

Serrano Ham & Manchego Croquetas



100g Jamon Serrano

2 tbsp olive oil

60g unsalted butter

½ small leek, finely diced

60g plain flour

500ml whole milk, hot

Nutmeg, to grate

2 free-range eggs, beaten

150g breadcrumbs

25g manchego finely grated

1 litre olive oil, to fry

Dice your ham as finely. Heat the oil and butter in a medium, heavy-bottomed saucepan over a medium heat and, when the butter melts, add the leek and fry gently for a minute, then add 70g ham and cook until the leek has softened, and the ham fat has begun to melt.

Turn the heat down, gradually stir in the flour and cook gently, stirring regularly, until it loses its raw flavour - this should take about 8-10 minutes.

Gradually stir in the hot milk, beating it in well, until you have a smooth paste. Cook for another 15 minutes until it has the consistency of smooth mashed potato, then fold through the rest of the ham and season to taste with a grating of nutmeg and some black pepper (you won't need any salt). Put the béchamel in a bowl and allow to cool, then cover, pressing the clingfilm on to the surface of the sauce to prevent a skin from forming, and refrigerate for at least 2 hours.

Put the beaten eggs into a bowl, and the breadcrumbs and cheese into another. With floured hands, roll spoonfuls of the mixture into cylinders and dip these into the egg, then roll in the breadcrumbs until well coated.

Heat the olive oil in a large pan to 180C, or until it begins to shimmer. Prepare a plate lined with kitchen roll. Fry the croquetas in batches for a couple of minutes until golden all over, then lift out with a slotted spoon and serve at once.