Mike Lepizerra's Polenta



Ingredients

1/4 cup virgin olive oil
1/2 pound (2 sticks) unsalted butter (can cut down to 1 stick, 4 ounces.)
1 1/2 to 2 tablespoons chopped garlic
2 cups chicken stock, preferably homemade [optional: can use part or all of any stock, including mushroom]
1 1/2 quarts half-and-half (yes!)
2 1/2 cup water
1 1/2 to 2 teaspoons kosher salt
12 turns of a pepper grinder
1 teaspoon crushed red pepper flakes
2 cups cornmeal [Anson Mills preferred]
pinch sugar
1 1/2 to 2 cups freshly grated high quality pecorino romano
[optional sliced and sauteed shiitakes or other mushrooms]

Directions

1. Heat the oil and butter in a large, heavy stockpot. Add the garlic and saute over low heat until it is golden.

2. Add the stock, half-and-half, 2 1/2 cups of water, salt and black and red peppers, and stir to combine. Raise the heat and bring to a boil.

3. Very slowly, add the cornmeal, stirring constantly. Lower the heat to maintain a gentle boil. After all the cornmeal has been added,[optional:add mushrooms now] continue to stir until it is thick and creamy,[and spoon can stand up straight in it] about 20 minutes.

4. Off the heat, stir in the sugar and Romano.

Serve right away with any sauce or side of your choosing. I like it with braised short ribs, roast chicken or a killer red sauce. [If you want to serve it with a rich dish, like osso bucco, use less butter and cream and more stock or water.] notes: I prefer stoneground cornmeal from traditional mills like Anson in South Carolina or Gray's in Rhode Island. Source: Cucina Simpatica]