

FONTINA PUFFS

MAKES ABOUT 30 PUFFS

When diners come into a busy New York City restaurant, it's often customary to present them with what is known as an *amuse bouche* or a small bite. This freebie is typically given at the beginning of the meal when the guests have been seated, but I wanted to offer something as well to those still standing, waiting for their tables to be ready. I developed these Fontina puffs as an Italian take on the French *gougère*, which is a savory cream puff made with cheese. My staff jokingly referred to them as "cheesy poofs," but all kidding aside, they were a hit with those guests waiting to begin their evening of dining. At home when I make these, I use them as an appetizer and everyone eats them like candy. Warning: These can be addictive! **SPECIAL EQUIPMENT:** pastry bag, #8 plain tip

1½ cups water

1½ tablespoons kosher salt

2 teaspoons ground white pepper (black is okay, too)

12 tablespoons (1½ sticks) unsalted butter

1 cup all-purpose flour

7 large eggs

¾ cup shredded Fontina cheese (about 3 ounces)

Preheat the oven to 375°F. Line a baking sheet with parchment paper (see "Batch Baking," opposite page).

In a medium, deep pot, combine the water, salt, pepper, and butter. Bring to a boil. Reduce the heat to low and add the flour all at once, stirring until the mixture forms a dough. I strongly suggest using a wooden spoon for this step. Continue to stir the dough over low heat for 1½ minutes to help dry the dough out a

bit. This is what starts to form the texture of the puff. When the dough starts to stick and form a slight skin on the bottom of the pot, take it off the heat.

Transfer the hot dough to a stand mixer fitted with the paddle attachment and beat the dough at medium speed for about 3 minutes or until the steam stops escaping the top. Reduce the speed to low, add the eggs one at a time and beat well after each addition until fully incorporated into the dough. (The dough will break apart into pieces, but don't worry, it comes back together.) After all the eggs have been added, add the cheese and beat on medium speed for 1 minute more.

To make the puffs, fit a pastry bag with a #8 plain tip and scoop the dough into the pastry bag. Pipe 30 balls of dough onto the baking sheet, spacing them 1½ inches apart. Bake the puffs for 10 minutes. Reduce the oven temperature to 325°F, rotate the pan front to back, and bake until the puffs have risen and developed a slight crack on the top, with a pale brown coloring, about 10 minutes longer. Serve warm.

INSIDER TIP • BATCH BAKING

Most recipes for cookies and small pastries make more than can fit on a single baking sheet. Since many home cooks may only have one large baking sheet, the cookies or pastries need to be baked in batches (just be sure the pan cools in between batches). But if you have more than one baking sheet, you can bake 2 sheets at once. When you preheat the oven, place one rack in the top third of the oven and a second rack in the bottom third. Place a baking sheet on each rack. Halfway through the cooking time, switch the sheets from rack to rack, and at the same time, rotate the sheets from front to back for even browning.