

Rosario's Pasta al Forno alla Miró

Serves 4–6 people

You will need three pots: two medium-sized and one large.

Ingredients:

1/2 stick butter
4 C whole milk
1/2 C all-purpose flour
nutmeg, salt and pepper, to taste
1 C shredded Gruyère or Fontina cheese
1/4 C grated Parmesan cheese
12 oz dry fusilli pasta

Foods to compose your art:

There are no rules here. Assemble a few naturally-colored foods to create your composition. Some ideas: roasted tricolor peppers, green and/or black olives, cooked green beans, fresh herbs, cooked squid-ink spaghetti (or other kinds of naturally-colored pasta), cherry tomatoes, balsamic glaze or *vin cotto* for "painting." You may wish to cut up shapes ahead of time to have a fully stocked "palette."

Procedure:

Preheat the oven to 350 degrees.

Bring a large pot of water to boil on a back burner for the pasta.

Prepare the béchamel sauce:

Scald the milk over medium heat and keep hot until ready to use.

In a separate pot, melt the butter over medium heat. Once the butter has melted, add the flour, whisking until it has all been absorbed by the butter, to obtain a roux. Do not let it darken. Add the milk in two or three installments, whisking vigorously to obtain a smooth and silky sauce. Be careful not to let the sauce form lumps! Cook over low heat, continuing to whisk and make sure it doesn't burn.

Once the pasta water has come to a rapid boil, add a pinch of salt, and then add the pasta. Cook according to package directions minus two minutes (the pasta will be finished in the oven and you do not want it to overcook). Before draining the pasta, reserve 1/2 cup of the pasta water to add to the béchamel; the residual starch in the water will add creaminess to the sauce. Drain the pasta before it is fully cooked, as indicated above, and return it to the pot.

Add the reserved pasta water to the béchamel and mix thoroughly. Fold in the cheeses and mix to incorporate evenly.

Pour the béchamel over the cooked pasta. Mix gently but thoroughly and transfer to a medium-size baking dish. Pasta should be level with the top of the dish. Smooth out the top. Bake on the bottom rack of the oven for a few minutes until the sauce starts to bubble but not brown.

Remove from the oven and place on a heat-proof surface. Create your desired composition using a variety of foods and return to the oven for just a few minutes.

Admire your art before dividing it into portions. Take a picture of it to share. Enjoy!