

Bruschetta with Caramelized Fennel and Onion (“The New Vegetarian Epicure” Anna Thomas)

4-5 large yellow onions (6 cups sliced)
4-5 large, trimmed white fennel bulbs (6 cups sliced)
2 Tbsp olive oil
1 Tbsp butter
salt to taste
½ cup slivered Kalamata olives
1/3-1/2 cup white wine, to taste
freshly ground black pepper to taste
1 loaf crusty, coarse-textured Italian bread
optional garnish: sprigs of watercress

Peel the onions, quarter them lengthwise, and slice them thickly. Trim and clean the fennel bulbs and slice them to a similar size.

In a heavy-bottomed non-stick pan, heat the olive oil and butter. Add the onion and fennel, salt it lightly, and cook over medium heat, stirring often, until the vegetables are a beautiful golden brown. This may take 45 minutes to 1 hour.

Stir in the slivers of Kalamata olives and the white wine. Continue stirring until the wine is completely absorbed. Taste and correct the seasoning with salt or freshly ground black pepper if needed.

Meanwhile, slice the bread about ½ inch thick. If it's a large loaf, cut the sliced down to about 3 by 2 inches. Toast the slices in a 400 degree oven or on a grill over hot coals until they are crisp and golden brown on both sides. Brush the lightly with olive oil.

Put 2 toasts on each plate and spoon the hot fennel and onion mixture over them. Garnish the plates with sprigs of watercress if desired, and serve at once.

I find the taste of caramelized fennel and onion intoxicating. It can be varied with a shaving of Parmesan cheese, or you can up the ante on the fennel by toasting some fennel seeds, crushing them, and stirring them in. This dish is sensational with a glass of red wine.

Serves 8-10