

Living Well in the Wine Country
FineLifeTM

*The Olive
Festival*

Ten Q

with Jens Hoj

By Daedalus Howell

El Dorado Kitchen and El Dorado Hotel general manager Jens Hoj is a formidable presence both professionally and physically. Hoj presides over the classy restaurant, hotel and bar with a personality as big as he is tall (6'7"). Recent guests have included such luminaries as Pixar's John Lasseter and Apple's Steve Jobs as well as, of course, writer Daedalus Howell and photographer Ryan Lely.

DH: So, some local joints have "lingerie night," is EDK going to do that?

JH: [laughing] No, not unless we black out the place. Actually we're working on a fundraiser with Jean Arnold Sessions of Hanzell Vineyards that's a pajama night. We're going to have one room set up as a spa, another for massage, as well as manicures and champagne. It's going to be a lot of fun. We're going to have the whole place booked for them.

DH: It's all women?

JH: Yes, for breast cancer awareness.

DH: Can I hang out with them?

JH: [laughs] You can act like you're on staff.

DH: You should have a fundraiser for me.

JH: For what, living expenses?

DH: It sometimes seems that a lot of your clientele is from someplace other than Sonoma. Where do they come from?

JH: San Francisco or New York. We ramp up the music, have a busy bar and attract a hip crowd. It's gotten out on the web that this is a great place to stay. We presently have a 110 party bookings for the year.

DH: Wow, they're aren't even that many weekends. With the kind of clientele this place attracts, have you ever had any "diva" style problems?

JH: Diva? Yes. We have a lot of that. We had a group recently where you could tell the lady was super-high maintenance. We ended up doing well with her – she called and said it was really great. But I would say she made about 30 phone calls just to get a party of 15 booked.

DH: Is that high maintenance or obsessive-compulsive disorder?

JH: We occasionally get folks with odd needs. We'll have a tasting dinner for 10 people and it will turn out one is a raw-vegan, but didn't tell us. If you're a raw-vegan you essentially can't eat anything that we cook. So we had to prepare something out of nothing. We made a beet juice soup, a vegetable salad, diced jicama – but it was only heated up to 113 degrees, but not anymore – otherwise it's cooked. Every night, especially on Friday and Saturday, you're going to get people who have needs. They expect it to be good – if you drove from the city to have dinner here, it better be good.

DH: Some of my special needs involve having a red carpet when I walk in. Can you do that?

JH: If you tell us early enough.

DH: Consider yourself told you, dude.

JH: [laughs] We could do it. People will ask for special requests for the rooms – a special champagne, that kind of thing. Whatever we can do within reason, we'll do.

DH: You seem really good at reading your customers. Let's say you don't know me and I just walked in and I'm just one of these guys. "Hey." What's the read?

JH: Well, right there, it would seem you would want to engage in conversation. If you say "Hey." Now, if you come in and your demeanor says "I'm just looking, I'm just here for a drink," that tell me "don't engage." You can tell pretty quickly.

DH: What if somebody is sitting at the bar wearing sunglasses, what does that signify?

JH: That probably signifies that they're drunk.

Photograph
by Ryan Lely

