



Photography: Kenneth Theysen

A BITE OF HISTORY:

CHEF URVIN CROES’ JOHNNY CAKE SLIDERS WITH PULLED ARUBAN BEEF STEW, PICKLED ONIONS, AND AVOCADO CRÈME

by Creator and Executive Chef / Owner **Urvin Croes**
of *Infini* and *Po-Ké Ono*

**Chef Urvin Croes needs no introduction to Aruban gourmets:
the restaurateur and Iron Chef Aruba winner’s lifetime goal
has been to make the island a culinary destination.**

With *Infini*, a chef’s table fine dining restaurant, and two outlets of the casual *Po-Ké Ono*, Asian and Pacific Islands restaurant and tiki bar, the internationally renowned chef is well on his way to reaching this goal.

Croes is excited to share this recipe for *Johnny Cake* or *Journey Cake* because it represents so much history to him. “This is the cake we grew up with,” he says. Traditionally filled with salted cod (*bacalao*) or cheese, Croes is sharing a new version with a local twist: slider style, with Aruban pulled beef stew (*mechada*) and topped with avocado crème and pickled onions.

Why is it called *Journey Cake*, you might ask? “This fluffy fried bread actually comes from the Greater Antilles and was originally made with corn,” Croes says. “It was made by wives when their husbands went on days-long fishing trips— hence the name *Journey Cake*. But the name changed through its travels throughout the Caribbean, and here in Aruba we call it *Johnny Cake*.”

Journey or *Johnny Cake*, each component eaten separately or as a slider, you will definitely feel the love that Chef Croes puts into this recipe.

URVIN CROES

Creator and Executive Chef / Owner – Infini and Po-Ké Ono

Johnny Cake Sliders

Serves 6

PART ONE:

JOHNNY CAKE

INGREDIENTS

- 1 lb. flour
- 1 tbsp. baking powder
- ½ tsp. yeast
- 240 grams milk
- 50 grams butter
- 1 tsp. salt
- 3 tbsp. sugar



Instructions

1. Set deep-fryer to 170°C.
2. Melt the butter in a bain-marie. (See chef's tips on page 71)
3. Weigh milk and add the butter.
4. Weigh all the dry ingredients and add together in a large mixing bowl. Attach to a mixer and start mixing the dry ingredients together with a dough hook.
5. Add wet ingredients and mix / knead until dough is not sticking on the hook. If you are doing this by hand, knead until the dough is no longer sticky, approximately five minutes. (NB: the dough can be put in the refrigerator at this point to rest)
6. When the dough is ready, using a rolling pin, roll the dough flat to approximately 5 cm thickness, and cut out with a round cookie cutter approximately 4.5 x 4.5 cm, a bit less than 5.1 cm.
7. Fry until both sides are golden brown and bread is fluffy.

PART TWO:

PULLED ARUBAN BEEF STEW

STEP 1: BEEF BASE

INGREDIENTS

- 500 grams beef chuck or brisket, cubed
- 2 liters beef bouillon
- 6 garlic cloves, mashed
- ½ onion, diced
- 2 tbsp. olive oil
- 2 celery stalks, diced
- ½ small carrot, diced
- 6 cilantro stems

Instructions

1. Add the olive oil to a hot stock pot and sweat the carrots, onions, celery and garlic until they have released their aromas.
2. Add the beef and deglaze with the beef bouillon.
3. Add cilantro stems and bring to a boil.
4. Reduce heat to medium; liquid should be boiling slowly with small bubbles.
5. When meat is fully cooked, strain and keep the broth, discard the vegetables, and pull the meat.

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PART TWO :

PULLED ARUBAN BEEF STEW

STEP 2: PULLED BEEF STEW (MECHADA)

INGREDIENTS

- 3 tbsp. roucou oil (achiote or annatto oil)
- 350 grams beef base, cooked and pulled
- 1 onion, cut into brunoise (See chef's tips on page 71)
- 1/2 Madame Jeanette pepper, cut into sugar brunoise
- 1 green bell pepper, cut into brunoise
- 3 garlic cloves, finely chopped
- 1 tbsp. Worcestershire sauce
- 1/2 tsp. black pepper
- 1/2 tsp. cumin
- 70 grams tomato paste
- 50 grams beef bouillon (left over beef base)
- 2 tbsp. cilantro, chiffonade cut
- 1 tsp. butter
- Salt to taste

Instructions

1. In a small brazier, add the roucou oil.
2. Add and sweat the onions, green peppers, garlic and the Madame Jeanette peppers.
3. When onions are translucent, add the tomato paste and deacidify.
4. Add the pulled beef and mix with vegetables.
5. Deglaze with the beef bouillon and Worcestershire sauce; add the cumin, black pepper and stew until desired consistency.
6. Turn off and add the butter and cilantro; check for salt and add to taste.



PART THREE:

GARNISHES

PICKLED ONIONS

INGREDIENTS

- 300 grams red onions, julienne cut
- 100 grams sugar
- 100 grams red wine vinegar
- 5 black peppercorns
- 1 bay leaf
- 3 tbsp. red beet juice

Instructions

1. Mix the vinegar and sugar in a stock pot, add peppercorns and bay leaf and bring to a boil.
2. Mix well until all sugar is dissolved, add red beet juice and turn off.
3. In a stainless steel or heatproof container, add the onions and pour the warm pickled liquid on top.
4. Let it all cool off at room temperature.

AVOCADO CRÈME

INGREDIENTS

- 1 avocado
- 1/4 red onion, diced
- 2 garlic cloves, finely chopped
- 1/2 bunch cilantro, chopped
- 1/4 bunch parsley, chopped
- 1/2 tomato, diced
- 1/2 lemon, juiced
- 1/2 lime, juiced
- 1 tsp. vinegar
- 1/4 tsp. cumin
- 1/4 tsp. coriander powder
- 1 tbsp. olive oil
- Salt and pepper to taste

Instructions

1. Add all ingredients to a blender and blend to a fine smooth purée / crème.

PRESENTATION & GARNISH

INGREDIENTS

- 3 Johnny Cakes per person
- 3 leaves of cilantro microgreens per person
- 3 pickled red onions per person
- 1 tbsp. beef stew per person
- 3 dots of avocado crème from a squeeze bottle per person

Instructions

1. Hollow the upper part of the Johnny Cake.
 2. Fill with 1 tbsp. of beef stew, topped with pickled onions and 3 dots of avocado crème.
 3. Garnish with 3 leaves of cilantro microgreens on the avocado crème dots.
- Repeat this until you have 2 or 3 per person.

URVIN CROES

Creator and Executive Chef/Owner – *Infini and Po-Ké Ono*



CHEF'S TIPS

1. Croes recommends making the beef base one day and the *mechada* stew a day later to allow for the flavors to really meld. The *Johnny Cake* dough can also rest in the refrigerator overnight.
2. No bain-marie? No problem! You can also use a double boiler or set the bowl with butter inside another bowl with boiling water.
3. Brunoise chopping technique means the finest dice. Sugar brunoise means very, very tiny pieces, almost a mince.
4. Prepared guacamole can be substituted if you have no avocados.