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Ultraviolet is
the life project of
Paul Pairet



Ultraviolet: the Making of

Exploring **time and psycho-taste** at this **multisensory dining mecca**

One table. Ten guests. Ninety days advance booking. Twenty courses with accompanying visuals, sounds and scents. Four hours in a secret location. ¥4,000 and up per seat. This is Ultraviolet's cutting-edge formula for an immersive dining experience that was first launched by chef Paul Pairet in May 2012. It's all about timing. It's all about "psycho-taste."

On the night of Ultraviolet's 629th seating, we spent an evening with chef Pairet and head chef Greg Robinson inside the kitchen, laboratory and audio-visual control room for a behind-the-scenes look at how this multisensory dining experience is choreographed.

"I'm a strong believer in the primitive approach to cooking," says Pairet. Having one set menu gives him control over his offerings and the timing of the meal. This allows him to "serve each dish at its peak," an idea that was reiterated several times during our conversation.

Some have said this is Paul Pairet's autobiography in 20 courses. Each dish is a story inspired by the places he has lived in or traveled to, curated with the perfect balance of technique, culinary sensibility and a sense of humor.

Time is of the essence at Ultraviolet. Everything is on a con-

stant countdown. A live feed of the dining room is broadcasted in the kitchen, cueing chefs on when to fire courses at the perfect time.

Though the clock is always ticking, there's never a tense moment. A loud response of "*Oui, chef!*" is the only time anyone raises their voice.

The first three quarters of the meal are often left in the capable hands of head chef Greg Robinson, who has overseen more than 600 meals here. He's Pairet's most devoted disciple and a longtime collaborator since Pairet's tenure at Jade on 36.

Shortly after 6:30pm—when the guests arrive at their meeting

point before being shuttled to Ultraviolet—chefs begin soaking the toasted bread in a meunière sauce for the "Truffle Burnt Soup Bread" course, the seventh on the UVB menu. This allows for the optimal level of flavor and moisture when the dish is served about an hour later.

A phone call notifying Robinson that guests are on their way means it's time to put the "Beggar's Veal Shank" in the oven and to steam the egg in the "Egg Gruyere Raviolo." The first guitar chord of Pink Floyd's "Shine on You Crazy Diamond" is a signal to pick up the "Mont Blanc" dessert.

"Everything is retrofitted ac-



Keeping an eye on the guests



Racing against the clock



Controlling the audio-visual experience



Sight affects taste

According to the timing of when each course is served,” Pairet explains. It’s a well-choreographed show, not only in the dining room, but also in the kitchen.

Having all 10 diners arrive at the same time from another place not only builds suspense, but it’s a practical requirement to control the pace of the meal from the very beginning.

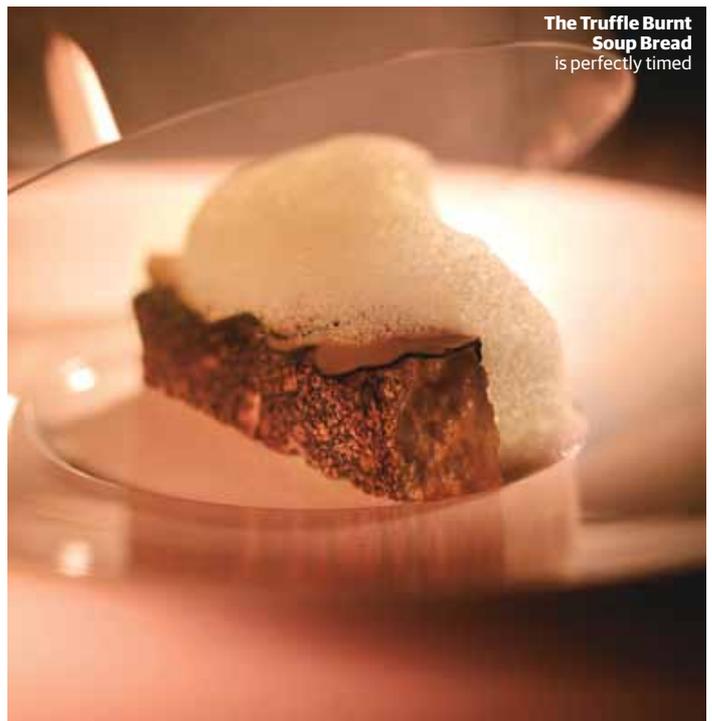
Psycho-taste is, as Pairet describes, “what taste should be based on memory, imagination, experience and culture.” Ultraviolet plays with this concept by using visual effects, sounds and scents to control, enhance and manipulate the perception of flavors.

“[The Truffle Burnt Soup Bread] has been served on each one of chef Pairet’s menus since 2006,” Robinson tells us. But the experience is more memorable at

Ultraviolet, where diners enjoy the dish in an eerie autumn forest in the midst of the earthy, musky scent of wet soil. Curate the sights, sounds and smells surrounding diners, and you can enrich the taste of the dish. That’s psycho-taste. That’s Ultraviolet.

As sweet is presented with a twin concept course named “Tomato Mozza and Again.” Identical in presentation, one is actually made with savory ingredients (tomato, mozzarella, brined olives) and another with sweetened versions and the substitution of berries for tomatoes.

“The psycho-taste [for both plates] is the same,” Pairet says, “but they’re miles away, nearly complete opposites [in terms of flavors].” For the first bite or two of the sweet version, the memory of the first plate led us to believe we were actually



The Truffle Burnt Soup Bread is perfectly timed



Chef Greg Robinson says the **Oyster x2** is "technically brilliant"



Counting down



The best example of **psycho-taste**



Tomato Mozza and again



The meal ends with a kitchen tour

having the same thing again.

The dish comes just after a 6-minute-50-second-long Charlie Chaplin video plays in the dining room while servers clear away the main courses.

At the same time, the countdown begins for the chefs. Five minutes out, the "Mozza" and herbs are plated. Ninety seconds, the gel must be on. Thirty seconds, the tuile is added. When the utensils for the third guest is set in the room, chefs place the sorbet on to each plate. This is the most intricate and seamless culinary assembly line we've seen.

When asked about his favorite dishes on the UVB menu, Robinson named "the Oyster x2" as one of his top choices. "This is just the way [Pairet] likes to eat oysters, cold and with lots of lemon," says

the 31-year-old Ohio native. "Technically speaking, it's absolutely brilliant, even more so from a cook's perspective. It's equally beautiful in taste," he adds.

The dish is a deconstruction (and reconstruction) of the simple oyster, an idea Pairet came up with when he launched the UVB menu in 2013. (The UVA menu features Pairet's original courses when Ultraviolet opened in 2012.) It's served in the shell with caviar and a dash of soy and pepper, then covered with a foam of seaweed and lemon juice—Pairet's attempt to mimic the flavors of seawater—and frozen with liquid nitrogen into a sorbet to recreate the natural habitat of an oyster.

Before "the Oyster x2," guests are fully immersed with elements of the sea. A whiff of salty seawater is dispatched from scent diffus-

It's a well-choreographed show, not only in the dining room, but also in the kitchen

ers while the dining room's audiovisual system creates images and sounds of a calming seashore with water and waves gently floating and crashing.

"It respects the essence... and beauty of the oyster," Robinson says. This goes back to Pairet's emphasis on a primitive approach to cooking. Even with all the visuals and sounds, food is still the central focus of the whole concept. That's the magic of Ultraviolet.

On the night of Table no. 617, when we enjoyed the meal as a guest in the dining room, our host told us an interesting story as Adele's "Skyfall" was playing in the background, signaling the end of the meal.

When the stars of *Interstellar* were in town for the movie's premiere, they had contacted Ultraviolet hoping to get seats but were unsuccessful as a result of the restaurant's strict 90-day advance booking policy. It's an experience that even Hollywood royalties like Matthew McConaughey and Anne Hathaway would want to take part in, and it's right in the heart of our city.

Text: Dominic Ngai

Photos: Scott Wright (Limelight Studio), Robert Paschen, Dominic Ngai

Find it: <http://uvbypp.cc>