

Restaurants & Bars

Tasting notes

Balsan

By Heather Shouse

The dining room at [Balsan](#)—the casual sister to the Elysian hotel's [Ria](#)—was always a comfortable place. But when it opened earlier this year, offering an ambitious menu of housemade charcuterie and seasonal small plates, the kitchen was plagued with problems of execution. Recent buzz suggested that these problems had been fixed (thanks in part to a new hire, pastry chef Stephanie Prida). Turns out, this buzz is more than white noise. Chef de cuisine Danny Grant is putting out a slab of well-seasoned rabbit terrine that begs for a brown beer; fat Fanny Bay oysters as cool and crisp as salted cucumbers; a velvety corn soup hiding nuggets of *jamón ibérico*; and suckling pig that delivers both tender flesh and crackly-crisp skin, the richness balanced by lavender-scented peaches and a pile of purslane. The successful dishes continue with Prida, whose deceptively simple and totally delicious endings like peach cobbler and blackberry corn parfait fall right in line with the Balsan meal that comes before them. For a glimpse of Prida's sophisticated side, request the [Ria](#) dessert list, which is always available in Balsan's dining room.



Photo: Martha Williams

Nearly two-dozen whole-wheat crêpes are layered one on top of the other, with a whisper of egg custard between, before the cake is sliced, lightly pan-seared in butter then plated with brûléed Italian plums, crispy basil chips, puffed wheat berries and a chilled scoop of custardy *crescenza* cheese. It's a brilliant dessert and, like the new and improved Balsan, unexpectedly good. 11 E Walton St (312-646-1400). *El: Red to Chicago. Bus: 36, 66, 143, 144, 145, 146, 147, 148, 151. Breakfast, lunch (Mon–Fri), dinner. Average main course: \$20.*

- [More "Tasting notes"](#)
- [More Restaurants & Bars articles](#)