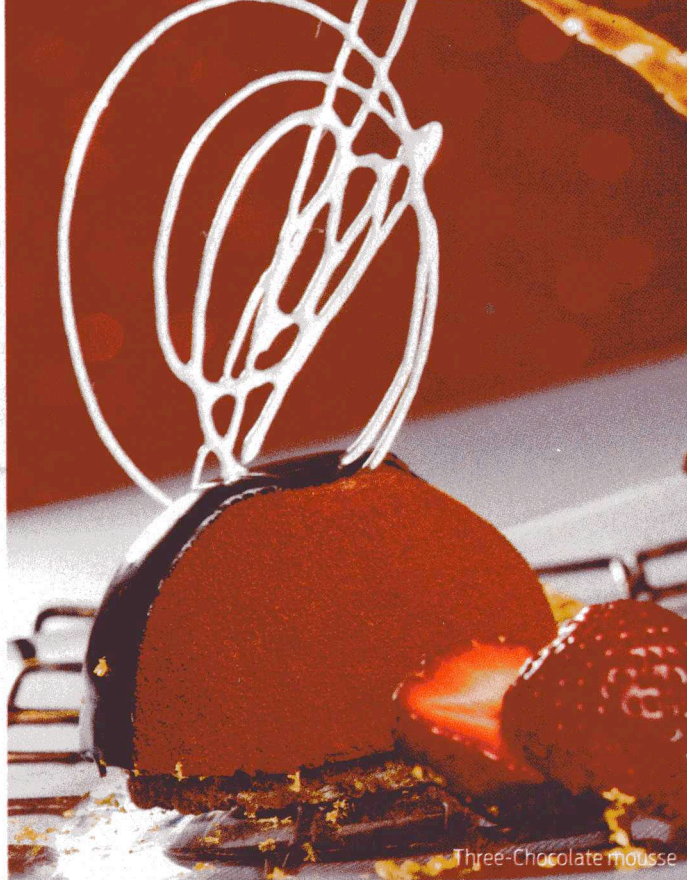




Sturgeon Carpaccio



Three-Chocolate mousse

BY E.C. GLADSTONE  
Photos by Beverly Poppe

## That's Amore

### *Romance complements exquisite fare*

#### **Valentino/ The Venetian**

Grill opens at 11:30 a.m.;  
fine dining room opens at  
5:30 p.m. 702.414.3000

Ten years is a long time for a fine dining establishment on the ever-changing, ultra-competitive Las Vegas Strip, so it's hard not to over-praise Valentino, younger brother of Piero Selvaggio's Los Angeles landmark. Valentino is even more notable for having spent the entire decade under the guise of one James Beard Award-winning chef, Luciano Pellegrini.

Exploring a modern international cuisine with an Italian perspective is Pellegrini's passion. An attractive and charming companion is not a necessity to enjoy the romantic restaurant, but if you happen to have one around, bringing that person will certainly add to the experience. Begin with a flute of refreshing Ca' del Bosco prosecco while you break off a bite of lacy cheese fritter and peruse the options. Don't expect your choices to be easy: Pellegrini even offers five different breads to accompany.

We began with a sturgeon carpaccio, paper-thin medallions spread around a petite island of passion fruit-dressed fennel and arugula salad, nicely contrasting the delicate fish. Next came some gorgeous lobster purses, vintage-style black-and-white striped upright ravioli filled

with tender meat on a tomato heirloom fonduta sauce and drizzled with basil oil. It seemed almost unfair that something so pretty had to disappear so quickly.

In fact, Pellegrini's presentations are as pleasing to the eye as the palate. The lollipop-cut Australian lamb chops were the most tender and burstingly flavored I've had in a long time, served with a cube of saffron and baby vegetable risotto. The Alaskan halibut, pan-seared, was a hearty but delicate filet accented by roasted pepper vinaigrette and a balanced selection of sauteed Swiss chard, baby carrots and patty pan squash.

Dolci are an essential element here: A prickly pear zabaglione with sorbet, paired with a sweet moscato, ended things delicately—before a fantastic three-chocolate mousse with peanut butter gelato and caramelized bananas pushed things over the top.

Should you be fortunate enough to have the above recommended dining companion, by all means request one of the two intimate wine rooms. They turn a merely excellent meal into something unforgettable.