Spanish Meatballs in Almond Sauce

MAKES 18 MEATBALLS

I've been making these meatballs for many years, both as an appetizer for parties, as well as a main course for dinner. To me, they represent some of Spain's most prevalent ingredients, including saffron, almonds, paprika, and olive oil. Much of the flavor comes from the addition of the picada, which is an aromatic mixture of nuts and spices, ground in a mortar and pestle or food processor. Once the meatballs are cooked, they simmer in a light wine sauce and can then be served with a green salad or over a bed of rice. I often make a double batch of meatballs and freeze half so I can cook as many as I need for a quick weeknight dinner or snack.

INGREDIENTS

MEATBALLS
½ pound ground beef

½ pound ground pork

1/2 cup white breadcrumbs

¼ cup minced yellow onion

2 cloves garlic, minced

3 tablespoons finely minced fresh parsley

1 egg, lightly beaten

1 teaspoon sweet paprika

½ teaspoon ground nutmeg

2 teaspoons kosher salt

½ teaspoon pepper

1 ½ cups vegetable oil for frying
PICADA
2 cloves garlic, minced

3 tablespoons ground blanched almonds

2 tablespoons chopped fresh parsley

½ teaspoon sweet paprika

Pinch saffron, crushed

SAUCE
2 tablespoons olive oil

1/3 cup minced yellow onion

1/2 teaspoon kosher salt

½ cup dry white wine

2/3 cup chicken stock

PROCESS:

Meatballs:

To make the meatballs, in a bowl, combine the beef, pork, breadcrumbs, onion, garlic, parsley, egg, paprika, nutmeg, salt and pepper. Knead with your hands until well mixed. Form into 2-inch meatballs and put on a baking sheet before frying. (At this point, you can place baking sheet in the freezer and freeze the meatballs for 3-4 hours. Remove and place in a freezer bag and freeze for up to 3 months).

Picada:

To make the picada, in a mini food processor combine the garlic, almonds, parsley, paprika, and saffron and process or grind to a paste. Season with salt and pepper. Set aside.

Heat vegetable oil in a 12-inch skillet over medium high heat until it reaches 375 degrees, using a candy thermometer. Working in batches, carefully slide the meatballs into the hot oil and fry until golden, about 4 minutes.

Using tongs, turn meatballs to cook undersides for another 2 minutes. Transfer to a platter lined with paper towels.

Sauce:

To make the sauce, in a large frying pan over medium heat, heat the olive oil. Add the onion and sauté until tender. Stir in the picada, wine, and chicken stock, and bring to a simmer. Add the meatballs and simmer over low heat for 5 minutes. Serve warm.