Pisco and pastries south of the world

Description

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Some people naturally throw parties where the food, company and spirits are all good.

Over the last two years during a stay in the Hudson Valley, friends from Chile repeatedly shared their party flair.

It started at Andrea and Rodrigoâ??s baby shower, where guests sampled a beverage featuring pisco, colorless brandy with an alcohol content that can rise above 40 percent. The hosts served *piscola*, a chilled blend of cola and pisco (primarily produced in regions of Chile and Peru), as the showerâ??s signature cocktail. One tall slender piscola tasted just right (had I not been driving home later, two may have tasted better).

Prepare pisco sours with freshly squeezed lemon juice.

When Andrea and Rodrigo marked their sonâ??s first birthday, we toasted again with pisco. Inspired to mix South American drinks, my husband and I asked Rodrigo where he purchased pisco (Payless Wine & Liquor in Newburgh) and we started experimenting to perfect pisco sours, a full-bodied Chilean cocktail.

Piscoâ??a luxury spirit made from several varieties of grapes and distilled to proofâ??anchors the pisco sour, but freshly squeezed citrus juice turns the beverage into a lemony libation.

Last month, before the couple returned to Chile with their young son and another baby on the way, Rodrigo made the splashy cocktail while Andrea taught a group of friends how to create traditional empanadas.

â??In Chile,â?• she said, â??you always can find empanadas. Itâ??s very typical and we eat a lot of them, out for lunch, at the beach, at home. Iâ??m no excellent cook but I do know a good empanada.â?•

Her variation, which she credits to her mother Maria, stands up boldly to the savory sort sold at Rincon Argentino in Cold Spring and the flavorful Mexi-Cali-inspired empanadas stuffed with everything from chipotle chicken to kale and sweet potato at Beaconâ??s Tito Santana Taqueria.

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For an empanada like her motherâ??s, Andrea cooks a spicy filling of beef, onion, garlic and cumin, prepared a day ahead to let the mixture rest.

â??This part, the filling, is the most important part of the empanada,â?• Andrea insisted. â??You donâ??t want too much onion or we say â??this is no good.â?? You taste and taste and taste the filling as youâ??re cooking and stirring, adding the cumin and some salt, until you find a good flavor and thatâ??s it.â?•

Empanadas

These empanadas, *empanadas de pino*, include spicy beef filling as well as raisins, black olives and hard-boiled egg. The fillers are wrapped with dough made from scratch or purchased in prepared form. For the group assembly, Andrea provided ready-made â??discosâ?• packaged by Goya.

To change up your party repertoire, prep empanada ingredients and invite all to join in the pastry assembly while sampling pisco sours. Icy-cold lemon drinks without pisco can be something special even for those who prefer booze-free beverages, so you can never have too many lemons on hand. The beauty of this south-of-the-world tasting brings guests together all in good spirits.

Pisco Sours

Yield: 1 serving

3 measures pisco

1 measure freshly squeezed lemon juice

1 measure simple syrup (1:1 water and sugar. In small saucepan, bring to boil. Stir, dissolve sugar, simmer and remove from heat. Cool.)

1 egg white

bitters

ice

Shake pisco, lemon juice, simple syrup and egg white with ice for 20 seconds. Strain into glass and add a swirl of bitters on top of the foam. Serve immediately

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Empanadas

Yield: 1 dozen

Dough

1 Â½ cups flour

1 teaspoon baking powder

1 teaspoon salt

Â¾ cup butter

1 egg yolk

8 tablespoons cold water or milk

Combine flour, salt and baking powder in mixing bowl. Cut in the butter, mixing evenly. Mix in egg yolk. Gradually add liquid. Refrigerate 15 minutes. Separate dough into 12 balls. Roll into 5-inch circles.

Filling

2 tablespoons canola oil

Â½ yellow onion, diced

1 clove garlic, minced

1 pound ground or finely chopped beef

Â½ cup white wine

1 teaspoon ground cumin

salt and pepper to taste

Stuffing

2 hard-boiled eggs, sliced into 6 lengths

1 cup raisins

2 dozen black olives

1 egg, whisked (set aside)

1. Over medium heat, cook onion, garlic and cumin in oil until softened. Add meat and wine. Cook until browned, seasoning with cumin, salt and pepper to taste.
2. Place dough rounds on floured surface. Add 1 tablespoon of filling to center. Top with egg slices, raisins and olives. Moisten dough perimeter with water. Fold pastry in half and crimp edges. Turn ends into middle.
3. Brush sealed empanadas with egg wash. Bake at 350 degrees for 30 minutes until golden.

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Text and photos by Mary Ann Ebner

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