

RUSSIAN FOOD NETWORK

Project form

Please fill out the form below, print it to turn it in, in **HARD COPY**, and also send **ELECTRONICALLY**, on the due date you selected on the sign up sheet. The Russian Food Network Event as a follow up to your Russian cooking experience will take place during class time as indicated on the syllabus. Please duplicate your recipe and bring it in for the event.

- Recipe: **Fish Burgers Stuffed with Cod Livers**

Pulse in a blender a mixture of finely chopped onion, egg, and chopped whitefish (Cod, Pollock, Hake or Perch). Form the resulting paste into patties. Place cod livers in the centers of the patties, and fold into half circles. Roll in bread crumbs and flatten the patties slightly, and then fry them in vegetable oil for 3-4 minutes on each side. Make four burgers from one pound of fish with one egg and half an onion, stuffed with the contents from one 4-oz. can of cod livers.

- Photo of the prepared dish: fish burgers appear at lower left, served with kasha and mushrooms, Charlotte apple pie and a Chilean chardonnay:



- A synopsis of your research on the recipe and the area where the recipe originated:

Both fresh-water and salt-water fish have been staples in Russian cuisine for centuries. Russian Orthodox Christians were required to abstain from meat every Wednesday and Friday, plus many holy days and feast days of saints, totally nearly half the days of the year. (Hosking

11) When bad harvests led to a decline in livestock and to severe food shortages in 1932 (Hosking 457) during a time when Russian Orthodox religious practices were discouraged, the Soviet government proclaimed “Fish Day.” All Soviet canteens served only fish on Thursdays, usually as fish burgers or fish soups.

Meat or fish patties, prepared in a variety of ways, are called “*kotleti*.” “Inspired by his 1936 trip to America, Stalin's food supply commissar, Anastas Mikoyan, wanted to copy Yankee burgers in Russia, but somehow the bun got lost in the shuffle and the country got hooked on mass-produced *kotleti* instead. Deliciously greasy, petite, and with a heavy industrial breading that fried up to a wicked crunch, Mikoyan factory patties could be scarfed down by the dozen. <https://www.epicurious.com/recipes/food/views/kotleti-51193010>

I did not find any specific region for the origin of fish burgers stuffed with cod livers. Salt was plentiful as a preservative as early as the Rus Dynasty and salted cod – a seawater fish – could easily have reached the interior regions in early days. (Hosking 11) But cod livers could not have been traded into interior regions until canneries appeared in the latter 19th century. Hence, I conclude that fish burgers stuffed with cod liver probably originated either (1) in earlier times but only locally along the Baltic Sea, the Dead Sea, or the Caspian Sea, or (2) in 1932 when the government declared a weekly “Fish Day” and only burgers or fish soups were served in the canteens, or (3) in 1936 when Mikoyan visited America.

One should also observe that the many Francophiles among Russians during the 18th and 19th centuries probably knew and enjoyed liver patés. Cod livers taste very much like a very mild French paté.

- Your description of the experience of preparing and tasting the recipe (any ingredients you needed to substitute, any changes you made to the recipe... does it remind you of something you tasted before? What would you serve to accompany it? Etc.

The recipe calls for any one of a variety of whitefish. I used codfish filets and canned cod livers. One could use Lake Superior whitefish. Thill’s Fish House will save whitefish livers if a customer makes the request in advance.

Pulsing the fish/onion/egg mixture in the blender created far more moisture than I had anticipated. It would have been easier to form tighter patties if I had drained the mixture on paper towel for 5-10 minutes (losing a good bit of nutritional content, however).

In place of simple bread crumbs, I used a 50-50 mixture of Japanese Panko (to make the burgers crisper) and bread crumbs seasoned with Italian herbs (to add minor seasoning to an otherwise very bland mixture).

Also, in the future, I will cut the cod liver into smaller pieces so that the taste is more evenly distributed through the burger. The wad of cod liver shown in the illustration in the cookbook is concentrated too tightly into the center of the burger, resulting in overpowering taste changes.

The tasting experience itself was very pleasant. Cod livers are smooth-textured and even milder than a French paté, adding a very tasty component to the blandness of ground codfish. The slight richness of the cod liver is offset nicely by the onion in the burger.

I also found that it is extremely important to coordinate the preparation of this dish, so that you can serve the burgers immediately, very hot. The short frying time means that the centers of the burgers are not as hot, and will cool quickly.

I served the cod burgers with Putan-Broms' "Buckwheat Kasha with Mushrooms." (The taste of that side dish improves with a dollop of sour cream – an ingredient consistent with Hosking's observation that Russians use many fermented dairy products. {10}) For desert we enjoyed her "Charlotte Apple Pie" (although mine did not rise into a soufflé, as she predicts).

Our bottle of Chilean chardonnay was too heavy a wine for these relatively bland foods. I would recommend a lighter white wine, perhaps a pinot grigio, a sauvignon blanc, or even a light champagne. As a substitute for wine as a palate-refresher, one could serve cold, crisp Claussen dill pickles. (Both the champagne and the dill would keep the meal authentically Russian.)

- Like a wine recommendation to accompany a dish, make a recommendation of a reading from Russian literature that would accompany the making or tasting of the dish you prepared. Perhaps the reading would suit the mood of the dish, its spiciness or its sweetness... perhaps there was a mention of one of the ingredients or the dish itself in the reading... etc. You may select from the stories read or presented in class, or some other Russian work with which you are familiar.

As noted above, one should serve a light and dry white wine, to avoid overpowering the mild and delicate taste of this dish – a sauvignon blanc, or pinot grigio, or perhaps even a light, dry champagne (but not a brut).

I could find nothing in our reading assignments that addressed whitefish or a fish paté. In Gogol's "The Coach," the general's dinner included "sturgeon of various sorts, as well as sterlet [small sturgeon used as a source of caviar], bustards [large game birds], asparagus, quails, partridge and mushrooms" washed down with LaFitte champagne, Madeira and coffee (243). In "The Overcoat," Akaky's simple meal consisted of "soup and a piece of beef with an onion" – no fish (308). At the supper hosted by the assistant of the head clerk, Akaky and the other titular clerks were treated to "salad, cold veal, pastry and pies from the bakery, and champagne" (321). In "A Hero of Our Time," Maxim Maximych prepares "a remarkably good pheasant, nicely dressed with a cucumber sauce" together with a bottle of "Kakhetian wine" ("a region of eastern Georgia celebrated for its wine"). (44 and note 3)

I have lived in the mountains (the Alaska Range) for many years, and I can relate with love to Lermontov's wonderful descriptions of the mountain scenery, terrain, and fresh cold mountain air, as Pechorin travels along the Georgian Military Highway through the Krestovaya Pass; and then again Lermontov's descriptions of the mountain scenery surrounding Taman. I might read those paragraphs to my guests as they enjoy (hopefully) my Russian meal of cod burgers stuffed with cod-liver paté (with a light champagne next time).