Soft-boiled egg is delicious covered in panko and fried

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I find myself feeling pretty virtuous when I can put a dish together using a handful of local vegetables and maybe some fish from local waters. Look at me, all locavore and such.

But I am a mere amateur. On Saturday, at a reception before the Hawaii Food Manufacturers Association's Taste Awards, I tasted what three professionals could put together when challenged to really go local.

Ronnie Nasuti of Tiki's Grill & Bar made a poke using Big Island abalone, with hearts of palm and sea asparagus in kukui-nut butter. James Aptakin of Mac 24/7 used 20 local products in summer rolls filled with tea-smoked beef, Kauai prawns and a dip made with Kona coffee. Sheraton Waikiki chef Colin Hazama's Local-Style Bacon, Eggs + Rice tapped Hawaii products from eggs and pork to spring water and tea.

We mortals could not pull off these dishes. They are so complex we'd likely starve before we could fill a plate, if we could even round up -- or afford -- all the ingredients.

So I went after a single component from a single dish that could be replicated at home, by someone with enough determination.

Enter the egg, from Hazama's plate. It was magical -- a soft-cooked egg, stripped of its shell, rolled in panko and deep-fried. Crispy on the outside, soft with a runny yolk on the inside. If you like soft-boiled eggs (like me) and fried food (like me), this little puff ball will make you so very happy.

Hazama said he perfected the technique while working with chef Jean-Georges Vongerichten, who served the crispy eggs with caviar and creme fraiche at his acclaimed restaurant, Jean-Georges, in New York. Hazama brought the dish when he opened Vongerichten's Kauai Grill at the St. Regis Princeville in 2009. "It's very ingenious," he says.

You can try this at home, but you'll have to try very hard and be very patient and maybe waste a few eggs. I did.

Hazama's instructions: Heat water to 167 degrees. Let eggs cook, keeping water temperature stable, for 23 minutes. Cool in an ice water bath. Carefully remove the shell, coat in panko and let sit 30 minutes, then deep-fry. The secret to getting them to Jean-Georges' level is to use very fresh eggs and cook them very slowly, never letting the water boil. Then you have to get the shell off without breaking the yolk, which is no small trick as a soft-cooked egg is incredibly delicate.

You're welcome to try it his way, but for the less dextrous among us, and for those who don't have an hour to make an egg, I offer a simplified version, based on various recipes designed for home cooks. Basically, soft-boil an egg however you normally would, then let it cool in ice water to make the shell easier to peel. Your egg won't be as soft, but it will be much easier to handle.

The difference between us and professionals: Hazama's crew made 320 eggs for Saturday's event. I had my hands full making two. But I'll get better at it.

Hazama suggests a coating of fine panko (Japanese breadcrumbs; if you don't have the fine type, pulverize regular panko in a blender). For Saturday's event, in order to use more local products, the chef added ground macadamia-nut cookies and Diamond Bakery soda crackers. I've seen versions with Parmesan cheese and pulverized bacon. You can get as wild as you like.

Crispy Soft-Boiled Eggs

4 eggs
Bowl of ice water
1/2 cup fine panko
Vegetable oil, for frying

Place eggs in a pot of water and bring to full boil. Turn off heat and cover; let sit 5 minutes.

Carefully place eggs in ice water and let cool. Gently break shell, then carefully peel each egg. (A small spoon can be used to separate egg from shell.) Don't break the yolk. If you do, that egg is a lost cause.

Cover eggs in panko and let sit while oil is heating. The panko should make a light coating, but if it doesn't stick, wet the eggs with water, milk or an egg wash first.

Heat oil to 330 to 350 degrees in a small pot. Carefully lower 1 egg into oil and fry a few seconds until golden all around. Remove from oil and drain on paper towels, then fry remaining eggs. Serves 4.

Nutritional information unavailable.

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