

Delicate milk skins remind me of mozzarella. After we make them, we brush them with a little bit of cream for hydration, so what you experience is a solid, soft, curdlike sheet of dairy goodness. You can even use them in savory applications (see Abalone with Pig’s Feet, Avocado, Milk Skin, page 158). If you have any syrup left over from the confit, it’s delicious drizzled over vanilla ice cream.

FIG AND WILD FENNEL CONFIT, MILK AND HONEY

SERVES 8 to 10

| Fig and Wild Fennel Confit |

- 12 to 15 Candy Stripe figs
- 1 (750-milliliter) bottle dry white wine, medium bodied, fruity, without oak
- 265 grams (3/4 cup) honey
- 3 to 4 tender wild fennel stalks, about 4 inches long
- 3 to 4 mature aromatic wild fennel flower pods
- 2 grams (1 teaspoon) fennel seeds

Prick the bottom half of each fig with a needle in three places. Stand the figs upright, in a single layer, in a pan with the wine, honey, fennel stalks and flower pods, and fennel seeds. Bring the wine to a light simmer and cover the pan. Poach the figs until they soften but still maintain their shape, about 10 minutes. Transfer the figs to a storage container. Reduce the wine mixture by about half, just until it begins to thicken. Pour the warm liquid, with the fennel stalks and pods, over the figs. Cool at room temperature, cover the container, and refrigerate overnight.

| Milk Skins |

- Approximately 500 grams (2 cups) whole milk
- Approximately 30 grams (2 tablespoons) heavy cream

Pour the milk into a saucepan—about 5 inches in diameter—to a depth of about 2 inches, and place, undisturbed, for 15 to 20 minutes, over very low heat. Meanwhile, brush a plate with some of the cream. When a thick skin forms on top of the milk, carefully loosen the edges from the side of the pot with a spatula, leaving the skin undisturbed. With your fingers, pick up the skin from opposite sides of the

pan. Let the 2 halves of the skin drape together, and place the folded skin on the prepared plate. Brush a little more cream on top of the skin and cover with plastic wrap. Return the pan to the heat and repeat until you have made 8 to 10 skins. Brush cream on top of the plastic wrap before adding a skin to the stack. Cover the finished stack of skins loosely with plastic wrap and refrigerate until almost ready to use.

> To Serve

- Fleur de sel
- Freshly ground black pepper
- Fennel fronds
- Extra-virgin olive oil

Let the milk skins come up to room temperature for a few minutes, until they are pliable. Cut the reserved figs in halves and place 3 halves on each plate. Drape pieces of the milk skin over the figs, followed by a drizzle of the confit syrup, and a piece of the confit fennel. Finish with a pinch of fleur de sel, a turn of the pepper mill, a few small fennel fronds, and a drizzle of olive oil.