# The Bluffs Food & Wine gazette

# Event **Report:**

A TRUFFLE DINNER AT DANTE



ALSO INSIDE • Truffles: Culinary Gold in Black and White Recipe: Dante's Chef Drew Statz's Rib Cap Croquette Yartsa Gunbu: The Most Expensive Fungus in the World

A publication of the Council Bluffs Branch of the International Wine and Food Society

# EDITOR'S

ruffles at Dante Pizzeria. What a great idea Amanda Harrington and John Matthews had for a theme and a great way to spend a Wednesday evening. Can't remember an all truffle every course event before. Well, everything but the antipasto. Everything else, including the dessert had truffles. Chef Drew Statz and Sommelier & Manager Paul Foss were excited to break from the usual menu and stretch their culinary and vinous legs to highlight everyone's favorite fungus. There was a lot going on in the kitchen for our courses. Read about it here.

Chef Drew agreed to give us a recipe. The **Rib Cap Croquette** was incredibly flavorful and beefy, something to enhance a steak or prime rib dinner.

I thought we could use a little more education on truffles. We only had black truffles for our dinner, but there are white truffles as well. The white were out of season for our event. Chef Stats didn't really talk much about the finer points of truffles, so expand your knowledge of this edible fungus. One salient fact to take home with you: Black Truffles need heat to bring out their aroma and flavor, while heat dissolves / destroys White Truffles. With the white, you just shave or grate them over something warm or hot after it is finished cooking.

I had never heard of **Yartsa Gunbu** before. Its other name is the Latin codification name for it: *Cordyceps Sinensis*. I hope that helps you. Let's just say it is the most expensive fungus in the world. And you thought real truffles were pricy. You will just have to read about it within to find out who would pay \$50,000.00 a pound for it.

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Tom Murnan

**Cover photo:** Dante Pizzeria Chef Drew Statz holding a 7 oz Black Truffle before shaving it over our Eye of Rib-eye. Photo by Tom Murnan



# I'd stop drinking ...but I'm not a Quitter."

-COCKTAIL NAPKIN

# EVENT REPORT:

A Truffle Dinner at Dante

# STORY BY TOM MURNAN PHOTOS BY TOM MURNAN & WAYNE MARKUS

I loved the theme that Amanda Harrington and John Matthews found for our event: Truffles. Can't recall ever having an entire meal devoted to black truffles. Amanda said she got the idea from a public event Dante had in December. Whatever the source, it was inspired. And we can always trust that Dante will do an excellent job. We had 31 sign up on this mild January evening, one being a guest. Chef Drew Statz was our culinary guide, while Paul Foss was our wine expert. Both would come out before each course to explain the dish and the wines used.

We followed COVID guidelines, with masks required when out of our seats, and were handed a glass of **Ferrari Fratelli Lunelli Metodo Classico Brut Trentino NV**, a wine made of 100% Chardonnay. The wine hails from the Trentino DOC, or appellation. A pleasant bubbly, it was made in the Metodo Classico, or a term we are more familiar with, Méthod Champenoise, meaning the wine is sparkled in the bottle. It was refreshing and lively.

Our appetizers were served at the table. And a wide selection of antipasti there was. **Tigelle** was the largest item on the plate. Tigelle is a mixture of flat bread and English muffin, made from the Emilia-Romagna region in Italy. It's a dough made with milk, yeast, a little bit of salt, and looked like an English muffin. They had a nice flower design stamped into the top. But I digress.



Other delights were honeycomb, berry jam, whole grain mustard, flax cracker, beef rillette (which was spicy hot), Prosciutto Friuli, Calabrese salumi, jardinière (a condiment of pickled peppers, carrots & serrano pepper), and three cheeses: Gorgonzola Dolce (cow), Montasio (cow) and Dola Mina (goat). So what's the difference between the more familiar Prosciutto di Parma and our Prosciutto Friuli? It is salted less, which results in slighter sweeter ham. They also press the leg for several days which removes excess moisture and forces the fat to merge with the lean meat, making it better for aging. Before going on to the First Course, President Connie Martin presented Leah and Josh Johnson, our newest members, their IWFS medallions. Welcome Johnsons! Our First Course was Foie Gras Mousseline Crostata, basically a pâté pie. Made with duck liver and black truffles, it was served cool. This is entirely understandable because heat would cause the liver to melt and run. A classic short crust (pie shell) was filled with the liver. It was topped by a mousseline made out of gelatin from cooked beef bones. It was rich and unctuous, with earthy tones supplied by the truffles. There was also a hint of nuttiness. It was a very rich start to our dinner. The truffles themselves were somewhat muted in flavor.



A 20-year-old Balsamico was drizzled over the top and around the plate. There is a big difference between industrial grade Balsamic Vinegar you get at the grocery and a true artisanal product that is labor and material intensive. A true Balsamico takes grape must, including skin and seeds, and cooks it down to about half. It then is fermented for 3 weeks. It then is placed in a series of about 5 barrels to age and concentrate the flavors for 12 years. The barrels might be oak, chestnut, cherry, juniper, but it always ends up with mulberry. They use a solera system to keep transferring the vinegar into smaller barrels as the vinegar evaporates, with the new vinegar starting at the first barrel. As you can imagine, it is an expensive process. In our case, the sharpness of the Balsamico helped cut the richness of the foie gras.

We were given a second sparkling wine, a **Contratto Millesimato Pas Dosé**, this wine had 80% Pinot Nero (Pinot Noir) and 20% Chardonnay. The wine aged in tanks until May, then was blended and put in the bottle. Like in Champagne, the bottled are riddled by hand. They put a painted thumb print in the punt of the bottle so the riddler can tell where he is at in directing the lees, or dead yeast cells, towards the neck of the bottle for disgorgement before finishing the bottle with a cork and wire basket. It was creamy with nice acidity, a good match to the foie Gras.

The Second Course was one of my favorites. Black truffles need heat to really bring out the aroma and flavor. We had just that with our Risotto. The raw rice was sautéed with rendered chicken skin for richness and flavor, the best part of the chicken, then cooked in broth. Black truffle was incorporated into the dish while cooking. This was all sprinkled with Parmigiano Reggiano cheese. But this risotto was not made with just the usual Arborio rice. Carnaroli rice was used instead. Coming from northern Italy, Carnaroli is used for making risotto. It is different from the more common arborio rice due to its higher starch content and firmer texture, as well as having a longer grain. It is also drier, which means it absorbs more broth, hence more flavor than Arborio. The dish was very moist, with ultra thin slices of radish, perhaps green onion, a bit of truffle oil. The rice was cooked a bit more than al dente, but it still had structure and was not mushy. Truffles that Dante's had winterized, i.e., preserved in oil, were used. The truffles were in the rice, and it was finished with the oil on top.

We had a really pleasing **Paitin Serra Barbaresco 2010.** Paul Foss likes to call Barbaresco the Queen of Nebbiolo. Barbaresco is made with 100% Nebbiolo grape like Barolo. Barbaresco only became a DOC after World War II. The main difference between Barolo and Barbaresco is the soil. Barbaresco's soil has more nutrients, so the wine is not as tannic and muscular as Barolo, and more approachable young. It almost reminded me of a Pinot Noir, so soft were its low tannins, smooth texture, and good integration of earthy flavors. It was perfect for this very civilized and flavorful dish. The word Serra is the name the family assigned to the best vineyard of the Paitin family, the slope of the Serraboella hill. The wine was aged in 15-year-old Slavonian and Austrian oak so as not to impart too much oaky tannin to the wine.

The **Third Course** was our entrata, or entrée course. **Eye of Rib-eye with Shaved Black Truffles, Rib Cap Croquette, Potato Cake and Shallot Relish.** Chef Drew came in with a 7 oz truffle on a small plate that had been flown in just for our meal. One side was shaved down a bit so we could see the white veining inside. At \$750.00 a pound, that was a \$328.00 truffle.

Chef Statz wanted the entrée course to be big, and nothing is bigger than a ribeye. A Rib-eye is the choicest part of Prime Rib, more tender and flavorful. But the cap is the choicest, and smallest, part of the ribeye. The potato cake was cooked in duck fat and pressed overnight so that when the chef goes to portion it, it stays together like individual strands of petit potatoes. Caramelized onion was served to provide moisture. He also did a **red onion jam,** like you would a fruit jam, by cooking the onions down in sugar with a bit of vinegar for brightness. Chef then went around the room shaving the truffle on all 31 plates. He ran out for the last few plates and had to grate another truffle on the ribeye. **>** 













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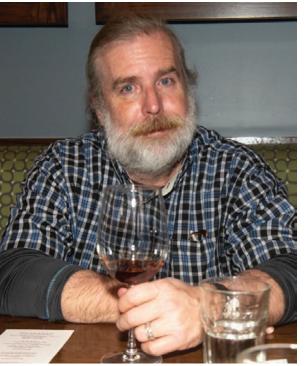


















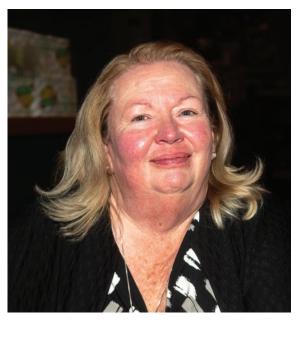












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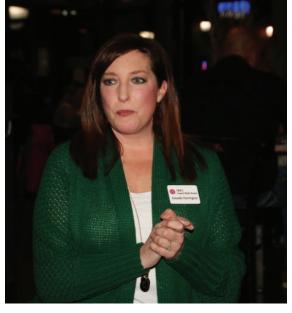




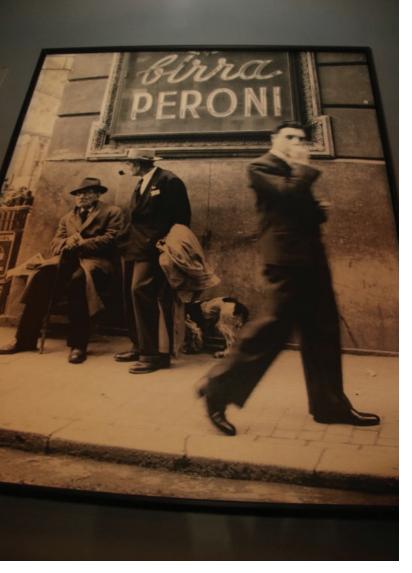








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# Pizza' loclay







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The beef was cooked medium rare, it was all pink in the center. It was tender and tasty, but what really caught my attention was the Rib Cap Croquette. Its beefy flavor was dense pack beef flavored. He then took the rib eye cap and slow roasted (braised) it in white wine overnight. The next day, they ripped it into a rillette (like pulled pork), added potato, put it in a food processor, then breaded it and fried it in oil. A fun side, it has a different texture than the beef. Shredded it was a different texture than the ribeye. And what is a croquette, you may ask? Defined, it is a small often rounded mass consisting usually of minced meat, fish, or vegetable coated with egg and breadcrumbs and deep-fried. It was a way to recycle leftover meat and scraps in the 19th century. The Shallot Relish was a great earthy, but vege contrast to the beef. I was so impressed with the croquette I asked the Chef for the recipe, and he agreed to provide it.

We had two red wines with this course: a Clos Apalta Le Petit Bordeaux Blend 2016 from Chile and an Azelia Barolo San Rocco 2016. The Barolo had an orange tinge to its rusty red look, while the Bordeaux blend had reds and purple colors. Azelia is one of Paul Foss' favorite producers. Barolo is 100% Nebbiolo grape. 2016 was a rock star weather year. This wine got full maturity. Located in Serralungs, the Rocco was Azelia's first vineyard purchased in 1990. Serralunga is known for lower elevations and higher sand concentrations in the soil so the vines must work harder. Beautifully pronounced spice, fruit and body with a tarry note in the nose. The Petit Bordeaux is 95% Cabernet Sauvignon, 4% Merlot and 1% Carmenère, a classic Bordeaux blend. Made by Alexandra Marnier Lapostolle, she is the great granddaughter of Louis-Alexandre Marnier Lapostolle, the inventor of Grand Marnier. So, this Frenchwoman and her husband Cyril brought French grapes to the Colchagua Valley in central Chile. Lots of sunshine, barely any rain, which really stresses the vines out to yield deeper fruit. 100% fermentation in new French oak, then aged in 1st, 2nd and 3rd used French oak.

My take on the course: the ribeye was not hot enough by the time it got to tableside to really bring out the flavor of the shaved truffles. It was quite good, but it needed heat to release that truffle bouquet. The Barolo integrated a bit better with the food while the Petit Clos' fruitiness seemed to impede a total oneness. But it was still a good match.

Dessert found us with **Butterscotch Budino with Brown Butter & Almond Gelato, and Graham Crumble.** One of the favorite menu items at Dante is Butterscotch Budino. Basically, a butterscotch pudding topped with caramel and sea salt, and graham crackers crumble. Different than the menu, Brown Butter was added to gelato. Brown butter is clarified butter. Once the milk fats are separated, you toast them in a sauté pan where it gets nutty flavored and aromatic. There was a request for this recipe too, but Dante's doesn't release a recipe if the item is on the menu list. Finally, some truffle oil was poured over the iced confection to keep us in theme. Delicioso.

From Victoria, Australia was a **Campbell's Rutherglen Muscat** with 17% alcohol. Muscat is the oldest style of wine in Australia. The high alcohol was used to protect the wine from heat and long ocean voyages from England. It is aged in a solera style, like Sherry, where the bottom barrel has a mixture of young, middle aged and old wine.

Many Thanks to **Chef Drew Statz** and **Paul Foss** for a wonderful meal with education. And thanks as well to our cadre of servers, who provided good service throughout the evening. Grazie as well to event producers **Amanda Harrington** and **John Matthews** who organized the evening so delightfully for us. An unexpected bonus was a gift of a sparkling wine stoper, for those partially used bottles of bubbly, from **Bob Kossow**, who was unable to attend. Thanks Bob! They look like good bubbly keepers.

# **TRUFFLES:** CULINARY GOLD IN BLACK & WHITE

BY TOM MURNAN

Our January 20th event at Dante had an unusual culinary theme: Truffles. Expensive, labor intensive to find, and perishable, they are none-the-less near the top of the exotic culinary pyramid. They come as White or Black, with the white being twice as expensive as Black, due to their smaller quantity and shorter shelf life. I for one was thrilled to have Amanda Harrington and John Matthews choose truffles as their theme. We had only black truffles at our Dante event.

Let's start with what a truffle is. In a nutshell, it is the fruiting body of a fungus found near the roots of Oak, Hazelnut, Chestnut, Beech and a few other tree species. One of the great truffle providers is **Urbani Truffles**, an Italian firm founded in 1852, who got its start exporting fresh Italian truffles to France. Their website provides about as succinct but complete an explanation of what a truffle is as well as some of the scientific terms used to describe them.

"This **hypogeous fungi** belongs to the class: Ascomicetos, Family: Tuberaceae, and Genus: Tuber. Being a hypogeous fungi, truffles grow and mature underground close to the roots of some types of trees, specifically oaks and elm trees. Truffles create a symbiotic relationship with these roots which is a property also known as mycor-

rhiza. Through this symbiotic relationship the **sporocarp** (also known as the fruiting body) is formed.

They are covered by an external wall called **peridium**, which can be smooth or textured, with a color that varies from light to dark. The inner part is called **gleba** and its color varies from white to black and from pink to brown. On its surface there is a veining that delimitates cavities, in which are submerged big cells, called **aschii**, which contain the spores. "The conformation of peridium, gleba, aschii

and spores allows us to recognize and categorize truffles. 80% of the truffle's mass is made up of wart, while the remaining 20% contains ashes, total nitrogen, non-proteic nitrogen, proteins, fats, soluble glucids and fibers." Growing truffles has a long history and is covered with mystery. They have resisted many efforts at mass production, but more is slowly being discovered about propagation. No one knows precisely what the secret is to grow truffles. At one time, pigs were used to sniff them out because they are several centimeters underground and pigs have an incredible sense of smell. Dogs are preferred now because they are more easily trained and won't eat the truffle like a pig. Hunting is usually done at dawn during the summer because the dogs get overheated if you wait until the heat of the afternoon. It is just the opposite for winter truffles. Then you go during the warmest time of day, the afternoon, when the heat rise will bring out the truffle scent for the dogs. France, Italy (Piedmont) and Spain are the three primary producers of quality truffles. White truffles seem to get the most press and come predominantly from Italy. France produces 45% of black winter truffles, with Spain following at 35% and Italy 20%. China has a lot of inferior, but cheap truffles. If the price looks too cheap, they are probably from China, and

have little flavor.

### White Truffles are

fragile and somewhat unstable. They cannot be cooked, so are best grated or shaved over warm pasta or on risotto just before serving. This allows the white truffle to put forth the glory of its subtle aroma. They come on the market in December and the season ends in March. They are very perishable when fresh, which is why it many times is incorporated into butter or oils, then sealed into jars or cans to preserve them. But

their reputation rests on being best fresh where they can parade their earthy, pungent perfume.

> **Bianchetto Truffles** have the nickname as the White Truffle's poor cousin. They are smaller, have less aroma, have a marbled brown reddish gelba

(inner part) with white-reddish veins. They are also cheaper.

Winter Black Truffles are the best of the black truffles. Their flavors are released with heat and need to be cooked. They have better flavor than other black truffles and a bit sweeter. They cost half as much as white truffles because they are more plentiful and less delicate. The gelba is black, brown with tinges of purple red. It has thin white veins. Their season is November to mid March. The Australian Black Truffle comes from Australia and Tasmania. It is the same species as the European Winter Black Truffle. The gelba is black with thin white veins.

### Summer Black Truffles

are more delicate than winter black truffles, more weather tolerant, but not as flavorful. Their season runs from May through November. **The Burgundy Truffle** is similar to the Summer Black Truffle and comes from Italy.

> The Urbani web site discusses storage of truffles. "As for its preservation, it's better to wrap it in a paper towel, put it in a plastic or glass container and place the container in the lower part of the fridge (0/4°C) up to 2-3

days. If you wish to use truffle after 2-3 days, freezing is recommended. Truffle helps digestion when consumed in moderation, it has only 31 calories for 100 grams and it is believed to be an aphrodisiac food."

A Wine Spectator article on Truffles in Trouble (December 15, 2012 noted that there has been a precipitous decline in truffle production from 1,200 tons in the 1960s to 20 tons in 1988. It is theorized that global warming may play a role. But knowledge on how to grow truffles is sparse and somewhat mysterious. Experiments on cultivation are ongoing, using specific trees. After about 30 years, you get diminishing returns from a bed. Truffles are finicky about the weather, not wanting too much heat or cold, and just the right amount of rain. So far, they cannot be grown on a large, industrial scale.

So, remember that the main difference between black and white truffles is that the black needs to be cooked, but not the white. For example, slip slices of black truffle under the skin of a chicken breast before roasting. The black needs the heat to unleash the flavor and aroma, while fresh white truffles are grated or shaved on things like fried or scrambled eggs, steak tartare or pasta, especially with a butter sauce. Wine pairings include Sangiovese based wine like Chianti Classico or Brunello di Montalcino. White truffles have an affinity to Barolo and Barbaresco, Burgundy, Pinot Noir, Côtes du Rhône and Brut Champagne. 🍩

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# YARTSA GUNBU: THE MOST EXPENSIVE FUNGUS IN THE WORLD

BY TOM MURNAN

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A caterpillar fungus stalk, sticking out from the ground (Kelly Hopping, photographer)

was listening to Performance Today, a Classical Music show featuring new and old music, when I heard Dongqing Fang: Concerto for Strings "Caterpillar Fungus". But I was entranced by the story behind the Tibetan term Yartsa Gunbu, or in English, Caterpillar Fungus. I just got done writing about Truffles, and White Truffles especially, for the Gazette. I had to think, "There is a form of fungus even more expensive than truffles?" Turns out there is. White truffles sell for about \$1600.00 a pound. Caterpillar Fungus can sell for \$50,000.00 a pound! Researchers named Kelly Hopping and Daniel Winkler have studied the phenomenon.

*Cordyceps Sinensis*, the Latin name for this fungus, is known as "Summer Grass, Winter Worm if one were to translate Yartsa Gunbu. In English we call it Caterpillar Fungus.

The fungus predator lives a few inches under the soil. A host insect, the caterpillar of the Ghost Moth, burrows down into the soil during the summer, eating plant roots, unaware that the fungus has invaded them. The fungus enters the caterpillar during the summer, fall and winter. It begins digesting it from within, killing its host. When the snow cover melts in the spring, it drives the nearly dead host towards the surface. The fungus then sends a spore laden stalk though the caterpillar's head and onto the surface, through the shallow soil and into the open world. When local villagers hear the sprouting has begun, they all hightail it out to the various locations to harvest it. Sometimes, it is hard to spot the stalk since it looks like the sedge grass it co-habitats near. Once found, it is tricky to extract from the soil because if the caterpillar base becomes separated from the stalk, it loses its economic value. It is labor intensive work. Harvest is conducted in May and June. This is the villagers' main source of income. There is virtually nothing else the villagers can do to make money in such a deserted place. Once sold, the produce works its way to China, Hong Kong and other major cities.

It used to be that only the uber wealthy and aristocrats could afford it, but since the 1993 Olympics, when Chinese athletes won many track events, their coach boasted they used the caterpillar fungus, and demand surged.

And why is it so valuable? It's not because of its culinary enhancements. Rather, it is considered an aphrodisiac in the West, like Rhino horn or Viagra, so to speak. But in Asia it is sought out more for as an immune booster and anti cancer agent. In the 15th century, the Tibetan physicians attributed a host of aphrodisiac properties to it, which like Rhino horn, are all probably false. But still the demand persists. Probably it is a wealth and status thing. It has not caught on in the USA. One guy who tried it felt nothing and noticed nothing different: no surge of energy, no increase in sexual desire, nothing except an empty wallet.

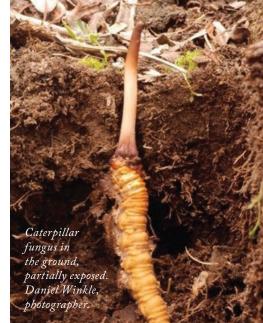
But the harvests are thinning. One reason is the incredible demand, which means the fungus is harvested before it has the chance to spread its spores in the soil. Another reason is that the Himalayas are experiencing warmer temperatures in the last few years. The fungus has adapted to temperatures between 5 to 20 degrees, and the temperature has risen above this lately. A third factor is that the Nepal villagers are so poor that this is almost the only source of income for them, which encourages over harvesting.

So, Yartsa Gunbu is not a culinary delight, but it was interesting to me that the world was willing to pay so much money for truffles and the caterpillar fungus.

Sources: https://www.npr.org/2011/ 10/09/141164173/caterpillar-fungus-the-viagra-of-the-himalayas; https:// www.theatlantic.com/science/archive/2018/10/ tibetan-caterpillar-fungus-trouble/573607/

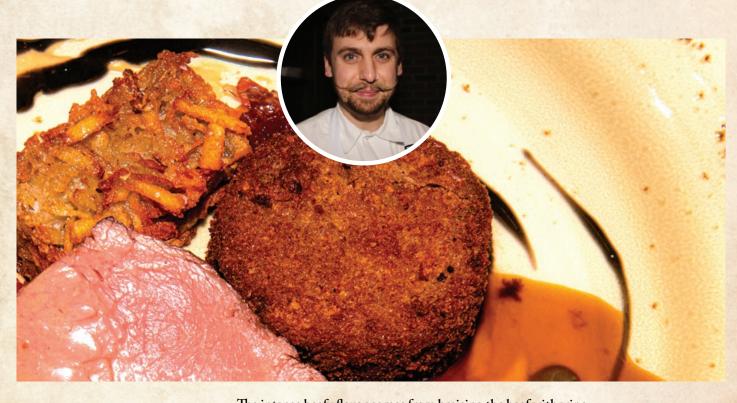






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# Dante's Chef Drew Statz's Rib Cap Croquette



The intense beefy flavor comes from braising the beef with wine.

# **INSTRUCTIONS:**

Salt the beef, cover it with plastic wrap, and refrigerate it overnight.

The next day, in a medium saucepan, cover the beef with 6 cups water. Add the wine, the peppercorns, carrots, onions, and cloves and bring to a boil. Reduce the heat to maintain a simmer and cook until the beef is tender, 1 1/2 to 2 hours. Transfer the meat to a plate and shred it with tongs or two forks and transfer it to a food processor. Strain the broth through a fine mesh sieve over a bowl and discard the solids.

Meanwhile, in a small saucepan, boil the potato until tender, about 40 minutes. Transfer to a bowl and, when cool enough to handle, peel and cut into 1-inch pieces. Add the potato and Mortadella along with 1 to 2 tablespoons of the reserved broth to the food processor and pulse until it forms a paste. Transfer to a medium bowl along with the Parmigiano-Reggiano, parsley, and half of the eggs. Season with salt and pepper and mix well to combine. Refrigerate 1 hour.

Remove the beef from the refrigerator and form into 16 patties, about 2 12-inches wide and 12inch thick. Roll into a ball or a short log. Heat 2-inches vegetable oil in a 6-qt. saucepan until a deep-fry thermometer reads 350°.

Place flour, remaining eggs, and bread crumbs in separate shallow dishes. Working with 1 patty at a time, dredge in flour, dip in eggs, and coat in bread crumbs. Working in batches, fry patties until golden and crisp, 3 to 4 minutes. Transfer patties to paper towels to drain and serve hot.

# **INGREDIENTS:**

cup dry white wine
whole black peppercorns
carrots, peeled and halved
medium yellow onions, quartered
whole cloves
large potato (Russet or Yukon Gold)
1/2 oz. Mortadella, thinly sliced
cup grated Parmigiano-Reggiano
tbsp. finely chopped flat-leaf parsley
large eggs, lightly beaten
cup all-purpose flour
cup fine breadcrumbs
Vegetable oil, for frying

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MAY TBD

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