



Baked Rice Cake with Ham and Cheese

Serves 6 to 8

ACTIVE: 45 MIN.; TOTAL: 2 1/4 HR.

At Caffe Latino in Palermo, saffron-hued risotto-style rice is spread in a pan, layered with thinly shaved ham and mozzarella, and baked until crunchy and crisp on the outside for a unique version of the popular Sicilian fried rice balls called arancini. Be sure to use thinly sliced fresh mozzarella, which will add moisture and disperse evenly into each bite. This cake version of arancini can be prepared up to 2 days ahead of time and baked when you're ready to serve.

- 2 Tbsp. unsalted butter
- 1/4 cup plain bread crumbs
- 3 Tbsp. olive oil
- 1 large shallot, minced
- 1/4 tsp. saffron threads, crushed
- 2 cups arborio rice
- 3 cups chicken stock
- 1/2 cup finely grated Parmigiano-Reggiano
- 2 large eggs
- Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste
- 6 oz. thinly shaved cooked ham
- 6 oz. thinly sliced fresh mozzarella

large saucepan, warm the olive oil over medium heat. Add the shallot and cook, stirring, until soft and beginning to brown, 3 to 4 minutes. Stir in the saffron, then stir in the rice and cook until lightly toasted, about 2 minutes. Pour in the chicken stock and bring to a boil. Cover the pan, remove it from the heat, and let stand for 20 minutes. Uncover the pan and scrape the rice into a large bowl. Let the rice cool for 10 minutes, stirring it a few times to allow it to cool evenly, then stir in the Parmigiano and eggs and season the rice with salt and pepper.

2 Spread half of the rice over the bottom of the prepared baking pan, pressing it lightly into an even layer. Arrange the ham over the rice in an even layer, followed by the mozzarella. Spread the remaining rice over the cheese, pressing it lightly into an even layer and smoothing the top, and bake until golden brown at the edges, about 50 minutes. Transfer the baking pan to a rack, let cool for 10 minutes, then invert the rice cake onto a serving plate. Cut the rice cake into wedges and serve warm.

1 Heat the oven to 375°. Grease a 9-inch springform pan with the butter, applying a thick layer on the bottom, and dust it with the bread crumbs, letting the loose bread crumbs settle on the bottom. In a