

Eno at the InterContinental Chicago

ENO'S FOUR WOMEN SOMMELIERS—YOUNG, DYNAMIC, AND ENTHUSIASTIC—COULD EASILY PASS FOR A GROUP OF COLLEGE CO-EDS.

JULIANNE WILL



Left to right: Eno sommeliers Kristin Turner, Shara Bauer, Jennifer Bingham, and Mary Krol (above); InterContinental Chicago (below).



But spend five minutes with any of them, and each exhibits a level of knowledge and professionalism far above what someone could pick up from a weekend waitressing job. “That’s one thing that I think we deal with on a daily basis,” says Jennifer Bingham, wine director at Eno. “A lot of people ask us if we’re in school.” But the four are pleased to set the record straight. “Everyone who works here,” Bingham says, “wants wine to be their career.”

Eno, located in the InterContinental on Chicago’s Michigan Avenue, is the first in a series of wine bars, now expanding across the country, that specialize in cheese and chocolate. The female sommeliers here divide up the duties: Bingham is the wine director, along with Scott Harney; Mary Krol is wine manager/event planner; Shara Bauer is wine manager/chocolate buyer; and Kristin Turner is wine manager/cheese buyer. Each has both the work experience and formal education to inform her role.

Bingham, 26 and an Ohio native, earned her bachelor’s degree at Ohio Wesleyan University, studying sociology and business. During a semester abroad in Australia, she toured the Hunter, Yarra, and Barossa valleys, where her interest in wine was piqued. When she got home, she started working part-time at a wine shop. After college, Bingham moved west, taking a job in 2004 at high-end retailer Knightsbridge Wine Shoppe, in the Chicago suburb of Northbrook. Soon after, she was hired as wine buyer for the boutique Que Syrah Fine Wines in Chicago’s Lakeview neighborhood. She left for Eno to gain experience on the service side, joining the restaurant shortly after it opened in December 2006.

Photo by David Ditzler (bottom)

SOMMELIER SPOTLIGHT

Along the way, she studied. Bingham passed Wine Fundamentals I and II through the International Sommelier Guild in spring 2006, and she passed the Court of Master Sommeliers' Certified Sommelier exam in April 2007. She took a break from further classes to plan for her September 2008 wedding in northern Michigan.

Krol, 33, grew up in Rolling Meadows, a northwest suburb of Chicago. She attended Harper College part-time for three years, studying English and creative writing. Her interest in wine actually did begin with a waitressing job in college, at Gino's East Pizza, then part of the Lettuce Entertain You group. Her pay and benefits were so good that Krol stayed with the restaurant group when she moved to the city in 1998, transferring to Shaw's Crab House.

She befriended the wine steward and started taking classes, including a certification in wine fundamentals through Allied Domecq. In 2002, she signed up for a winemaking apprenticeship at Pacific Star Winery in Fort Bragg, Calif. Krol completed Wine Fundamentals I and II and the six-month, intensive Sommelier Diploma Course through the International Sommelier Guild; she is currently preparing for her two-day final exam. At Shaw's, she was eventually asked to assist with the wine program, which she did until moving to Eno in 2007.

Bauer, 31, grew up in the Chicago restaurant business. Her grandfather owned a restaurant



for 40 years; her dad, a longtime restaurant general manager, is now a headhunter in the industry; and her mother is a corporate trainer for Weber Grill Restaurants. From high school on, Bauer worked in fine dining, beginning as a server and later tending bar.

She studied psychology and English at the University of Iowa, but after meeting sommelier Belinda Chang, then with Chicago's Cenitare restaurants and now the wine director for The Modern in New York, Bauer realized that wine could be both a passion and a career—and not just for men. She passed Wine Fundamentals I and II in the winter of 2007, and joined Eno that

Eno

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Eno's exterior (above) and interior (left).

Julianne Will passed the introductory level of the Court of Master Sommeliers last summer. She left a career in marketing and publishing this spring to pursue freelance writing full time, covering food, wine, fitness, travel, and other subjects. She has also authored or co-authored four best-selling Catholic children's books. She lives in Chicago and can be reached through her website, www.juliannewill.com.

summer. In April 2008, she became a Certified Sommelier through the Court of Master Sommeliers; now, she's decided to pursue Master Sommelier status.

A talented baker with a sweet tooth, Bauer crafts her chocolate list with an informed palate. At the moment, she's excited about pairing a white-chocolate-strawberry truffle with the M. Lawrence Brut Rosé Cuvée Eno, a sparkling wine from Michigan.

Turner, 29, moved to Chicago from Indiana to attend Loyola University, double-majoring in cognitive psychology and vocal performance with a minor in neuroscience. She, too, worked her way through college with restaurant jobs, serving at The Club at Chicago Symphony Center, the Garden Restaurant at



Eno's seating area is adorned with grape names.

WINE LIST EXCERPT

WINE FLIGHTS

Tickled Pink		\$16
<i>Don't call them Champagne; they're "sparkling wines." Mon Dieu! (Ask the French.)</i>		
M. Lawrence, Brut Rosé, California/Michigan	N.V.	\$10
Gran Sarao, Cava Brut Rosé, Penedès, Spain	N.V.	\$9
Graham Beck, Brut Rosé, South Africa	N.V.	\$12
Festival of Whites		\$16
<i>Chicago summers are filled with tons of awesome festivals—Blues Fest, the Taste, and all the neighborhood fests. Celebrate with our favorite whites!</i>		
Twisted Oak, Verdelho "Bordello," Lodi, California	2006	\$11
Kana, "Katie Mae," Yakima Valley, Washington	2004	\$14
Brooks, "Amycas," Oregon	2006	\$12
Pinot Envy		\$16
<i>Let Freud have his theories and us ours—in this ménage a trois of Pinots, you will become uniquely acquainted with the beloved Pinot Noir and her equally tasty mutations.</i>		
Yamhill Valley, Pinot Blanc, McMinnville, Oregon	2007	\$9
Eola Hills, Pinot Noir, Oregon	2006	\$12
Domaine Chandon, Pinot Meunier, Carneros, California	2006	\$14
Dusted Valley		\$21
<i>Tiny-production winery out of the Walla Walla Valley in Washington, owned by former cheeseheads (Wisconsin natives). How can you argue with a winery that calls its wine club the "Stained Tooth Society"?</i>		
Dusted Valley, Viognier, Yakima Valley	2006	\$15
Dusted Valley, Syrah "Stained Tooth," Columbia Valley	2006	\$17
Dusted Valley, Cabernet Sauvignon, Walla Walla Valley	2006	\$17
Spanish Siesta		\$14
<i>Earthy, fruity, versatile wines and a two-hour lunch break! The Spanish can do no wrong. Discover the Spanish way of life with these three red wines.</i>		
Paisajes IX, Rioja (Grenache/Tempranillo) (bottle)	2003	\$50
Sacra Natura, Crianza, Terra Alta (Carignan/Tempranillo/Syrah)	2004	\$9
Bodegas Castaño, Monastrell "Hécula," Yecla	2006	\$10

the Art Institute of Chicago, and Sam's Wines and Spirits. On those jobs, she discovered her love for pairing food and wine.

Turner stayed at Sam's for two years after graduation, then started at Eno in December 2006. She has passed Wine Fundamentals I and II; after her November wedding, she plans to concentrate on becoming certified through the Court of Master Sommeliers and to pursue Wine & Spirit Education Trust studies.

Turner also loves to cook; her cheese expertise is fueled by her personal interest in food. Each woman has her own area of expertise in wine as well. With 700 wines listed at any time and new ones always coming in, Krol says, if there's a wine on the list that a sommelier is unsure about, "there's someone you can always turn to." The four also meet once a month for training and discussion. "We'll each be assigned anywhere from four to six wines," Turner says, "and we do all the research we possibly can and present it to each other. Which really helps, because then we all see the labels of the wines that we actually do carry, so in case we're not here to meet with the wine reps, we can still get a good handle on it."

All four sommeliers are on the floor during service hours, so they have to conduct most of their research into new wines, cheeses, and chocolates—not to mention tasting and ordering—on their own time. Wine buying for Bingham is "even more challenging," says Bauer, "because we do try to find stuff that you can't find anywhere else. We want stuff that we have to tell people about."

Bauer uses five chocolatiers, primarily

WINE LIST EXCERPT

Decadence		\$100
The summit of decadence. One of history's storied dessert wines, complex beyond belief. Drink and reflect on history gone by.		
D'Oliveiras, Madeira Boal Reserva (3 ounces)	1968	\$35
Barbeito, Madeira Verdelho (3 ounces)	1929	\$55
D'Oliveiras, Madeira Boal Reserva (3 ounces)	1908	\$110
Méthode Champenoise		\$20
If it's not from Champagne, at least it's made like it is! Dom Pérignon would be proud.		
Montsarra, Cava Brut, Penedès, Spain	N.V.	\$12
Domaine Meriwether, "Thomas Jefferson Cuvée," Oregon	1998	\$15
Louis Roederer, Brut Premier, Reims, Champagne, France	N.V.	\$22
Mamma Mia		\$14
They're all Italian whites, but each of these wines is unique. So if you're drawing a blanc and can't decide what to order, this flight will not disappoint.		
Alois Lageder, Pinot Grigio, Alto Adige	2006	\$13
Ca' Rugate, Soave Classico "Monte Fiorentine"	2005	\$10
Pojer & Sandri, Sauvignon, Dolomiti	2003	\$12
Eno Flight		\$20
We have been lucky enough to work with three amazing California winemakers in the first edition of Eno's private-label wines. Small production, but big flavor!		
Schweiger, Sauvignon Blanc, Uboldi Vineyard, Sonoma	2006	\$12
Miller, Syrah, Sage Canyon, Napa	2004	\$15
Robert Sinskey, Merlot, Carneros	2005	\$15
The Godfather		\$17
Chicago owes a great debt to the Italian immigrants who contributed so much to the city. This is our tribute. Salut!		
Domenico Clerico, Barbera d'Alba "Tre Vigne," Piedmont	2003	\$13
Rocca di Montegrossi, "Geremia," Tuscany	1996	\$14
St. Michael-Eppan, Lagrein, Alto Adige	2001	\$12
Faux Bordeaux		\$17
Three of the five red Bordeaux varietals, but none from France! Can you name the two that are missing?		
G. Puiatti, "Le Zuccole," Friuli, Italy (Cabernet Franc)	2004	\$12
Tomero, Malbec, Mendoza, Argentina	2005	\$12
Finca Omblancas, Petit Verdot, Jumilla, Spain	2005	\$12
Port in a Storm		\$17
Chocolate! Cheese! Port! The trifecta of perfection.		
Smith Woodhouse, Port LBV, Portugal	1984	\$14
Trevor Jones, Tawny Port "Jonesy," Australia	N.V.	\$10
Ferreira, 10-Year-Old Tawny, Quinta do Porto, Portugal	N.V.	\$15
Willy Wonka Wines		\$18
Meant to be with chocolate. You may not be the same after this flight. This is your "golden ticket."		
Valter Barbero, "Serena," Alba, Italy (3 ounces)	2006	\$8
Tobin James, Late Harvest Zinfandel "Liquid Love," Paso Robles, California (3 ounces)	2005	\$14
Mas Amiel, Cuvée Speciale 10 Ans d'Age, Maury, France (3 ounces)	N.V.	\$14
Prices are by the glass except as noted.		

Photos by David Ditzler



Eno's wine, cheese, and chocolate samplers.

from the Midwest, for her handmade and hand-dipped sweets, from all-natural, Fair Trade ingredients. Even the gift boxes are biodegradable. "We have to explain why this costs \$5," she says with a laugh, holding a truffle.

"We kind of moved away from the big European names to small, Midwestern, artisan cheeses and chocolates," says Turner. "We buy direct from the cheese farm whenever we can. Tourists on Michigan Avenue really like that." She's been known to get up early after a late shift just to be the first to meet a particular cheese provider at the Green City Farmer's Market in



The four sommeliers in Eno's wine cellar.

FIVE FAVORITES

SHARA BAUER:

Soter Pinot Noir Beacon Hill Vineyard,
Yamhill-Carlton District, Oregon 2005 \$89

To me, Oregon Pinots are the perfect balance between Burgundy and California. The harmony between the lush fruit, earth, and spice makes the Soter an elegant choice to pair with our cheeses and chocolates.

JENNIFER BINGHAM:

Domaine Jean Chartron Clos du Cailleret,
Puligny-Montrachet, Burgundy 2004 \$168

Complex and just plain delicious, this wine has amazing balance and is a definite go-to in my quest to find the perfect Chardonnay.

MARY KROL:

Milat Chenin Blanc, Napa Valley (glass) 2007 \$11

A full-bodied white that is slightly off-dry, with a perfect balance of acidity and round mango and apricot flavors. The texture and slight sweetness make it an excellent pair for many different cheeses, as well as the perfect glass to enjoy on its own.

KRISTIN TURNER:

Sadie Family Columella, Swartland,
South Africa 2002 \$125

For a full-bodied wine, this Syrah-Mourvèdre blend is incredibly smooth. The fruits are stewed and earthy without bitterness. It's a velvety, rich wine whose flavors rebound to please any palate on a cold, Chicago winter day.

SCOTT HARNEY:

Dusted Valley Viognier, Yakima Valley,
Washington (glass) 2006 \$15

An excellent example of New World Viognier—elegant, with great minerality—from a small producer in Washington whose winemaker we consider a friend.

Lincoln Park. She also surfs the Internet early in the morning, she says, “finding those super-small cheese farms that no one else has on their lists. It’s definitely a lifestyle.”

Although Eno prides itself on seeking out exclusive products, it tries to make them as accessible as possible. “We have so many bottles that are priced so reasonably that people who wouldn’t normally take the risk of getting a bottle, can,” says Krol. “That’s what we try to do—bring it on a level that’s super-casual. It doesn’t need to be intimidating. We’re just very laid-back.”

“For someone who knows nothing about wine, cheese, or chocolate,” Turner adds, “they can come in and have all these experiences and be educated on all the products.” Those experiences include parties ranging from classroom-style tastings to lavish cocktail hours with stations. “We can be as in-depth as they want,” Krol says. “They love that there are all sommeliers there, and they can really impress their friends.”

That all four sommeliers are female still surprises and impresses guests, who often assume the women won’t know what they’re talking about. But that’s starting to change. “It’s an up-and-coming career choice for women,” says Bingham. “When we go to trade tastings, we are always the minority, for sure.” But she and the others are noticing more and more women in their classes. In fact, the number of women who applied for their Eno positions was noticeably greater than in the past, according to Harney.

Kathleen Lewis, executive director of the Court of Master Sommeliers for the past 11 years, has also observed the trend. Though there are just 14 women among the 96 current Master Sommeliers in the American chapter, the ratio of women to men has been increasing. And the growth is even greater at the Certified and Advanced levels, Lewis says, which will eventually be reflected in the Master ranks.

The four sommeliers at Eno find strength in numbers. “We’re always teaching each other,” Krol says. “It’s nice that we’ll all be able to open a bottle and talk about it. You’re working with people who all have the same passion for it.” They clearly have a lot of fun, too. Almost like a group of college co-eds. 🍷

Photo by Julianne Will (top left)