

Robb Report

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MALAYSIA

PLUG AND PLAY
PORSCHÉ'S HYBRIDS
RING IN THE FUTURE

**FROM KL
TO LONDON**
FLYING ON FIRST
WITH BRITISH AIRWAYS

LEVEL UP
NEW TOYS
FOR BIG BOYS

**UNDER
THE SEA**
GOING DEEPER IN
A SUPER FALCON
SUBMERSIBLE

PLUS
SANYA
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BEIJING
THE SEYCHELLES

SKY HIGH

WHEN INNOVATION, TECHNOLOGY
AND LUXURY COME TOGETHER





APPETITE FOR INVENTION

Using everything from music to incense, chefs are ensuring we never look at food the same way again.

By SUDI PIGOTT

The latest way of enjoying a meal is a multi-sensory experience where sound, aroma, texture and even the crockery feed into all our senses and enhance the overall pleasure and memory.

What's more, there is scientific evidence to prove that the psychology and emotion associated with food, or 'psycho taste', impacts our brain and affects our perception of flavour, increasing its efficacy by up to 20 per cent. These findings are supported

by Professor Charles Spence, head of the Crossmodal Research Lab in the Department of Experimental Psychology at Oxford University (www.psy.ox.ac.uk) and author of *The Perfect Meal*.

His research shows that our



Rape Marea Baja
Nuevo at Arzak;
Professor Charles
Spence.

Facing page:
Ultraviolet's dining
room is equipped
with multi-
sensorial high-end
technology to allow
each course to be
experienced in its
own taste-tailored
atmosphere.

brains process all manner of sensory inputs together in a process known as Crossmodal Sensory Perception. "We're playing with inputs from other senses to create a magical moment," says Jean Roca, head chef of El Celler de Can Roca (cellercanroca.com). It recently took a 'gastronomic opera' on tour, where images were projected on the walls and ceiling, and specially-composed music accompanied the dishes. Back at the restaurant, a commentary of Barcelona football star Lionel Messi scoring a winning goal against Madrid was played while a dessert on artificial grass perfumed with real grass was served.

Diners had to manoeuvre a chocolate ball past meringues and eat

Diners had to manoeuvre a chocolate ball past meringues and eat them to score.



them to score. Many said they felt as though they had been transported to the thrill of the match and found the dish incredibly satisfying.

Most extreme is the thrill of dining at Ultraviolet by Paul Pairet (uvbypp.cc) in Shanghai, where shifting images are projected onto the blank walls of the dining room and table. Music matches each scenario in this exclusive dining experience, with just one table for 10 people. Dinner starts dramatically with an apple wasabi sorbet, frozen and cut into wafers. A Gothic abbey appears on the walls, the air is filled with holy incense and AC/DC's *Hells Bells* assaults the ears.

There's plenty of humour too. Fish and chips encapsulated in an



“Without the constraints of a la carte, I can be in complete control and arrange a scenario around each dish.”

over-sized battered caper filled with anchovy tartar is served while huge raindrops light up the walls amidst the drumming sound of rain. A Union Jack appears to drape the table and The Beatles' *Ob-La-Di, Ob-La-Da* plays.

The last dessert, a homage to Pierre Hermé's famous lychee, rose and raspberry macaron, is called Ispahan Dishwash. It appears to be a messy tray covered with soap foam, and features all kinds of texture combinations from meringues to macarons and lychee foam. The dish is brought to life with visuals

of washing up and Edith Piaf's *La Vie en Rose* filling the air. Classically trained Pairet is pragmatic. "Without the constraints of a la carte, I can be in complete control and arrange a scenario around each dish." He wants to create the best possible setting by "extending the plate into the atmosphere".

The idea is that "diners are 'tasting' through the external triggers before they bite in, feeding their brain and imagination. I am not telling them what to think, merely leading them down a path. It makes the food itself matter even more; it gives more power to the dish and strengthens the

memory enormously."


Simpler still, Eleven Madison Park (elevenmadisonpark.com) in New York serves its cheese course in a picnic basket with plates made of ceramic that imitate paper plates. Thrilled diners report that they feel as if they are at a picnic while still in the restaurant.

At Arzak (www.arzak.info) in San Sebastian, certain dishes are served over a digital tablet: grilled lemons with shrimp and patchouli sit atop a fired-up grill with the noise of crackling flames. Explains Elena Arzak: "We experimented with serving the dish on and off the tablet and diners always said that having

the image and the sound intensified the flavours of the dish and made it even more enjoyable. We're keen to use new technology to further augment the meal. There's huge potential to experiment."

Jozef Youssef of Kitchen Theory

(kitchen-theory.com) works closely with Prof Spence and tests many of his theories on diners. Their experiments have shown that high-pitched sounds make ingredients taste sweeter and lower tones more bitter.

What next? Prof Spence predicts greater use of digital technology, more theatricalisation of service, even the introduction of old-fashioned storytelling and playing with the weight, materials and textures of cutlery. Listen out for the clash of spoons. 

Most extreme is the thrill of dining at Ultraviolet by Paul Pairet in Shanghai.

THE MAIN TAKEAWAY

Recreate the experience at home with the aid of these tips:

- Buy atomisers and infuse small amounts of spices or fruits in oil or water that feature in recipes for guests to spray before they taste dishes. Encourage them to inhale deeply.
- Use tablemats with different textures and ask guests to touch these as they try different dishes. Rough textures tend to dull flavours whereas smooth or velvety textures enhance them.
- Choose two different pieces of music to accompany each dish and see if either affects the way diners enjoy the meal. Higher pitched tones can make food taste sweeter and lower tones bring out the bitterness. Piano music may enhance some dishes more than strings or brass. Loud music, unsurprisingly, encourages people to eat more quickly.
- Professor Charles Spence's research has shown that people enjoy food more when it is plated artistically. Put this to the taste test.

Crunchy Fierce Salad at Ultraviolet.

Facing page:

Basque dishes at Arzak include this dessert called Fruta Pisada: Paul Pairet.

