checkered tablecloth spaghetti and meatballs

makes 6 to 8 servings

meatballs

2 tablespoons olive oil

1 large onion, finely chopped

2 cloves garlic, minced

1 pound ground round (85 percent lean)

1 pound sweet Italian sausage, casings removed

1 cup dried plain bread crumbs

½ cup freshly grated Parmesan cheese

2 large eggs, beaten

1 teaspoon dried oregano

1 teaspoon dried basil

¾ teaspoon salt

¼ teaspoon freshly ground black pepper

classic tomato pasta sauce

2 tablespoons olive oil

1 medium yellow onion, chopped

2 cloves garlic, minced

1 (28-ounce) can crushed tomatoes

1 (16-ounce) can tomato sauce

1 cup hearty red wine, such as Shiraz

2 teaspoons dried oregano

2 teaspoons dried basil

¼ teaspoon crushed hot red pepper

1 bay leaf

1½ pounds spaghetti

Freshly grated Parmesan cheese, for serving

1 egg
1/2 cup almond flour

A composite of what I've learned about spaghetti and meatballs from the various Italian grandmothers in my life, this is everything that the classic dish should be—the perfect example of *abbondanza*, which means glorious excess. This makes a large amount, but even if you don't have a big family, make the entire amount to have leftovers for another meal. In the old days, the meatballs would be fried in oil, but most cooks I know prefer to bake them to keep the stovetop clean of splatters.

1. To make the meatballs, heat the oil in a medium skillet over medium heat. Add the onion and cook, stirring occasionally, until golden, about 5 minutes. Add the garlic and cook until fragrant, about 1 minute more. Transfer to a large bowl and let cool completely.

2. Add the ground round, sausage, bread crumbs, Parmesan, eggs,

oregano, basil, salt, and pepper to the onion mixture and mix well. Cover and refrigerate for at least 15 minutes or up to 4 hours.

3. Position a rack in the center of the oven and preheat to 375°F. Lightly oil a large metal roasting pan. Using your wet hands rinsed under cold water, shape the meat mixture into 24 equal meatballs. Arrange the meatballs in the pan. Bake until lightly browned, about 25 minutes.

4. Meanwhile, start the sauce. Heat the oil in a heavy-bottomed nonreactive pot over medium heat. Add the onion and cook, stirring occasionally, until golden, about 5 minutes. Stir in the garlic and cook until fragrant, about 1 minute more. Stir in the tomatoes, tomato sauce, wine, oregano, basil, hot pepper, and bay leaf. Bring to a simmer over high heat. Reduce the heat to medium-low and simmer, uncovered and stirring occasionally, for 30 minutes.

5. Transfer the meatballs to a platter. Pour the fat out of the roasting pan, leaving the browned bits in the pan. Heat the pan over high heat. When it sizzles, pour in ½ cup water and bring to a boil, scraping up the browned bits in the pan with a wooden spatula. Stir into the sauce. Add the meatballs to the sauce and return to a simmer. Cook, stirring occasionally, until the meatballs are cooked through, about 30 minutes more.

6. Meanwhile, bring a large pot of salted water to a boil over high heat. Add the spaghetti and cook according to the package directions until al dente. Drain well and return to the pot.

7. Using a slotted spoon, transfer the meatballs to a platter. Remove the bay leaf from the sauce and discard. Add the sauce to the spaghetti in the pot and stir well. Transfer the spaghetti and sauce to a large warmed serving bowl and top with the meatballs. Serve hot, with Parmesan passed at the table.

sicilian meatballs: My friend Marguerite Scandiffio adds ½ cup chopped raisins and ⅓ cup toasted and cooled pine nuts to the meatball mixture.