

THE VERY BEST OF HIGH-END TRAVEL IN CHINA AND AUSTRALIA

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北京小吃

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欧米茄
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Food for thought

THE CHANGING FACE OF SHANGHAI DINING



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Sizzling

In the past decade, China's trendsetting metropolis has become a gastronomic powerhouse. **Sarah O'Meara** explores the city's innovative dining scene

“**H**ugh Grant and John Cusack were here last weekend,” says our host brightly, as my husband and I walk along the corridor to the Mandarin Oriental's Yong Yi Ting restaurant.

Above our heads, lampshades inspired by Chinese wine jars light our way towards a modern dining room that feels fresh, yet traditional, with translucent embroidered screens separating the tables, chilled music and an avant-garde waterfall feature. The glitzy five-star hotel in Shanghai's Pudong district has barely been open a year, but it's already made its mark – and not just when it comes to welcoming A-list movie stars.

Yong Yi Ting has been acclaimed by critics as offering the most innovative examples of contemporary Chinese cuisine in the city. Developed by one of the country's brightest gastronomic talents, chef Tony Lu (currently number 26 on Asia's 50 Best Restaurants list for his Shanghai restaurant Fu1015) is cited by experts as China's touchstone for modern dining.

The menu is a sublime culinary combination of ancient and modern practises that, he says, is fundamental to his approach.

“We create new flavours to suit contemporary clients. And the new creations may be tastier than those in their memories,” Lu explains.

The Shanghai dining scene has achieved a remarkable transformation in the past two

decades. Rewind 20 years and the city was dominated by a small selection of conservative, state-run restaurants. Now there are more than 90,000 dining venues, according to restaurant review website Dianping. And while that number might include every little dumpling stand, it also represents a significant influx of high-end restaurants.

With its booming economy and robust investment scene, the city is the perfect launchpad for budding restaurateurs, both from China and the west. Shanghai restaurants currently take five spots in the prestigious top 50 best restaurants in Asia list.

“The western food scene is pretty cutting-edge,” says Shanghai-based food writer Crystyl Mo. “Everyone wants to be here because you can get financing, find collaborators and open



Photo: Scott Wright of Limeight

Shanghai



Photo: Scott Wright of Limelight

Light show

ULTRAVIOLET USES UV
LIGHTS TO HIGHLIGHT
THE COLOUR OF FOOD



“SHANGHAI IS
OPEN-MINDED AND
READY TO EMBRACE
UNUSUAL PROJECTS”

Photo: Scott Wright of Limelight



Plate it up
ULTRAVIOLET'S GUMMIES
HIBERNATUS COLA
ROCKS (ABOVE); LIGHT
& SALT CHEF TONY LU
(LEFT); YONG YI TING
KITCHEN (FAR LEFT)



Master at work
LIGHT & SALT
EXECUTIVE CHEF
RAFAEL QING (RIGHT)
AND ONE OF HIS
DISHES (FAR RIGHT)



projects. You can bring a trend to Shanghai in the span of an airplane ride.”

Whether you're after molecular gastronomy served in a hidden location, French cuisine that rivals the brasseries of Paris, Ethiopian food served from a pop-up kitchen or an organic, locally sourced Chinese meal in a laid-back cafe, you can find it in Shanghai.

According to Lu, customers' tastes have moved beyond the traditional and towards a more modern appreciation of the dining experience.

“Chinese gourmands have a comprehensive appreciation criteria for high-quality dining, which is related to sensual pleasures and arousing your imagination.

“Achieving the ultimate food itself may just take up 30 per cent. The rest of the components are service, art and ambiance.”

Dishes at Yong Yi Ting include turnip marinated with soy chilli sauce that melts on the tongue like a glace cherry, a tuna tartar starter that tantalisingly combines fresh mango and plum powder, and desserts that cleverly deliver Asian flavours with a modern, western flourish.

Shanghai first found its high-end contemporary food voice with the opening of Whampoa Club at Three On The Bund in 2004.

Managing Editor of SmartShanghai Justin Fischer remembers how pioneer chef Jereme Leung turned traditional dishes such as drunken chicken (marinated chicken in yellow rice wine, steamed and served cold) on their heads.

“He served the dish in a martini glass. The rice wine was made into granita. You'll still see this dish copied around town,” tells Fischer.

Ten years since the Hong Kong chef took Shanghai by storm, there's been a taste revolution that culminated in the opening of Ultraviolet, ranked number eight in Asia's 50 Best Restaurants – and 58th in the world – this year.

Conceived by French chef Paul Pairet more than 15 years ago, the still new-age restaurant offers a fully immersive dining experience by implementing multi-sensorial technologies.

“Ultraviolet could have happened anywhere; I tried to launch the concept a few times in Australia, Miami and in Paris,” says Pairet.

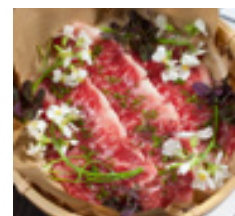
“The reason it happened in Shanghai was the positiveness of the economy. Shanghai is open-minded and ready to embrace unusual projects.” The 3,000RMB per head restaurant was an overnight success and is regularly described by critics as “the best dining experience ever”.

Each evening, a table of 10 diners are treated to a 20-course avant-garde set menu that engages their visual, auditory and olfactory senses. “In a historical sense, we are going back to the restaurant before the restaurant. To the 17th century, before any a la carte restaurant opened. The DNA of Ultraviolet is to control the times that people eat, as well as the offering.

The principle that people can order different items from a menu to be served in a short time is not necessarily the best way to deliver a great

Art and food

FOOD AND VENUE ALIKE ARE CREATED BY OWNERS WITH AESTHETIC IN MIND





New generation
FRANCK CHEF YANN
MEINSEL (TOP) AND
ULTRAVIOLET CREATOR
PAUL PAIRET (BOTTOM)

“THE CITY IS ALSO BURSTING WITH GLOBAL FOOD FLAVOURS”

dining experience,” explains Pairet.

But it's not just the food in Shanghai that's undergone a revolution. Eating spaces reflect the city's fashion-conscious reputation. Restaurant owners even go to the extent of hiring sophisticated design firms to create chic dining environments.

“People in Shanghai really care about how things look,” says Mo. “Everything is industrial chic, or sophisticated living-room style – with beautiful lighting, of course.”

New restaurant, bookshop and speakeasy bar Light & Salt is situated in a historic 1920s building on the Bund and reflects the city's love affair with interior design. Executive chef Rafael Qing, who trained under American chef Brad Turley in Shanghai, designed a 1930s-inspired menu, which includes roasted miso cod with purple potatoes and pomegranate.

“Shanghai is good place to experiment. It's modern and open and has grown up so quickly,” he says. “Chinese people are focused on the whole experience of the dining, so they pay attention to decoration and the new concepts of this kind of restaurant.”

The city is also bursting with global food flavours. While international cuisine used to be

represented by a handful of high-end western restaurants in five-star hotels and a few American fast-food chains, nowadays you can eat everything from Peruvian and Mexican to Turkish cuisine.

“It's just this wild mix that represents the parallel migration of international entrepreneurs from all over, bringing their cuisines and ideas with them,” explains Mo.

Korean restaurant Chi-Q is the most recent addition to the modern fusion dining scene. Developed by husband-and-wife chef team Jean-Georges Vongerichten and Marja, in collaboration with Three On The Bund, the menu comprises of dishes that marry Marja's traditional Korean recipes with Jean-Georges' modern spin on Asian flavours.

As Pascal Ballot, director of marketing at Three On The Bund, explains: “Our restaurant is about revealing a food culture that's simultaneously rooted in tradition and devoted to innovation, in order to satisfy the tastes of an international clientele.”

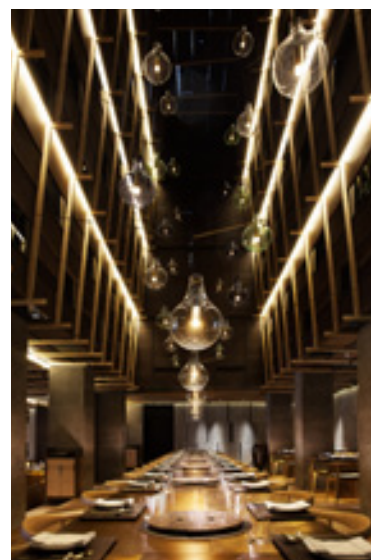
Similar to customers in a lot of other countries these days, diners in China are also increasingly concerned about where their food comes from, says chef Tony Lu.

“In recent years, people have become more health-conscious, and the dining habits of local Shanghainese people have changed tremendously. People focus more on local agricultural products and consider seasonality to be of utmost importance.”

Across the city, growing numbers of



“EATING
SPACES
REFLECT
THE CITY’S
FASHION-
CONSCIOUS
REPUTATION”



Creative spaces

(CLOCKWISE FROM TOP) CHI-Q'S CREATIVE TAKE ON THE SEAFOOD BASKET AND ITS DINING ROOM; 28 HUBIN ROAD'S MODERN VERSION OF BEGGAR'S CHICKEN; LIGHT & SALT'S MEI LIN'S ROOM

Sweet and savoury
28 HUBIN ROAD'S
DESSERTS ARE JUST AS
GOOD AS THE MAINS



chefs, business owners and restaurateurs are focusing on homemade, artisanal products and locally sourced ingredients.

Shanghai chef Austin Hu has staked his reputations on using locally sourced ingredients at his American-style restaurant Madison. Meanwhile, companies such as Sololatte – who supply restaurants with fresh mozzarella – are going from strength to strength.

So with all this gastronomic activity, the question on everyone's lips remains: When will Shanghai have its own world-beating chef who focuses solely on contemporary Chinese cuisine? According to Pairet, it's just a matter of time.

"I have a very strong core of people who have been with me since I arrived in 2005, who

have worked all the way up and are now on top of their game. I hope they will either open something with me, where they can take more responsibility, or find something just for them."

Pairet also believes Chinese chefs have more of a chance to compete for top place when preparing their own cuisine.

"The things that can work are the things that are genuine. Take Franck Bistro [number 48 on Asia's top 50 list]. It is doing a very good job because it is doing food that would be very good if it was in Paris.

"I see more and more that people are paying attention to the detail. Shanghai's still leading the face of cuisine in China... according to me," he says, with a smile. ♦



Shanghai's most innovative restaurants

Ultraviolet

Ultraviolet is the first restaurant to unite food with multi-sensorial technologies, in order to create an immersive dining experience. c/o Bund 18, 6/F, 18 Zhongshan Dong Yi Lu, Shanghai 20000
uvbypp.cc

Yong Yi Ting

Tony Lu embraces innovative techniques while keeping the culinary styles of the city and neighbouring provinces, Mandarin Oriental Hotel, 111 Pudong Nan Lu near Yincheng Lu Pudong
mandarinoriental.com/shanghai

Chi-Q

Korean chef Marja takes age-old flavours and packs them with a modern punch. Expect East meets West fusion dishes. Three On The Bund, 2/F, 17 Guangdong Lu, near Zhongshan Dong Yi Lu
threeonthebund.com

Light & Salt

This restaurant takes customers back to the roaring 20s with authentic food, decor and ambience, all served with a hipster twist Floor 6, 133 Yuanmingyuan Lu Near Beijing Lu Huangpu district
light-n-salt.com

Yu's Family Kitchen

Chef Yu Bo's 40-course tasting menu and edible calligraphy brushes are just some of reasons to visit this groundbreaking Chinese restaurant. 43 Zhao Xiang Zi, Xia Tong Ren Lu, Chengdu