Figgy Pudding with Brown Butter Hard Sauce

Serves 12

For the Pudding:

1 lb. dried figs, chopped (I used Calmyrna golden figs)
1 cup boiling water
1 cup salted butter
1 cup sugar
3 eggs
1 1/2 cups all-purpose flour
1 tsp. salt
1 tsp. baking powder
1 tsp. ground cinnamon
1 tsp. ground nutmeg
1/4 tsp. ground cloves
finely grated rind from 1 orange
4 oz. dark chocolate, chopped
4 oz., toasted walnut pieces (optional)
4 oz. diced candied ginger (also optional)
butter for greasing pans

Preheat the oven to 350° Fahrenheit.

Butter two 6 cavity mini-Bundt cake pans (a total of 12 mini cakes). Put the figs in a small mixing bowl and cover with the boiling water. Let sit about 30 minutes. After soaking, put the figs and whatever water is left in a food processor and purée. It does not need to be smooth, a few figgy chunks are fine.

In a larger mixing bowl, preferably a kitchen-aid type mixer, whip together the butter and sugar. Add the eggs one at a time, beating until smooth in between. Add the fig purée and the orange rind. Mix until smooth. In a small mixing bowl, combine the dry ingredients. Add to the fig mixture and mix until combined thoroughly. Stir in the chocolate, walnuts, and ginger if you have decided to go there. Divide the batter evenly between the buttered cake pans.

Put in the oven and bake. Start checking them after 45 minutes - they should test like any other cake - firm to the touch on top and a toothpick should come out relatively clean (I don't know why they say "clean" for that test - it is never without a little moist crumb clinging to the toothpick- unless you have overbaked it). Let cool about 10 minutes, then turn them out onto a cooling rack. Okay, we're not done yet.

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For the Brandy Syrup:

½ cup water
1 ½ cups sugar
¼ cup brandy

In a small saucepan, combine the sugar and water. Put a lid on it and heat to a simmer. Simmer until the sugar is dissolved and the mixture is clear. OR, if you are impatient like I, put the water and sugar in a 2 cup Pyrex measuring cup, and microwave it about 3 minutes, stirring after the first two minutes. In any case, you want the mixture to end up in this 2-cup measuring cup. Add the brandy and stir to combine.

Now, this is what I do, but you can make it work however you wish - when the brandy syrup is cool enough for you to stick your hands in it (that sounds wrong, but just go with it) don some latex gloves, pick up a warm cake and submerge it in the syrup.

Place on a wire cooling rack over some parchment, foil, or plastic wrap, it doesn't matter, you just won't want syrup all over your counter. Repeat with each cake, then go back and do it again for the double dip. Let cool.

For the Hard Sauce:

½ cup salted butter
1 cup powdered sugar
1 tsp. vanilla extract
2 tbsp. brandy

Put the butter in a small saucepan. Melt over low heat and keep going at a low simmer until the solids have turned a nice nutty brown. Put in a small bowl and let come to room temperature, stirring occasionally to incorporate the solids evenly.

When the brown butter is cool and softly solidified, put it and the remaining ingredients in the bowl of a mixer and whip until light and fluffy. Serve alongside the puddings, or if you are really zippy, pipe some on top.

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