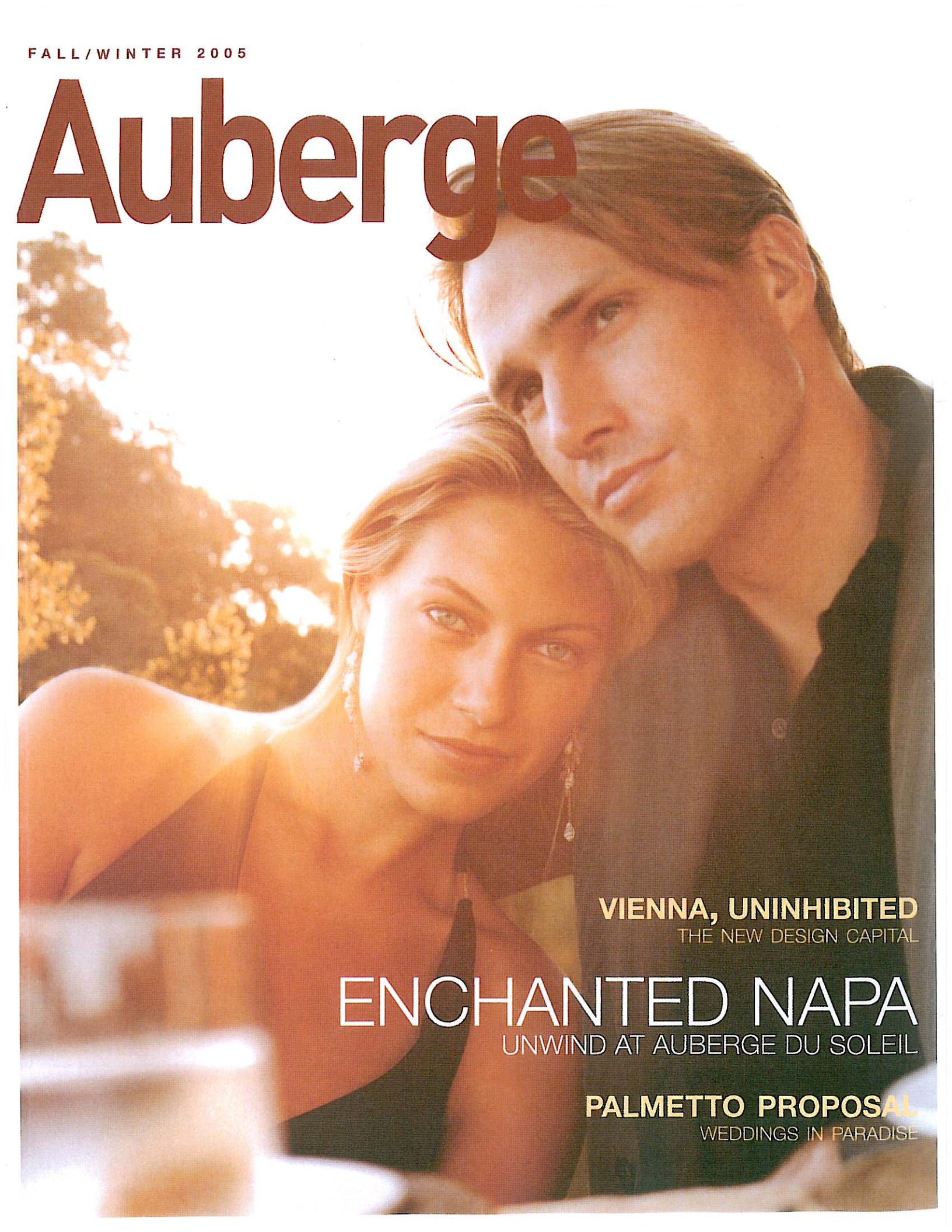


FALL/WINTER 2005

Auberge



VIENNA, UNINHIBITED
THE NEW DESIGN CAPITAL

ENCHANTED NAPA
UNWIND AT AUBERGE DU SOLEIL

PALMETTO PROPOSAL
WEDDINGS IN PARADISE

El Dorado Kitchen

Urban sophistication in a relaxed wine country locale. **by lisa rosen**

The new El Dorado Kitchen opened in June to such raves that a trip was promptly called for. Located in El Dorado Hotel, in the heart of the town of Sonoma, the restaurant is only a 45-minute drive from San Francisco, making for an easy impromptu visit.

The restaurant offers a delightful array of seating options. The hotel lobby provides a comfortable space for cocktails and selections from the bar menu. Or you can lounge by the dramatic fig tree on the patio. There are even day beds by the pool for a slightly more decadent setting.

For the full lunch or dinner menu, take a table on the patio—or a cabana, complete with chandelier. Or head inside, where the spacious dining room offers views in every direction. The décor is all clean lines and appealing touches, from the whitewashed walls to the menus, where El Dorado Kitchen is shortened to a simple EDK. And then there's the Big Table. Set in the center of the restaurant, made of a single long plank from a bridge in Vermont, it seats 20. One look and we can't help contemplating a return with a party in tow.

Future plans aside, we settled in for dinner on the patio. The drink menu sets an easy, happy mood. Instead of the usual list of everything-tinis, their inventive house drinks include a savory Cucumber and Thyme, with Magellan gin and lime juice. A Peach Jalapeno thrills the palate, with sliced peppers, Absolut Peach vodka, and lime and white cranberry juices.

But this is just a happy prelude to the food. Executive chef Ryan Fancher, formerly of French Laundry and Auberge, has brought skill and creativity to the menu. The salmon terrine starter is gorgeous, set off by the crunch of olive oil crostinis. Fritto misto disappears quickly, with its fresh mix of sun-

Right: take a seat at the big table. Below: the menu changes to suit the season.



chokes, haricot verts, and fennel dressed with garlic aioli. The wine menu perfectly complements this sunny array, with a range of enticing Sonoma options. Sommelier Anani Lawson, who hails from French Laundry, is on hand to help with selections.

On to the entrees: risotto is splendid, topped with English peas amid white truffle foam. A savory saddle of lamb is sliced and roasted with a lamb jus, and served with spinach and olive oil smashed potatoes.

The desserts were created by consulting pastry chef Janet Dalton, who spent years working at Wolfgang Puck's Postrio in Los Angeles. Brown butter crepes with bananas foster and cinnamon ice cream are a luscious treat. And EDK fig treats, with Tahitian vanilla bean ice cream and a port wine glaze, are already a signature dessert.

EDK is sophisticated, easy-going—and fun: a most welcome combination. ■

El Dorado Kitchen, 405 First Street West, Sonoma, California; 707/996-3030; eldoradosonoma.com.

THE BIG TABLE, MADE OF A SINGLE LONG PLANK, SEATS 20. ONE LOOK AND WE CAN'T HELP CONTEMPLATING A RETURN WITH A PARTY IN TOW.