

FOOD ARTS

AT THE RESTAURANT AND HOTEL FOREFRONT

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Techniques

MEGA MEATBALL DEMO BY HOSS ZARÉ. BEVERLY STEPHEN REPORTS. PHOTOS BY BRIAN CYBOK.

Could meatballs be the new sliders? It seems every chef and his mother are making meatballs or, more precisely, the chefs are pretty much making their mothers' meatballs, with a few upscale tweaks here and there. They're mostly Italian, though **Bill Telepan** riffs on his mother's Hungarian meatballs at his eponymous restaurant in New York City. There's even **The Meatball Shop** cafe on Manhattan's Lower East Side, where meatballs are the main event, and **Donatella Arpaia** has set up an alfresco Meatball Wagon dispensing Mamma Maria's Meatballs on the patio of her trattoria **Mia Dona** on East 58th Street. **Joey Campanaro's** (**The Little Owl**) signature meatball sliders are also sliding onto the menu at the new **Kenmare. Napa & Company** in Stamford, Connecticut, promotes Meatballs & Merlot or with other wine pairings weekly. **Andrew Carmellini** may have started the meatball rolling with his duck and foie gras concoction when he was at **A Voce** in New York City. But nobody does meatballs on as grand a scale as **Hoss Zaré**, who combines Mediterranean and modern Persian cuisine at **Zaré at Fly Trap** in San Francisco.

Zaré celebrates Meatball Mondays, turning what was once a slow night into a packed house, with customers reserving their meatballs along with their tables, because Zaré makes no more than two dozen a night. His are no little namby-pamby one-bite affairs. Zaré's Persian mega meatballs contain about half a pound of ground meat (usually half beef, half veal) and are stuffed with something significant like a braised veal shank, a roasted baby chicken, or a quail. On Thanksgiving he even stuffed a meatball with a turkey for his staff. "It weighed 65 pounds and took four people to lift it with the broth," he recalls and, all modesty aside, admits that he would love to replicate this reverse turdunken on the *Today* show.

To make his stuffed meatballs, Zaré fashions a mound of seasoned meat into a ball shape, presses a crater into the center with his thumbs, and places the item to be stuffed inside. Then he builds up the meat around the item until it's covered. Because the stuffing has already been cooked, it's only necessary to simmer the meatball in broth for about an hour.

In his native Tabriz, small meatballs, called *kufteh*, are stuffed with hard-boiled eggs. Traditionally they're served in two courses—first the broth with crispy bread and pickled vegetables, followed by the meatball itself. But at his restaurant, Zaré puts everything in the bowl at once. "It keeps the meatball moist," he says.

The leftovers—if there are any—make a great sandwich, hot or cold, like meat loaf. "I used to take it to school for lunch," he says.



VEAL SHANK KUFTEH TABRIZI

CHEF/OWNER HOSS ZARÉ, ZARÉ AT FLY TRAP, SAN FRANCISCO
 For 8 servings (requires advance preparation)

Broth:

- 2 Tbsps. olive oil
- 1 1/3 cups carrots, cut into small dice
- 1 1/3 cups celery, cut into small dice
- 1 1/3 cups onions, cut into small dice
- 16 cups chicken and beef broth
- 10 preserved limes, crushed
- 6 Turkish bay leaves
- 2 Tbsps. tomato paste
- 2 Tbsps. turmeric
- 1/8 tsp. saffron
- 1/2 cup fresh Italian parsley, chopped
- salt
- black pepper, freshly ground

Heat oil in large pot set over medium heat; add carrots, celery, and onions; cook until softened (about 10 minutes); add remaining ingredients; bring to a boil; reduce heat to medium; simmer



10 minutes; remove from heat; cool completely; place in airtight container; cover; reserve in refrigerator.

Meatballs:

- 4 lbs. ground beef, lamb, or veal
- 6 lg. eggs
- 2 onions, grated
- 2 cups garlic chives, chopped
- 2 cups parsley, chopped
- 2 cups yellow split peas, cooked
- 2 cups basmati rice, cooked
- 1 cup rice flour

- 1/2 cup dill, chopped
- 1/2 cup savory, chopped
- 1/2 cup tarragon, chopped
- 1/2 cup basil, chopped
- 1/2 cup mint, chopped
- 1 lime, juiced
- 2 tsps. saffron, dissolved in 1/2 cup hot water
- 2 tsps. turmeric
- 2 tsps. ground cumin
- 1 tsp. ground cinnamon

Place all ingredients in hotel pan (A); knead 10 minutes (B); envelop in plastic wrap; refrigerate overnight; reserve.

Assembly:

- 8 10- to 12-oz. veal shanks
- salt
- black pepper, freshly ground
- 1 cup olive oil
- 2 lg. onions, chopped
- 4 carrots, chopped
- 1 bunch celery, chopped
- 8 lg. cloves garlic, crushed

- 8 anchovy fillets, rinsed, patted dry, and finely chopped
- 6 Turkish or California bay leaves
- 3 cups dry white wine
- 1 cup red wine
- 8 cups chicken stock
- 2 sm. cans crushed tomatoes
- 2 strips lemon zest
- 2 strips orange zest
- 3 to 4 sprigs lemon thyme
- 1 lime, juiced

1. Heat oven to 350°F. 2. Season shanks with salt and pepper; reserve. 3. Heat 1/2 cup oil in large skillet set over medium-high heat; add shanks; cook until brown on all sides, turning with tongs as needed (8 to 10 minutes); remove from heat; place in large roasting pan; reserve. 4. Heat remaining 1/2 cup oil in same skillet; reduce heat to medium; add onions, carrots, celery, garlic, anchovies, and bay leaves; season; cook, stirring, until vegetables are softened (6 to 8 minutes); deglaze, scraping up brown bits; bring to a boil; reduce by 50 percent; stir in stock, tomatoes, zests, and thyme; bring to a boil; remove from heat; pour over shanks; tightly cover roasting pan with aluminum foil; cook in oven until meat is very tender (1 to 1 1/2 hours); remove from oven; remove foil; reserve (keep warm). 5. To serve, remove meatball mixture from refrigerator; divide into 8 pieces; roll into balls; make a hole in each ball large enough to fit shank (C) place a shank inside (D); pat meat up around shanks to seal around each shank (E); pour broth into large pot; bring to a boil; reduce heat to medium; add lime juice; gently add meatballs to broth (F); reduce heat to low; cook until meat is done all the way through (about 1 hour); remove from stock using a spider; place a meatball into shallow serving bowls; ladle 1 cup broth over each.

What to drink: Chateau Musar Lebanon 1999

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