

Fritter fascination

Another Southern classic that gets the fritter treatment is pimiento cheese.

This traditional spread of sharp Cheddar cheese, mayonnaise and pimientos is breaded and fried at the five-unit Del Frisco's Grille. Corporate chef Mike Fuller adds parsley to the classic mixture, chills it and coats it in flour, egg wash and panko breadcrumbs before frying it.

"You have to control the temperature when scooping it out," he said, noting that the balls lose their shape if not kept chilled. He serves eight of them with a chipotle-ranch sauce for \$8.

"They consistently are No. 1 or No. 2 in appetizer sales," he said — either just ahead of or right behind the chain's popular Ahi Tuna Tacos.

Pimiento cheese fritters also are offered at Firefly in Washington, D.C., where chef de cuisine Todd Wiss serves them with tomato jam and bacon marmalade.

Wiss' version incorporates brioche crumbs with Cheddar cheese, mayonnaise, pimientos, scallions, cayenne pepper, hot sauce, garlic powder, salt, pepper and Worcestershire sauce.

He shapes them into balls using an ice cream scoop, freezes them and then dips them in a finely milled flour, an egg yolk wash and finally panko breadcrumbs.

He fries them and sells them for \$12 per order of three.

Christophe Poteaux, chef-owner of Bastille in Alexandria, Va., makes a fried appetizer that's more substantial than your average fritter by using beignet batter.

Using the recipe of his pastry chef, business partner and wife Michelle, he makes a batter of eggs, milk, flour, baking powder, salt, pepper, parsley, chives, lemon zest and lime zest. He adds coarsely chopped sea-

food — currently rock shrimp, although he sometimes includes other seafoods, including crawfish, calamari, oysters or lobster — and uses an ice cream scoop to drop them into 350-degree oil.

"It's still slightly moist on the inside but crunchy on the outside," he said.

He sells four pieces for \$11. He currently serves it with a garlic aioli, but he might add more spice to the sauce this winter.

"It's an appetizer we've served for the past six years," he said. "If we take it off the menu, we'll probably get a riot."

Taking the opposite approach, Chris Hastings, chef-owner of Hot and Hot Fish Club in Birmingham, Ala., is making a fritter with less breading and more filling.

One of his favorite fritters is made with corn and shrimp, although he said he occasionally substitutes blue crab for shrimp.

He combines the seafood with corn kernels, diced red, yellow and poblano peppers; and scallions. He chills that mixture and seasons it with salt, pepper and cayenne pepper before adding flour mixed with a little baking powder — just to coat the shrimp and vegetables.

He refrigerates that for half an hour and then folds in whipped

Not everything made into fritters these days is based on Southern tradition, however. Craig Deihl, chef of Cypress in Charleston, S.C., makes kimchi fritters to serve with his crispy pork belly.

Deihl makes his own kimchi, which he has been serving with tuna tartare.

"It's hard to make a small batch of kimchi," he said. "After the first week it's pretty good, but after six weeks it's phenomenal, so we always make more than we need," he said.

But that meant he needed to find creative things to do with it.

He drew inspiration from a Korean dish of savory kimchi pancakes.

"But we were thinking, 'We're Southern; fritters are really more appropriate for us [than pancakes]," he said.

He simply scoops the batter into 350-degree oil and fries it until it's "nice and crispy."

He pulls the dough apart — "that way they don't come out looking like hush puppies, and you can see the kimchi within it," he said — and serves it with pork belly with a spicy Korean glaze and hot mustard for \$12. ■



Christophe Poteaux of Bastille uses beignet batter to make seafood fritter appetizer, which he serves on a bed of garlic aioli.