

**Dining and Wining ...
Where To Go ...
Where Not To Go**

**THE BEST
RESTAURANTS OF HONGKONG ...
AND THE WORST !**

Name of Restaurant

SPOON BY Alain Ducasse, InterContinental Hongkong

Address of Restaurant

Number 18, Salisbury Road, Kowloon, Hongkong

Date of Visit

Thursday, December 21, 2006

Category**TARGET's Rating****Service**

First Impression	Excellent	Acceptable	Poor
Attentiveness to Customers' Needs	Excellent	Acceptable	Poor
Flexibility	Excellent	Acceptable	Poor
Product Expertise of Serving Staff	Excellent	Acceptable	Poor
Speed of Service	Excellent	Acceptable	Poor
Cleanliness of Uniform and Serving Staff	Excellent	Acceptable	Poor

Smoking and Non-Smoking Areas

Smoking

Non-Smoking

Ambiance

Lighting	Excellent	Acceptable	Poor
Music	Excellent	Acceptable	Poor
General	Excellent	Acceptable	Poor

Food

Presentation	Excellent	Acceptable	Poor
Taste	Excellent	Acceptable	Poor

Quantity	Excellent	Acceptable	Poor
<u>Wine</u>			
Choice	Extensive	Limited	Unbalanced
Cost	Reasonable	Unreasonable	
Storage of Wine	Good	Poor	
Expertise of Sommelier	Excellent	Acceptable	Poor
<u>Total Cost of Meal</u>			
Very Expensive	Moderately Expensive	Very Reasonable Priced	
<u>Name of Executive Assistant Manager</u> <u>for</u> <u>Food and Beverage</u>	Mr Claus Pedersen		
<u>Name of Executive Chef</u>	Mr Tjaco van Eijken of SPOON		

Comments

The best part of the dinner at the fine-dining outlet of InterContinental Hongkong in Tsimshatsui, Kowloon, on Thursday, December 21, 2006, was leaving.

The arrival of the **TARGET** team at ‘*Spoon by Alain Ducasse*’ was at 7:30 pm on that Thursday evening, but it was not until 10:30 pm that the meal had been completed due to the outrageously long periods of delays between the individual courses.

The irony of the situation was that, in truth, the restaurant has the appearance of a dressed-up, fast-food eatery with its patrons, having to pay exorbitantly high prices for what was described by Amber, **TARGET**’s charming and very vivacious, little Chinese waitress, as ‘*French contemporary cuisine*’.

With a flurry of her slim little hands and a smile that could charm the poison out of the fangs of a spitting cobra, Amber said, among other things:

‘When asked by customers about the type of food that we (the restaurant) serve, that is what we are told to reply. Do you like it?’

(But this was before **TARGET** had even ordered a meal)

TARGET’s question arose when it was noted that many of the dishes were, clearly, of Italian origin, such as gnocchi, ricotta cheese, pasta, etc.

Before proceeding to the food, a word about the resident sommelier, Mr Thomas Scheidt.

He claimed to hail from Alsace, which, today, is part of France, having, formerly, been a territory of Germany.

TARGET asked him to recommend a wine, similar to the wine, made from the Italian Sangiovese grape.

He recommended a Spanish wine, Marques de Riscal – Reserva 2002, at \$HK950 per bottle.

Actually, it was a good choice although the wine was exceedingly dry, compared with a Chianti, the backbone of which is made from the Sangiovese grape.

It was the attitude of this Frenchman that interested **TARGET**, as well as his clear disinterest in his job or, alternatively, perhaps, the irksomeness that he was experiencing in having to deal with an inquisitive

guest.

Mr Thomas Scheidt responded to **TARGET**, when asked as to the grapes, used in Marques de Riscal wine:

Mr Thomas Scheidt: *'You ask a lot of questions.'*

TARGET: *'I enjoy wine and I am interested in knowing the grape variety of a certain wine. Do you know?'*

Mr Thomas Scheidt: *'Of course I know!'*

He, then, rattled off something, which was completely inaudible, but **TARGET** assumed that he was claiming to pronounce, in the Spanish language, the grape variety from which the Marques de Riscal had been produced.

But, then, in the next sentence, he explained that this old wine-maker does not release the type of grape that is used in the production of its wines.

A slight contradiction, here.

Then, **TARGET** asked as to the location of the wine-maker.

Mr Thomas Scheidt became more agitated at this question. Eventually, he said that it was in a small town, north of Madrid.

After the bottle of wine arrived at the table and it was shown to be that which was ordered, Mr Thomas Scheidt asked whether or not it should be decanted.

TARGET asked the obvious question: *'When should wine be decanted? I really do not know.'*

Mr Thomas Scheidt, again: *'It's a good question. In my opinion, decanting wine is just for show. It is not necessary. Wine loses a lot during decanting.'*

Throughout the 5-minute conversation, it was obvious that Mr Thomas Scheidt was becoming more and more visibly irritated at having to answer questions from an Englishman who claimed to know little to nothing about wines.

Later, when **TARGET** discovered that he had been working at Spoon by Alain Ducasse for 3 years and after this reviewer had enquired of him as to his experience in his art, he explained that his style of being a sommelier was not to be ostentatious about his wide knowledge of wines.

He, also, did not care to taste the wine from a freshly opened bottle, prior to it, being served to guests.

His irritation went so far as to ignore **TARGET** for most of the evening, after the first encounter, causing this reviewer to pour the wine, personally.

All things considered, this was quite acceptable, taking into account the unfortunate demeanor of this Frenchman.

TARGET has no idea as to whether or not Mr Thomas Scheidt is, really, knowledgeable about wines and wine-making, but this reviewer would prefer, henceforth, not to engage him in any kind of conversation on any subject because, in **TARGET**'s opinion, he is arrogant in the extreme, bombastic to the point of being outright rude, and oppressively supercilious.

About The Spoon

For a couple, one is seated at a 4-foot, square table, facing Victoria Harbour.

Victoria Harbour, on a clear night, is magical, but not the decor of the food outlet, called Spoon by Alain Ducasse, which is harsh and singularly unfriendly.

TARGET's team was seated in a crowded part of this 120-seater restaurant.

It was difficult to move one's arms on either side because, to the left was part of a folding, wooden partition, which obstructed one's movements, laterally, and, to the right, was one's partner.

Bags were parked on the floor and one had to be careful that nobody trod of them.

When all this was pointed out to the hostess, **TARGET** was told that there was nothing that could be done because that was how the restaurant was arranged.

'Would you like to check your handbag with us?' **TARGET** was asked.

(Which lady would want to part with her handbag, for even one minute?)

During the latter part of the evening, all of the diners at **TARGET**'s part of the room were told that they would have to move their tables forward a few feet because the wooden partition had to be closed in order to accommodate a large party.

'Sorry for the inconvenience,' one was told by a lady, wearing a dark dress, representing officialdom. *'But we need part of this space. Thank you for your understanding.'*

With that, the 3 tables at **TARGET**'s part of the restaurant were pulled about 2 feet closer to the middle aisle so that one could nearly touch the table in the centre of this part of the room.

As for the music, flooding the restaurant, it was the type that one would expect to hear at a racy discotheque, not at a fine-dining establishment as Spoon by Alain Ducasse claims to be.

The Food At Spoon By Alain Ducasse

The following was that which **TARGET** ordered on this Thursday evening, just 4 days before Christmas:

Sexy Spoon Menu (\$HK788)

Custard of Foie Gras, Veal Juice and Pear
Pan Seared Scallops, Cream of Lettuce, French "Aquitaine" Caviar
Soup Tasting
Gratinated Macaroni with Mixed Mushrooms, Parma Ham and Arugula
Lobster with Piperade and Lemon/Basil Condiment
Roasted Pineapple Tart, Pinacolada Ice Cream
Chocolate/Praline Finger
Coffee, Team
SPOON Petits Fours

À La Carte Menu

Artisan Shell Pasta, Finely Shredded Ham, Black Truffle Condiment	\$HK205
Roasted Sweetbread, Gratinated Green and White Swiss Chard, Veal Juice	\$HK395
French Camembert, Truffle/Mascarpone Condiment, Poached Pears	\$HK125

The À La carte Menu

The first course was so bad that it was sent packing within one mouthful.

The pasta, labelled as being, *'shell pasta with finely shredded ham with black truffle condiment'*, was tasteless.

It was, completely, inedible, with the ham, appearing and having the distinct taste of being the pressed variety, the type that one buys in a tin at a supermarket.

Amber suggested that it be changed; a pumpkin soup was produced.

The soup was good and the addition of the ricotta gnocchi was an interesting touch.

However, soup is soup.

If a restaurant cannot produce a decent soup, it is, really, in trouble because it is difficult to make a mistake in its preparation unless a stupid cook allows it to burn, during the cooking process due to excessive heat.

As for the second course, the roasted sweetbreads, they, too, were quite acceptable, with the presentation, matching the flavour of the dish.

Again, however, how much art is there to sautéing a piece of the pancreas or thymus of a calf, lamb, or other young animal?

This 3-course meal was finished off with some ripe, Camembert cheese.

All in all, disregarding the rejected pasta dish, the meal was acceptable.

But it could hardly be considered fine dining.

The Sexy Spoon Menu

The first course was delightful and, obviously, somebody had gone through a great deal of trouble in order to create this very tasty dish.

The veal jus was a perfect accompaniment to the foie gras custard.

The second course was a bit of a disaster, however, since the scallops were cold and the cream of lettuce was little more than a green, insipid jelly.

The soup tasting – a thimble-full of gazpacho, another thimble-full of a duck broth, and a third, thimble-full of a mushroom soup – was delightful and **TARGET** was happy to have been able to sample all 3 soups.

Again, however, producing a soup is no great shakes.

The following 2 courses – the macaroni dish and the lobster dish – were, to be honest, nothing worthy of this restaurant, or any other restaurant, actually.

The desert, however, was top drawer.

According to Amber, the pineapple had been freshly purchased (not the tinned variety, used in many other restaurants) and the entire creation was that of Spoon by Alain Ducasse.

This desert was, probably, the highlight of the meal.

TARGET was not offered tea or coffee so this reviewer just ordered the bill and left.

‘Thank you for coming. Good night.’

Needless to say, **TARGET** will not be returning to Spoon by Alain Ducasse, not because the food is terrible, not because the service is sadly lacking, not because the attitude of the resident sommelier is enough to sour the freshest milk, but because, inter alia, the waiting, between courses, is just not acceptable and this food outlet is not the place that one wants to spend too much time.

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