

*SOME CHEFS ARE OFFERING DINERS  
MULTISENSORY EXPERIENCES THAT APPEAL TO  
MORE THAN JUST THE TASTE BUDS*



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aul Pairet's memory of truffle foraging in Dordogne, France, sounds like a plangent piano solo. It smells of damp moss and tastes of bread dipped in butter laced with soy sauce, cigar smoke and earthy truffles.

Pairet's signature "Truffle Burnt Soup Bread" – a dish he's been serving since his days at Shanghai's Jade on 36 – is a distillation of his French cultural heritage, lonely walks through the woods, and all of his years as a chef. At Ultraviolet in Shanghai, he serves this taste memory with black-and-white video projections of trees, as an image of soil is projected on the table. By the time the dish arrives, some of the diners are moved to tears.

"This is the one that gets the [strongest] emotion from guests," Pairet says. "I take them deep into the forest." The statement is more than mere metaphor. Ultraviolet, which opened in 2012, bills itself as the world's first "immersive dining restaurant", the result of Pairet's desire to control every aspect of the dining experience.

**FAR LEFT**  
*Ultraviolet's signature cucumber lollipop.*

**ABOVE**  
*Ultraviolet's room is set up to a pop theme.*

PHOTOS: SCOTT WRIGHT, LIMELIGHT STUDIO



Equipped with 60 LED lights and seven projectors, a surround-sound audio system, air pressure and temperature controls, and a dry-scent diffusion system, the 10-seat restaurant is the culinary world's equivalent of *The Matrix*. The ambience shifts with each course on the tasting menu, and all of the sensory components are chosen to complement the individual dishes.

Pairet's interpretation of fish and chips, for example, is presented amid images of rain and the sounds of thunder, along with a projection of the Union Jack flag. The chef insists that the aim is "not to be artistic", but to "make the memory stronger" and "trigger emotion".

Many contemporary chefs draw upon the five senses to elicit specific reactions. At Alinea in Chicago, Grant Achatz famously uses aromas to inject his dishes with childhood memories. Heston Blumenthal, of The Fat Duck in England, is fond of pairing food with sounds. One dish, called "sound of the sea", comes with an iPod tucked into a large seashell, the prelude to a plate of fresh seafood nestled in edible sand.

Now, some chefs are pushing the boundaries even further to offer multisensory experiences that fuse food with art.

Earlier this year, the Roca brothers, whose restaurant El Celler de Can Roca in Spain ranks No 1 on the World's 50 Best Restaurant List,

collaborated with music director Zubin Mehta and visual artist Franc Aleu to create a lavish, 12-course culinary opera. The performance, called *El Somni* (The Dream), culminated in an exclusive dinner for 12. The one-off event took place in a specially designed rotunda outfitted with a sophisticated sound system and video panels swimming with lush, digital landscapes.

But to what extent can sensory manipulations really impact the experience of eating? Science seems to suggest that the effect can be profound. The olfactory bulb, which plays a large role in our sense of smell, forms part of the limbic system – a group of structures in the brain closely related to memory and emotions.

Recent studies have also shown that sounds affect the way we perceive flavours. Professor Charles Spence, who heads the Crossmodal Research Laboratory at the University of Oxford, demonstrated the effect in experiments he conducted with Blumenthal.

One of the experiments used Blumenthal's bacon-and-egg ice cream, which was served to participants, while two soundtracks were played in the background. When tasters heard the popping sounds of bacon sizzling in a pan, they reported 🍳

THIS IS THE PROJECT OF MY LIFE ... AND WE'RE AT THE BEGINNING PAUL PAIRET



**LEFT**

*The second dinner in Andrea Oscibetti's Living Kitchen series featured choreographer Kate March's dance troupe and ended with a scene reminiscent of a live-painting performance from the 1970s.*

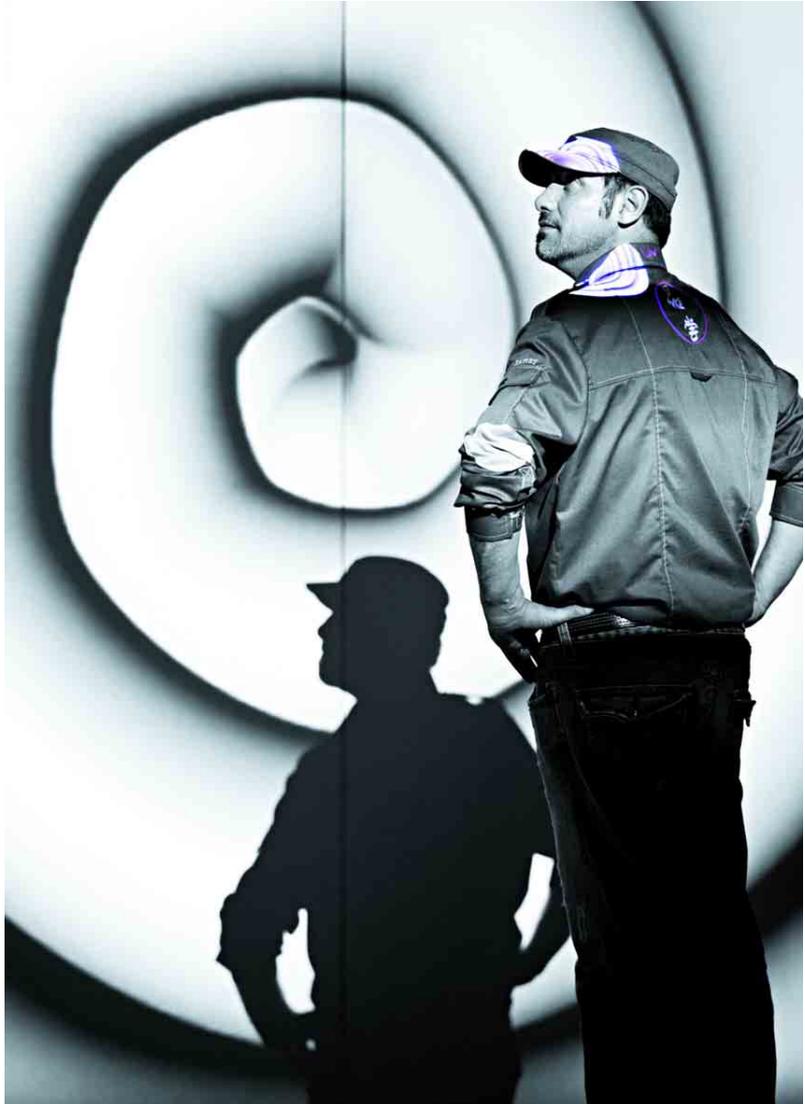
**BELOW LEFT**

*Rather than focusing solely on taste, many chefs open up the five senses to elicit specific reactions.*

**BELOW**

*Andrea Oscibetti sees the food in his Living Kitchen series as part of a larger collaborative effort, rather than the sole focus.*





**RIGHT**  
Paul Pairet of  
Ultraviolet. Photo:  
Scott Wright,  
Limelight Studio

**BELOW**  
"The artist and the chef go  
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creativity together," Andrea  
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and the diner."



THE ARTIST AND THE CHEF GO THROUGH THE PROCESS  
OF CREATIVITY TOGETHER **ANDREA OSCHETTI**

that the bacon flavour was stronger. When the researchers played a track featuring sounds of chickens clucking, however, the participants tasted the egg flavour more intensely.

Like conductors, savvy chefs can direct the taste experience with simple sound interventions. Pairet appears to have an intuitive understanding of this concept. "If you have sound, the impact is nearly the same without images," he says.

Yet, Pairet has spared no expense in bulking up the hi-tech, multisensory arsenal he uses at Ultraviolet. "You can't escape from what I'm trying to convey. Everything will lead you to [develop] a strong focus on the dish," he says.

Hong-Kong-based chef Andrea Oschetti, of Cuore Private Chef, takes a slightly different approach in his Living Kitchen series of special dinners. The events are live performances that span the chef's five-course tasting menu.

Like Pairet, Oschetti seeks to trigger emotions, but sees the food as part of a larger collaborative effort, rather than the sole focus. "The artist and the chef go through the process of creativity together," he explains. "We want to break down the barriers between the chef, the artist, and the diner."



**LEFT**  
*The eight-hour Gelinaz dinner in Lima, Peru.*  
*Photo: Santiago Barco*

### COOKING UP A STORM

In Lima, Peru, before the first of the myriad octopus dishes was served for the eight-hour Gelinaz dinner event, the night opened with a volley of Latin rhythms and dancers in day-glow outfits. Throughout the night, the courses were interspersed with an anarchic mix of music, dance, magic and video.

The event, which organiser Andrea Petri described as a multisensory food “performance”, featured 22 top chefs, many of whom fill the top slots on the World’s 50 Best Restaurants List. The line-up included René Redzepi of Noma (No 2), Massimo Bottura of Osteria Francescana (No 3), and Andoni Aduriz of Mugaritz (No 4).

Each prepared a unique interpretation of Gastón Acurio’s iconic dish of octopus, pureed potato and olive. The results ranged from Aduriz’s minimalist plate of boiled octopus, diced potatoes and spicy thyme to Spanish chef Albert Adria’s whimsical, ingenious faux octopus – crispy tapioca and rice crackers, stained purple with octopus concentrate and shaped like tentacles.

Petri, who was recently named one of the most influential food trendsetters in *Time* magazine, compares the concept to jazz improvisations or the Brandenburg concertos. Prior to the event in Lima, Gelinaz took place in Ghent, Belgium, and Petri plans to take the irreverent spectacle to New York this year.

For the first dinner, Oschetti worked with violinist Erica Ye Byeol Lee to create dishes that “reinforced the emotions” evoked by Lee’s original compositions.

The second dinner featured choreographer Kate March’s dance troupe and ended with a scene reminiscent of a live-painting performance from the 1970s. The dessert, a free-form tiramisu, was assembled in front of each guest by the dancers as they swirled around the table.

The months-long wait for a seat at Ultraviolet is a testament to the popularity of multisensory dining experiences, but Pairet and Oschetti agree that the sheer cost and time investment required will prevent the phenomenon from becoming a widespread trend.

“I’m not interested in trends,” Pairet says. “This is the project of my life ... and we’re just at the beginning.” ✕



**LEFT**  
*Hong Kong-based chef Andrea Oschetti, of Cuore Private Chef, seeks to trigger emotions through his Living Kitchen series of special dinners.*