbled blue cheese**
- 2 cups finely grated dry jack cheese**
- ¾ cup stemmed and coarsely chopped dried California figs**
- Vegetable oil, for deep frying**



Courtesy California Fig Advisory Board



Fig and Blue Cheese Fritters can be an elegant addition to any celebration.

In a small saucepan, over medium heat, bring the half-and-half, butter, and salt to a boil. Remove from heat and whisk in the flour. Return to the heat, cook, stirring constantly with a wooden spoon, until the mixture draws back from the sides of the pan, 3 to 5 minutes. Remove from heat.

One at a time, add the eggs, stirring to incorporate each before adding on. Stir in the thyme and mustard. Allow mixture to cool completely. Add both cheeses and the figs.

Line a baking sheet with waxed or parchment paper. With a small scoop or a tablespoon measure, make 1-inch balls of dough, and place on the prepared sheet. Continue with the remaining dough.

Fill a large, deep, heavy bottom saucepan or stockpot, fitted with a candy or deep-fat thermometer, halfway with oil. Bring to 350°F. Line a baking sheet with paper towels. Fry the fritters 4 to 5 at a time, being careful not to crowd, until browned, 3 to 4 minutes. Drain on towels and serve hot.

Yields 32 fritters