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Phoenix favorites Delux and Zen 32 are in good company with their newest strip-mall neighbor, Eliot Wexler's Noca.

If we were limited to only two words to describe our overjoyed-ness for Phoenix's new Noca restaurant, they would be "cotton candy." Prior to digging into dessert, diners are presented with a bountiful bowl of pink fluffiness, gratis. While this carnival staple can be purchased at any fair or ballgame, there is something especially delightful about indulging in this sweet treat at a chic eatery—especially when the food that precedes it is equally celebratory.

Now, just because cotton candy is served, don't think that Noca is an establishment where clowns make balloon animals for guests in between courses. There is nothing kiddish, in fact, about Noca. Dark woods, dramatic ceiling lights and a regal bar decorate the dining room and classic rock tunes fill your ears as you peruse the lengthy wine list (which includes wines by the glass and bottle, topping out at \$1,000). Though there is an alfresco seating area, we suggest settling into one of the sleek booths as, outside, your view consists of a Safeway parking lot.

Cotton candy wasn't the only childhood favorite served at Noca. The amuse bouche consisted of melon, mint and Pop Rocks. As strange as that combination may sound, the invigorating spoonful awakened our palate for the contemporary American fare to come. The appetizer menu—or the first page of the charming clipboard that Noca uses instead of a traditional bound bill of fare—starts off with a chilled white-corn soup with baby carrots and smoked paprika oil. The sweet soup was utterly refreshing, and the hearty chorizo croquettes provided a welcome bit of salt. We would have preferred the chewy bits of corn to have a tad more snap, though. There are also a few raw seafood options, like fluke with yuzu-shallot vinaigrette or Kona kampachi, on the crudo menu for a unique starter.

Though chef Chris Curtiss' menu rotates, there is always a helping of homemade pasta, seafood and meat dishes as far as the main courses are concerned. We were especially impressed with the tasting of summer vegetables. We're positive that juiced veggie drinks would be obsolete if all carrots, string beans, mushrooms and broccoli tasted this good. The heaping platter of assorted glazed, poached and roasted veggies, which includes the aforementioned delights, was, on this visit, capped off with a sweet-corn puree. Even meat eaters will be pleased with how satisfying this dish is—and it'll give your steak-knife-wielding hand a rest, as each veggie is very tender. For a carnivorous course, the steak frites were mouthwatering and served alongside crispy potato gnocchi.

After the cotton candy has perked up your taste buds, it's time to dig into the real dessert. Noca takes tried-and-true sweets and transforms them into a lip-smacking new incarnation. (On the menu, "milk and cookies" is translated into a malted vanilla milkshake with homebaked chocolate-chip cookies, and "doughnuts" are warm doughnut holes with dulce de leche jam, plum jelly and chocolate fondue.) We tried the strawberries and cream, a delicious display of strawberry gelato, shortbread cookies and a divine vanilla bean sauce, and used the supersoft cookies to sop up every last bit of the vanilla sauce. If your sweet tooth isn't satiated from the cotton candy and dessert, it will be from the shortbread cookie you'll receive upon getting your check.