



by Peter Buffa

## Eno strikes a decadent chord

**E**nology—the art of winemaking. If that's too many syllables, not to worry, just remember the first two—eno. Store that in the “delicious and fun” part of your brain, and make your way down to the new, improved, was-impressive-now-is-stunning Ritz-Carlton, Laguna Niguel. That's where you'll find Eno—the new wine-cheese-chocolate room at the Ritz-Carlton—au courant, terminally stylish and way up there on the fun meter. Eno is the brainchild of Laurence Geller, president and CEO of Strategic Hotels & Resorts, which specializes in drop-dead gorgeous hotel and resort properties around the world, from the iconic Hotel Del Coronado, to the Marriott Champs-Élysées, to the Four Seasons Punta Mita. Geller knows a good idea when he has one and hopes to repeat the Eno concept in other Strategic properties, including the Hotel Del. If Geller's vision for Eno was to offer wine, cheese and chocolate lovers a novel way to indulge their guilty pleasures, he has succeeded, to the power of 10.

Eno is first-cabin stem to stern without being stuffy. The richly paneled room is dripping with drama, the centerpiece a four-sided bar set in the midst of a jaw-dropping wine collection. For some viticultural grace notes, the surface of the bar is embedded with wine appellations lighted from below. Sampling wine by the flight—a number of glasses, each with a few sips of wines organized by region or style—is not new. But Eno spins some interesting variations on the theme. Each

flight consists of three glasses served on a wood tray with a printed card that gives both the expert and the novice interesting, broad strokes about each wine. I went with the *Sopranos* flight—a Livio Felluga Pinot Grigio, a Tasca d'Almerita “Leone” and

a lush Barolo, the prince of Piemonte reds. Here's a bit of the accompanying text: “Livio Felluga Pinot Grigio ... golden hues highlighted by tropical flavors. The finish is soft, but persistent notes of spicy citrus, peach and apricot.” Read up, sample, savor; if one wine or other in the flight triggers a life-changing experience, you can order it by the glass or the bottle of course.

But here is where Eno shines: Apply the same principle to cheese and chocolate, and you have the makings of an evening that is fun, to say nothing of decadent, which often results in more fun. The flights of cheese accompanied by fresh ciabatta are as delicious as their names are clever: “Blues Brothers Oregon Blue Vein, Hamlet Blue and Royal Stilton Blue”; “European Union Manchego, Aged Gouda, Pecorino Lucano”; “Don Queso Pata Cabra, Monte Enebro, and Queso de Valderon.” The showstopper was the Gorgonzola Dolce, which, like Barolo, is also a star player from the Piemonte region. If you find it listed on your visit, point to it and say, firmly, “That one!” Our server described it as “possibly the oldest blue cheese in the world, soft and buttery.” Age issues aside, it is one of the most luscious soft cheeses you will ever experience, very rich but not aggressive.

If you need something a little more substantial to quell your hunger while you stroll between the reds and whites, try the charcuterie—a selection of cured meats and condiments with prosciutto di Parma, duck prosciutto, sopresatta salami, *bresaola* (thinly sliced dried beef from the Lombardia region) and vegetable paté. Finally, to produce complete and total sensory overload, and stage-five guilt, there are the Chocolate Sensations from Los Angeles chocolatier Jin Patisserie—chocolate threesomes that are downright cruel and will produce instant, cocoa-induced rapture. Sample the sea salt caramel chocolate truffle, and I guarantee that you will tell your server to keep bringing those to you until you say stop or pass out, whichever comes first.

Above all, it is the careful and innovative pair-

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ing of wine, cheese and chocolate that sets Eno apart. Wine director-sommelier Holly Smith is not only at the top of her game but clearly in her element, changing the flights often as she works her pairing magic. "I developed my passion for pairing wine with food while working at Le Mas Perrier. I truly love finding that perfect pairing," Smith says. "I also enjoy the opportunity to introduce guests to new and interesting wines, and educate them on every as-

pect of wines, wineries and varietals."

Bottom line, Eno is fresh, and stylish, and fun, and should be around for a good long time. Go, get there, don't dilly-dally. As a before- or after-dinner experience, or the evening's main event, your taste buds will be thrilled. Bravo, Eno. Wait, I take that back. *Bravissimo!* **OC**

—Peter Buffa writes *Orange Coast's* monthly *Slicing the Orange* column.



## ENO

at the Ritz-Carlton, Laguna Niguel  
1 Ritz-Carlton Drive  
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[www.ritzcarlton.com](http://www.ritzcarlton.com)

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