Roasted Eggplant and Tomato Bisque

Parve or Meat  Yields 8-10 servings

*Chef Lito Tan shared this soup recipe with me during the summer when the tomatoes are bursting with flavor. But it is an all-season soup, since it is warm and filling in the winter and the roasting brings out great flavor from the out-of-season tomatoes. You can serve it hot or cold. If you decided to make it dairy, garnish with a flick of sour cream.*

 nonstick cooking spray

 5 large beefsteak tomatoes, each cut in half

 2 large Italian eggplants, each cut in half lengthwise

 olive oil

 1 whole head garlic, top ½ inch cut off and discarded

 fine sea salt

 freshly ground black pepper

 3 tablespoons tomato paste

 3 shallots, peeled, thinly sliced

 1 teaspoon paprika

 1 teaspoon fine sea salt

 ½ teaspoon dried oregano

 ½ teaspoon freshly ground black pepper

 ¼ teaspoon cayenne

 3½ cups vegetable or chicken stock

 ½ cup white wine

 1 tablespoon balsamic vinegar, plus additional for garnish

1. Preheat oven to 450°F.
2. Cover 2 jellyroll pans with foil and spray with nonstick cooking spray. Place tomatoes and eggplant, cut-side-up, on the prepared pans. Brush all the exposed surfaces with olive oil. Turn the eggplant cut-side-down. Brush the cut head of garlic with olive oil as well, sprinkle with a little salt and pepper, and wrap in a square of aluminum foil. Place on one of the pans. Roast for 35 minutes.
3. Remove pans from the oven and brush the tomatoes and cut side of the eggplant with tomato paste. Leave the eggplant cut-side-up. Return the pans to the oven for a final 10 minutes. Remove pans from oven and allow to cool. If desired, reserve a little eggplant and some tomato to chop up for garnish.
4. Meanwhile, heat 1 tablespoon olive oil in a large soup pot over medium heat. Add the shallots and cook until translucent, 4-5 minutes. Stir in the paprika, salt, oregano, pepper, and cayenne. Hold the head of garlic over the pot (use a paper towel to protect your hand if it is still hot), and squeeze the cloves of roasted garlic out of the skin and into the pot. Add the tomatoes and the pan juices into the pot.
5. Using a large spoon, scoop the flesh from the eggplants and add to the pot, discarding skins.
6. Pour in the stock and wine. Stir well. Raise heat, bring to a boil, then turn down to a simmer and cook for 5 minutes. Stir in the balsamic vinegar. Transfer the soup in batches to a blender or use an immersion blender right in the pot and purée until smooth. Ladle into bowls. Garnish with additional balsamic drizzled from a narrow squeeze bottle and with the reserved roasted eggplant and tomato if you had set it aside earlier.