

first course *recent openings*

Lucier

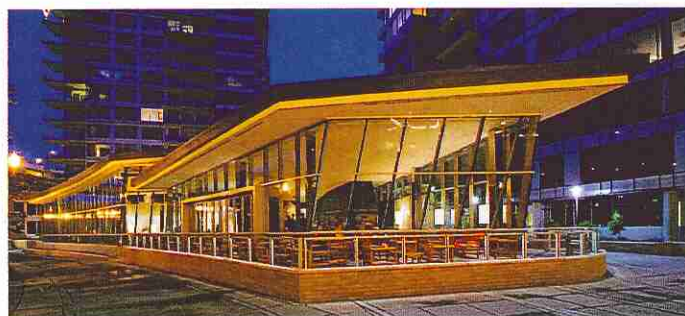
1910 SW River Drive, Portland, OR
503-222-7300, lucier-portland.com

★ OR One of the most anticipated—and talked about—restaurant openings in recent Portland history has finally happened. Lucier, the ultra-high-end, multi-million-dollar, modernistic, Willamette River-side bauble, is wowing guests with its goal of presenting a “unique, memorable dining experience.” And that is exactly what diners get.

From the moment you enter, you feel you’re in a special space. The design team also fashioned New York’s Le Cirque 2000 and Thomas Keller’s Per Se. The interior juxtaposes fluid elements of the eddying river (omnipresent during daylight hours thanks to a vast wall of windows)—including an interior running stream that girdles the 100-seat dining room—with the more rigid vertical lines of the city’s skyline echoed in tall, mirrored mid-room columns, and gleaming steel accents. Glass art pieces figure throughout the room and sparkle at night under spotlights, while ambient lighting softens the earth-tone décor and supple leather chairs. It is a room like no other in Portland—at once imposing, yet intimate after dark.

The menu commands thought with a medley of choices. Order conventionally—appetizer, salad, entrée, and dessert—or mix and match your own combination of three to five courses, with or without individual wine pairings, with each choice scaled appropriately to the number of selections. Or, choose the chef’s seasonally-changing tasting menu.

Executive Chef and co-owner Pascal Chureau melds his Michelin three-star European background with a nearly decade-long Portland



experience (he is also co-proprietor/chef at Fenouil in the Pearl and Tucci in Lake Oswego) to create Lucier’s somewhat equivocally named “Modern European” cuisine.

There are no pretensions of “local and seasonal” here—the opening week’s chef’s tasting menu highlighted heirloom tomatoes (in May) and scallops—though the ingredients, wherever sourced, are impeccable and delicious.

The fava bean soup with sweet corn flan, lobster, and duck prosciutto was a wonderful balance of sweet and savory tastes. The lobster mille-feuille presented layers of micro-thin pastry, serrano chile, fennel, and lobster with a Chartreuse reduction. The halibut sous vide, sitting atop pork belly and vanilla leek fondue, all enrobed in a langoustine emulsion sauce, was an amazing textural combination, with succulent flavors encouraging me to linger with each bite. A risotto of spring peas, crème fraîche, pistachios, and mint, topped with guanciale, was perfectly cooked and delicious. On the cheese cart I found a new favorite in the Charolais chèvre.

Though the wine cellar will ultimately boast 15,000 bottles (the final wine list had not been completed when I dined), opting for the course-paired wines was dollar-wise and taste-sensible: the pairings were excellent, thanks to the two Portland-veteran sommeliers who watch over the wine service.

General Manager Donny Sullivan (formerly of Gary Danko in San Francisco) professionally presides over the dining room. But while perfect service seems the goal, it will take more time to perfect. Friendly, solicitous, and individual attention is welcome and appreciated, but don’t yet expect the kind of unobtrusive grace and savoir faire you might find in Paris or London—this is still Portland.

I applaud the ambition—though many will say it is “un-Portland” and blogosphere carping will undoubtedly abound. I respect the early accomplishment—superb food, superlative setting, sincere service. And I honor the potential—owners and management who seem committed to learning, honing, and polishing their riverside jewel.

Dinner daily from 5:30–10pm. Lounge hours are 5–11pm, Sunday–Thursday, til midnight Friday and Saturday. —Cole Danehower



PHOTOS COURTESY LUCIER

(Left) Lucier’s fava bean soup, served from individual copper pans and poured in front of you, encircles a lobster-topped sweet corn flan.

(Above) Just feet away from the bank of the Willamette River, Lucier’s vast windows seem to make the river part of the dining experience.