

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

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

Name of Restaurant

Amber, The Landmark Mandarin Oriental

Address of Restaurant

7/F, No. 15, Queen's Road Central, Hongkong

Date of Visit

Thursday, November 27, 2008

Category**TARGETs 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

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

Wine

Choice	Extensive	Limited	Unbalanced
Cost	Reasonable	Unreasonable	Expensive
Storage of Wine	Good	Poor	Unknown
Expertise of Sommelier	Excellent	Acceptable	Poor

Total Cost of Meal

Very Expensive	Moderately Expensive	Very Reasonably Priced
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Name of Director of Food and Beverage

Mr Richard Ekkebus

Name of Executive Chef

Mr Richard Ekkebus

Comments

Amber of The Landmark Mandarin Oriental has been awarded 2 stars in the Michelin Guide to Hongkong.

Today, without question, Amber deserves praise.

But that was not, always, the case and, in fact, when **TARGET** () first surveyed this fine-dining restaurant on Thursday, September 21, 2006, it was bloody horrible.

In the early days of this restaurant, one was told that the cuisine was classified as being ‘*modern European*’.

Upon hearing this nomenclature, this medium retorted: ‘*Then, bring back the old-time religion!*’

The Executive Chef of Amber has not changed since the opening of this restaurant: He is, still, Mr Richard Ekkebus.

But, clearly, things have changed at Amber and, very much, for the better.

TARGET revisited Amber on Thursday, November 27, 2008, prior to the determinations of the people who put together the Michelin Guide to Hongkong restaurants.

Upon eating at this restaurant for the best part of 3 hours, this reviewer’s opinion was that it was one of the best in the territory.

As at Thursday, November 27, 2008, **TARGET** had no idea that Amber would be rated as highly as it was by the Michelin Guide because, about one year or so ago, it was worth nothing in this medium’s opinion.

Something very good has taken place at this restaurant and the food, its presentation, the service, even down to the china and the cutlery have improved since the early days of its existence.

On the day of **TARGET**’s visit, Mr Richard Ekkebus was having a day off and, in his place, was a Frenchman by the name of Mr Pierre Altobelli.

This was the menu that was ordered on this memorable evening:

White Alba Truffle Tasting Menu

Amuse Bouches

Wine: Ruinart Blanc de Blanc NV

Marrans Egg

“facon coque”, Jerusalem artichoke custard

Chicken bouillon, crispy bread and shaved white truffle.

Wine: Blange Langhe Arneis, Ceretto, Piedmont

Scallop

*Cauliflower and almond risotto “mantecato”
with orange scented oxtail jus and shaved white truffle.
Wine: Cervaro della sala, Antinori, Umbria*

Prime Beef Tenderloin

*Poached with bone marrow, mushroom consommé and
aromatic vegetables and shaved white truffle.
Wine: Sito Moresco, Gaja, Piedmont*

Bresse Pigeon

*Bresse pigeon served roasted, its leg crispy
Orange caramelized endives, jus Arabica.
Wine: 1996 Torres ‘Mas Las Plana’*

Concentrated Milk

Ice cream, salted caramel and shaved white truffle

“Oreo”

Ice cream cookie

6-course dinner per person \$HK1,888

Including champagne and fine Italian wine pairing per person \$HK2,888

Since **TARGET**’s team comprised 2 people, the Prime Beef Tenderloin on the Tasting Menu was substituted for the Bresse pigeon in order to sample both.

With the meal, a bottle Kracher, an Austrian ice wine, was ordered because one of **TARGET**’s team is keen on this sweet wine.

The Head Sommelier, now, is a Mr Patrick Frawley, who was very helpful and appeared to know his wines.

He has only been installed in his present position for the past 3 months or so and he told this reviewer – without the knowledge of **TARGET**’s survey of the restaurant – that it was he who made the determination to join The Mandarin Hotel Group and, especially, Amber, because of the potential that he perceived.

The Food

The only weakness of the entire menu on the day of **TARGET**’s visit to Amber was the Prime Beef Tenderloin.

It was not up to the standard of the other dishes.

Not be a long shot.

The problem with this dish was that the beef had little to no taste.

One cannot blame the chef for this because it would be terribly unfair to state that a bad workman always blames his tools.

In the case of this beef dish, the meat had come from Australia and the poor animal was grass-fed so that the bovine did not have the flavours of French beef or Kansas beef, the last-named, being corn-fed, prior to being slaughtered.

Even so, this was but a small negative factor, compared with the rest of the menu.

It would be difficult to state which of the 6 courses was the best – disregarding the beef, of course – because each course was so different from the others.

The Bresse Pigeon was as perfect as a roast pigeon could be, its succulent breast, requiring only a fork to dislodge the meat from the bone.

As for the flavour, it would be difficult to think that an improvement were possible.

Aside from the dishes, what was a distinct improvement at Amber, compared with the previous visit, was the presentation of the food and the knowledge of the serving staff of the various dishes.

It was obvious that the serving staff had been well groomed and, as the saying goes, they appeared to know their onions.

TARGET is appreciative of the fact that, by pure chance, the survey of Amber had taken place during the white truffle season, but, giving credit where it is due, if the survey had taken place during the season of the harvesting of the puffin, it is more than likely that the quality of the food and its presentation would not have been impaired in the slightest.

The reason that **TARGET** makes this statement is that the chef, from time to time, came out to see that his creations had been

served in HIS way; and, he wanted to make certain that the dishes were being well received.

This, in this medium's opinion, indicated that Mr Pierre Altobelli is the type of cook who pays careful attention to detail and takes great pains in order to bring out the best with the tools with which he has been supplied.

This restaurant seats 75 guests and is, in this medium's opinion, much too small if it continues to maintain its present high standards: It will not be able to accommodate the number of people who want to sample the cuisine.

In this regard, on being seated a table on the night of this medium's visit, one of the **TARGET** team commented that she felt a little chilly.

Within a minute, a shawl was spirited in for this lady's comfort – without anybody even asking for it.

This is called, service.

Another facet was, due to an oversight on the part of the Head Sommelier, the Ruinart Blanc de Blanc (a very nice Champagne) was not served.

After an apology from Mr Patrick Frawley, this reviewer accepted a peg of Hennessy Cognac, Paradis.

What a way to end a meal!

The cost of **TARGET**'s dinner, all in: \$HK5,700.

No regrets.

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