

BEEF MEATBALLS IN TOMATO SAUCE



SERVES 4

PREP TIME 15 mins

COOK TIME 1 hr 15 mins

¼ cup olive oil, plus more for greasing

2 pounds 80-percent lean ground beef

1 cup ricotta cheese

2 large eggs

1 cup cooked white rice

¼ cup chopped fresh parsley

3 ½ teaspoons chopped fresh oregano or 1 ¼ teaspoons dried oregano

Salt

¼ teaspoon crushed red pepper flakes

½ teaspoon ground fennel

1 small onion, finely diced

1 bay leaf

1 clove garlic, coarsely chopped

1 tablespoon tomato paste

One (28-ounce) can whole plum tomatoes, chopped with their liquid

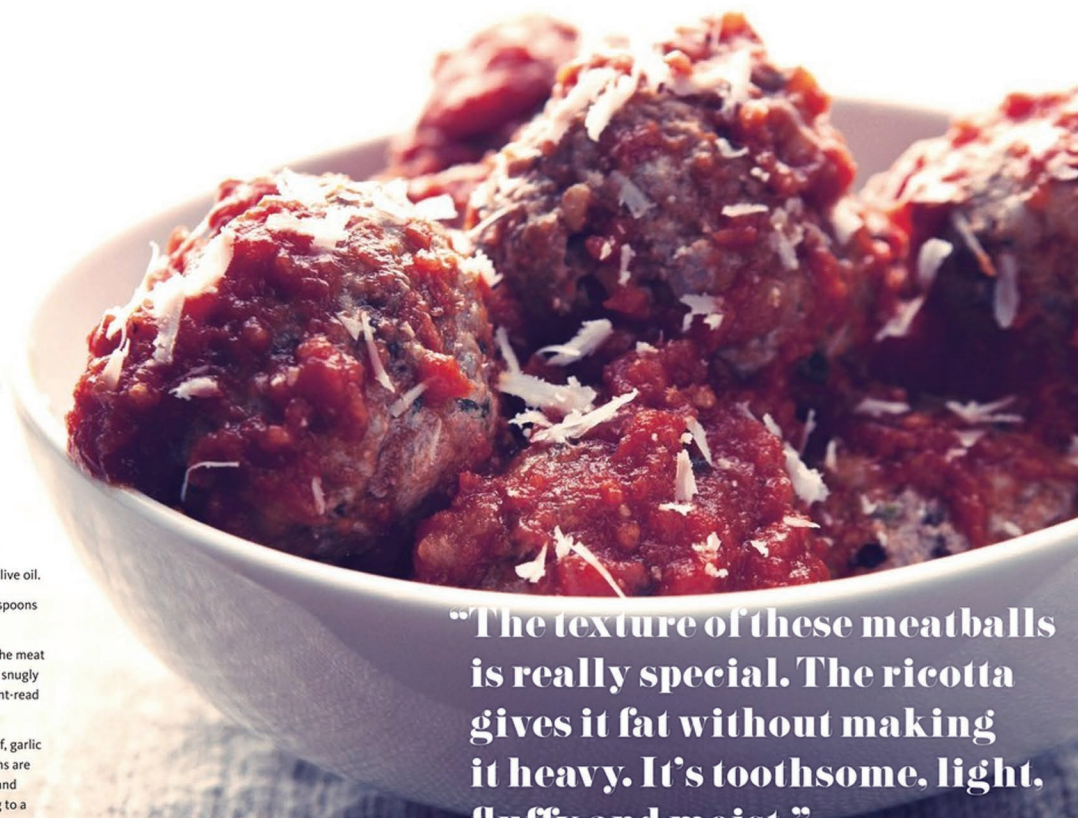
1 Preheat the oven to 450°. Grease a 9-by-13-inch baking dish with olive oil.

2 In a large bowl, combine the beef, ricotta, eggs, rice, parsley, 3 teaspoons oregano, red pepper flakes and fennel. Season with salt.

3 Divide the meat mixture into 24 golf ball-size meatballs, packing the meat firmly. Arrange the meatballs evenly in the baking dish, placing them snugly in rows to form a grid. Bake for 20 minutes, or until firm and an instant-read thermometer inserted into the center of a meatball reads 165°.

4 In a large pot over medium heat, cook the olive oil, onions, bay leaf, garlic and the remaining ½ teaspoon oregano, stirring often, until the onions are softened, about 10 minutes. Season with salt. Add the tomato paste and continue cooking for 5 minutes. Add the tomatoes and, stirring, bring to a boil. Reduce the heat to low and simmer for 1 hour, stirring every 5 minutes. Adjust the seasoning as needed and remove the bay leaf.

5 Drain the excess grease from the meatball pan. Pour the tomato sauce over the meatballs and bake for 15 minutes more.



“The texture of these meatballs is really special. The ricotta gives it fat without making it heavy. It’s toothsome, light, fluffy and moist.”

Daniel Holzman, executive chef and co-owner, *The Meatball Shop*, and author of *The Meatball Shop Cookbook*