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## SWITZERLAND

### LUZERN

#### BALANCES RESTAURANT



Exactly where you want a really good restaurant in Luzern, there is one. It is right next to the River Reuss and looks directly across the water at the charming white façade of the city's Jesuit church. It has a terrace, too, so that on clement days it is possible to eat *al fresco* and look along the length of the famous Wooden Chapel Bridge. This location on its own would make any dining room popular, but the Balances Restaurant has something else, which brings lovers of fine food flocking: a chef of exceptional talent. His name is Andy Fluri. I went for dinner, and found the whole experience thoroughly enjoyable – and one of my dishes quite exceptional.

The restaurant is within the Hotel Des Balances. This shows a charming painted face to the Weinmarkt, on the side away from the water. It was through this entrance I arrived, and soon found myself seated within the long curved dining room (it being rather chilly without), at the table next to the French window – with the desired view beyond. The napery was beige, the glassware was Riedel (the Restaurant range), the cutlery was Sola, the crockery was Rak and the waiters and waitresses (including the splendid Michaela, who looked after me exceptionally well throughout the evening) were in black from top to toe. I observed that the napkins of those who left the table for a moment were replaced. Everything therefore indicated an establishment aiming for high standards.

Chef Fluri offers a four course set menu for 95CHF, and two tasting menus at 105CHF for five courses and 135CHF for 7 courses. I chose to have four courses from the carte, which came in at 128CHF. Given the quality of the food and the service, all these prices represented good value.

After a delicious amuse-bouche of beef and lobster, I began my meal proper with a dish which demonstrated that the kitchen was afraid of neither hard work nor complexity. Indeed, this variation of duck foie gras was a *tour-de-force*. In the form of crème brûlée, pralines coated with pistachio, terrine with apricot and roasted above purée of red onion, the liver was utterly delicious, for each element was superbly realized. Next came another impressive confection, this time of three sorts of fish. The sole was grilled and served with beetroot, the tuna was rare with tobiko roe and the salmon was a fillet with Thai asparagus. Again, each part was exceptionally well done, and the whole was greater than the sum of its parts. But ever these bright joys were eclipsed by the exceptional main course. I do not eat bison often enough. It is a meat full of intense flavour. This fillet was glorious in both its richness and its tenderness. With it came good potato wedges and – by special request – steamed peas. (As I have said so often: a gentleman can never have too many peas. These were glorious.) I ended this lovely dinner with a trilogy of cassis and white chocolate, with cassis sorbet.



I would make one urgent recommendation to Chef Fluri about his presentation. With food as good (and as beautiful) as this, by far the best impression is made when it is presented on round white porcelain plates. Odd shapes and strange materials only distract from what should be the object of the diner's attention.

The wine list has 220 bottles and 18 halves. 20 wines are offered by the glass (including a white Chateauf-neuf-du-Pape at 12.50CHF.) Prices run from 41CHF for a local white to 445CHF for 1994 Mouton-Rothschild. Other bottles to catch my eye were: 2006 Almaviva, one of Chile's best (249CHF), Krug Grande Cuvée (335CHF), 2001 Barbaresco, Gaja (279CHF), 2007 Solaia (367CHF), 2008 Sassicaia (263CHF) and 2005 Ornellaia (304CHF). The cellar is strongest in Italian, so I thought it right to drink, after a Swiss white, a red from Tuscany. The former was a chasselas from Lake Geneva, a medium-bodied wine, with melon and apricot aromas (Dézaley Medinette Grand Cru, Louis Bovard, 2009 -

43CHF, half). The super Tuscan, one new to me, was the 2008 Argentiera Superiore (145CHF) – a beautifully caressing blend of cabernet sauvignon, merlot and cabernet franc, with lots of ripe damsons, blackcurrants and blueberries.

I shall end my thoughts about Balances with the words with which I began. Exactly where you want a really good restaurant in Luzern, there is one.



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## ADDRESSES

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