Rontini with Eggplant Caponata

Parve  Yields 8-10 servings

*Feel your tastebuds come alive with this wonderful dish. Caponata has a long list of ingredients, but don’t let that scare you off. The payoff is like a Sicilian ratatouille that has layers of flavor and textures.*

 1 (16-ounce) box rotini pasta

 olive oil

 1 large Italian eggplant (1½ pounds), with skin, ends trimmed, cut into ½-inch dice

 1 red onion, peeled, cut into ½-inch dice

 3 cloves fresh garlic, thinly sliced

 1 (6-ounce) can tomato paste

 ½ teaspoon paprika

 ½ teaspoon smoked paprika

 ⅛ teaspoon cayenne

 zest from ½ large or 1 medium orange

 ⅓ cup golden raisins (can rehydrate in mint tea)

 1 cup white wine, divided

 1 cup water

 1 teaspooon mint leaves, finely chopped

 1 teaspoon 2-4 parsley sprigs, chopped

 fine sea salt

 freshly ground black pepper

1. Heat ¼-cup olive oil in a large, high-sided skillet over medium heat. Make sure the oil is hot or the eggplant will soak it up. Add the eggplant in batches, don’t over-crowd the pan so the eggplant won’t steam and can caramelize, 3-4 minutes, stirring occasionally. Add another tablespoon or two of oil for the second batch if the pan is dry. Remove from the pan. Set the eggplant aside.
2. Add 2 tablespoons olive oil to the pan and heat over medium-high. Add the onions and sweat them, so they cook but don’t turn brown, 6-7 minutes. Add the garlic and cook for 5 minutes longer. Add half of the tomato paste, stirring for 3-4 minutes. Add second half of the tomato paste. Cook for another 2 minutes.
3. In a small bowl, mix the paprika, smoked paprika, cayenne, and orange zest. Stir in the raisins. Add the spiced raisins to the pan with ½ cup wine. Scrape the bottom of the pan to pick up bits of flavor. Raise the heat; cook for 1 minute so the wine can reduce a little. Add remaining ½ cup wine along with 1 cup water. Return the eggplant to the pan. Reduce heat to medium-low and cook the caponata for 5-6 minutes, stirring every few minutes, till bubbly and slightly thickened.
4. Cook pasta in salted water according to package directions until al dente. Drain, rinse, and toss with a drizzle of olive oil. Mix in the mint and parsley. Season with salt and pepper. Transfer to serving bowl. Top with Eggplant Caponata. Serve hot or at room temperature.