

# CUISINE & WINE

Singapore

## ASIA



**deconstructivist** cuisine  
let the chefs define...turn to page 30



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美食革命

# DECONSTRUCTIVIST CUISINE?

By Jackson Sim

let the chefs define...



溫有成

*"The presentation of my cuisine, the wines served and most importantly, the true perception of cuisine all come together to make an enchanting culinary journey."*  
Edward Voon



carbon de salmon



# 分子革命

THE PHRASE 'DECONSTRUCTIVIST CUISINE' MAY REQUIRE A DOUBLE TAKE FOR SOME BUT IF YOU MENTION 'MOLECULAR GASTRONOMY', THIS OTHER PHRASE MAY JUST GET YOU THE KIND OF REACTION YOU WANT. BUT IN TRUE CULINARY SENSE, DESCRIBING THE CUISINE CHEFS FERRAN ADRIÀ, HESTON BLUMENTHAL, ANDONI LUIZ ADURIZ AND PIERRE GAGNAIRE, AMONG MANY OTHERS, ARE FAMOUS FOR AS MOLECULAR GASTRONOMY IS A DEFINITE NO-NO.



保罗

*"Avant garde cuisine is simply the cuisine that takes its roots in the past to build today the cuisine of tomorrow."* Paul Pairet

*"I believe in using ingredients only when they're in their seasonal best, it always gives me great pleasure when my guests tell me they enjoy my cuisine."* Paul Ng

Picture courtesy of Artbeat



瑞安 凯文

# 美食革命

The true meaning of molecular gastronomy is the science of cooking which in essence means cooking in general. To label the cuisine as *avant garde* would be a better option as the phrase literally means pushing the boundaries, taking risks, unorthodox and daring, all describing it aptly. It's about taking what's familiar and changing it in accordance to the times. Perhaps Chef Paul Pairet said it best, "Avant garde cuisine is simply the cuisine that takes its roots in the past to build today the cuisine of tomorrow." Which may simply be the reason why many find it quite intimidating. But quite honestly, there's nothing intimidating about it as Chef Ryan Clift put it, "We're just adapting methods that have been applied to science over the years to improve the quality of the food we serve." In fact, diners should rest assured that they're in better hands now that these chefs are putting so much effort into improving the cuisine they serve.

Back to the phrase "deconstructivist cuisine", just what it is all about? According to Chef Pairet, though Chef Ferran Adrià may be responsible in highlighting it and hence, be associated with it, this creative approach to cuisine does not belong to him. Chef Pairet shared, "Deconstructivism is about taking an existing dish and breaking it down to build it again from a different standpoint." In other words, it is about taking a classic dish and breathing new life into it while at the same time introducing a different approach in showcasing its flavours and textures. Take for example Chef Kevin Cherkas' interpretation of the French Niçoise salad. He said of the dish, "I used the same ingredients as the original but the focus is on the final product as a whole instead of the lettuce." The same can be said of Chef Stephan Zoisl's take on the instantly recognisable pork belly. Slow-cooked through sous vide before the skin is crisped to perfection, the pork belly is served with accompaniments that are familiar – think along the lines of red cabbage and apples but all cooked in completely new methods.

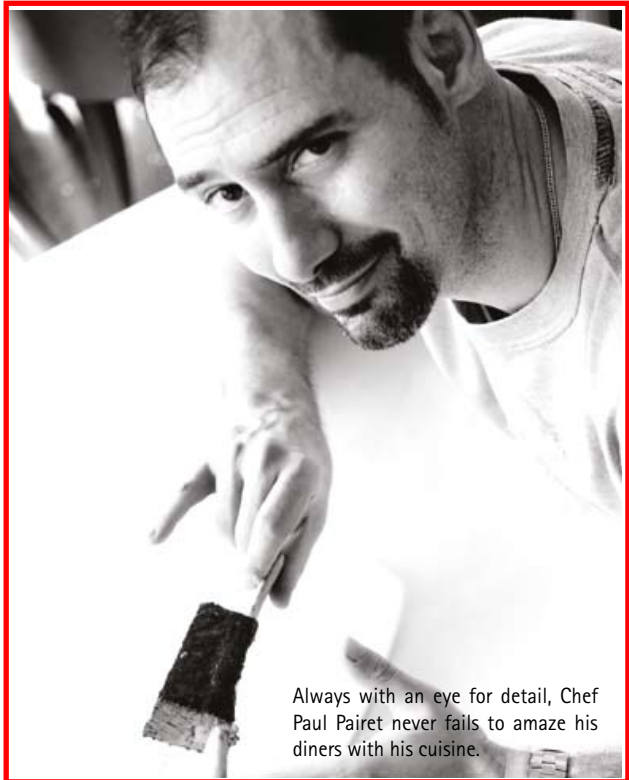
This leads to another side of *avant garde* cuisine – just how receptive are the diners today to this cuisine? Many factors contribute to this. Chef Paul Ng believed diners are nowadays more willing and daring when it comes to trying new things as he attributed it to the betterment of our standard of living. Chef Edward Voon, on the other hand, appeared a little sceptical saying not many diners are keen to spend a larger amount of money on good food but he remained positive and said, "I'm happy to note that many are more exposed to the culinary world as compared to a decade ago. Thanks to culinary programmes and their travels, they can now better understand the effort chefs take to present their food. We're living in a time when our lifestyle is constantly changing and it's good to know that quality speaks for itself." Both Chef Pairet and Chef Clift agreed on one thing, "Diners need to always keep an open mind and they need to

know that the possibilities are endless. The worst enemy of *avant garde* cuisine is a diner who eats according to their own pre-set culinary rules."

Looking from the perspective of young culinary talents who are eagerly awaiting to enter the industry, Chef Clift pointed out, "These talents need to realise the fact that what they learned in the culinary industry may just amount to 60 percent of what is relevant in the kitchens of today. The other 40 percent requires them to open up their minds and better understand what the future of cuisine is all about. Only then can our industry grow."

## The Faces Of Avant Garde

Those familiar with the seminal Broadway classic, *Wicked*, will no doubt know one of its signature tunes, *Defying Gravity*; a song I personally feel best describe Chef Edward Voon. Not content with just accepting the limits of the culinary industry, Chef Voon is one who is known to defy all conventions and bring to the table, a dining experience unlike any others have put forward before. A few years back, he made a bold decision and set up Aurum, his restaurant that saw a décor done to mimic a hospital. Many chefs will not have the guts to take up such risks but not Chef Voon. It paid off. Not only did diners rushed to his restaurant day after day but today, long after he decided to close down Aurum, many are still talking about the impact it has made. Moreover, with his team of culinarians, he emerged as the overall champion for the gourmet team challenge at FoodHotelAsia



Always with an eye for detail, Chef Paul Pairet never fails to amaze his diners with his cuisine.



Picture courtesy of Scott Wright

*passion-choco foie gras opera*

2008, beating nine other teams from around the world. In search of greener pastures and bringing his brand of cuisine to China, Chef Voon is currently the executive chef of Le Pan, the exquisite French restaurant of Tianjin Goldin Metropolitan Hotel. When asked how he felt about deconstructivist cuisine, he was quick to say, "I believe it's always important to bring out the best of the ingredients I used, no matter the style of cooking or the season. If the true flavours of the ingredients are not enjoyed by my diners, I feel that I've let them down." It's no wonder that Chef Voon is one chef who always strives to take his diners beyond familiar territories (he once served a liquid sphere of ham flavours as part of a dish instead of real ham).



With such passion and ambition, of his debut menu at Le Pan (the restaurant just recently open in early November), he shared, "My menu is a traveller's odyssey into the vibrant Mediterranean market (an interpretation is portrayed on page 34). The restaurant's ambience, the presentation of my cuisine, the wines served and most importantly, the true perception of cuisine all come together to make an enchanting culinary journey." And this is just one of many reasons Chef Voon was recognised as one of ten most innovative chefs in the world by *Restaurant Magazine* in 2007.

Perhaps one of the most underrated chefs in the local culinary industry, Chef Paul Ng deserves more recognition and accolade than he already has. The culinary mastermind behind the successful Private Affairs Restaurant & Bar (Private Affairs) in the quaint neighbourhood of Katong, Chef Ng is Malaysian-born but he has carved quite a name for himself in the local culinary scene for more than a decade now. This Kuala Lumpur boy came to Singapore with a huge dream, one of pure aspiration to be among the best in the culinary world. And he indeed has. But tell that to this humble chef who has worked in the *crème de la crème* of Singapore's restaurants (Les Amis, Le Saint Julien and Pierside Kitchen) and he'll tell you that he still has a long way to go. Most probably, he'll also say, "At the end of the day, nothing is more important than the dishes that I serve to my guests. I can win that many awards but winning the trust of my guests is far more superior." Maybe this is the reason why he's happier focusing on serving the best at Private Affairs. Perfection is the keyword when it comes to Chef Ng's cuisine, as depicted in the two culinary specimens on pages 5 and 9. The dish he serves is always a culmination of months of research, trials and constant tastings. He shared, "I rather not serve something that I'm not happy with and because I believe in using ingredients only when they're in their seasonal best, it always gives me great pleasure when my guests tell me they enjoy my cuisine." Hard work indeed but one that does not mar Chef Ng to keep pushing the culinary envelope; he once presented an ice cream dessert the exact same way one would buy from the ice cream pushcart uncle. Now that's audacity!

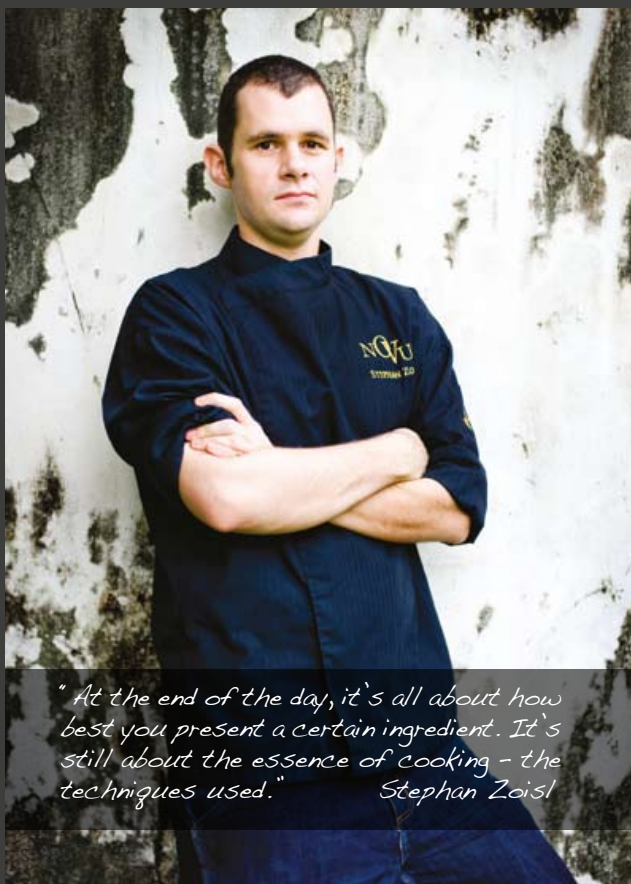
What would you call a chef who turns all restaurants into phenomenal ones everywhere he goes? How about culinary genius? Or perhaps Chef Kevin Cherkas? One of a handful of local chefs who are a part of the progressive movement, Chef Cherkas is the chef de cuisine of Shangri-La Hotel, Singapore's award-winning restaurant, Blu. Originally from Canada, he has travelled the world and worked in some of the most innovative kitchens in his native country, United States and Spain. Before he embarked on his culinary journey to our sunny island, Chef Cherkas was the culinary wizard of Shangri-La Hotel, Kuala Lumpur's Lafite. A French restaurant in essence, not only has he managed to wow his diners throughout his tenure, he has also brought Lafite to the top of the culinary ranks in Malaysia (the restaurant was named the best in Malaysia during his two years there).



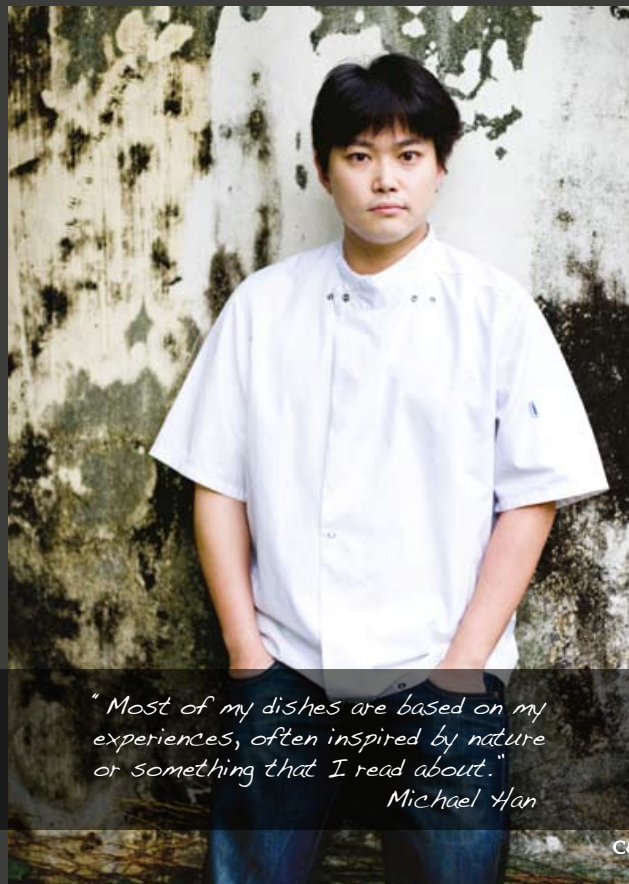
*mud crab with gooseberries,  
cloudberry & fresh almonds by  
Michael Han*



*pork belly & red cabbage fluid gel by Stephan Zoisl*



*"At the end of the day, it's all about how best you present a certain ingredient. It's still about the essence of cooking - the techniques used."*  
Stephan Zoisl



*"Most of my dishes are based on my experiences, often inspired by nature or something that I read about."*  
Michael Han

# 美食革命

At Blu, he has done just the same, saying, "Cooking is my passion and my objective has always been to surprise my guests by focusing on great taste achieved through cooking with a twist." And when he says cooking with a twist, he literally means it (witness how he turns a classic into modern culinary sensation on page 34). Because his main focus has always been on the ingredients he used, I asked what he feels about avant garde cuisine. To which he answered, "It's about focusing on the ingredients used, how I can make the most of it but still surprise my diners. It's easy to put a plate of salad on the table but it's all about how I can do things differently from the techniques I used to the combination of ingredients." Understanding Chef Cherkas's culinary concepts will leave anyone inspired because according to him, "I don't change my menu because I feel that I have to. I change my menu after careful consideration, research and when I feel I'm able to introduce something different and unique." Ditto.

For those who know better, fervour might as well be Chef Ryan Clift's middle name. The co-owner and head chef of Tippling Club, one of Singapore's most exciting food and beverage (F&B) establishment, Chef Clift always believes in thinking out of the box when it comes to his culinary creations. Nominated as World Gourmet Summit (WGS) Awards Of Excellence Meat & Livestock Australia Rising Chef of the Year, it's easy

to understand why Chef Clift is often recognised as one who is always ahead of others. If you need any proof, here's one: "To reduce a sauce or jus, you might put it in a pot, which will ultimately damage its physical structure when overdone. But I reduce mine in a vacuum distiller at 25°C, removing only the moisture and resulting in a concentrated jus with its integrity and proteins retained at all times." Chef Clift also shared that he's more than willing to spend that extra money, time and energy just so he could achieve the optimum result he wants for the food he serves at his restaurant. He shared, "Eventually, it's my choice to invest in all these equipment and research time. The sceptics might argue how they are supposed to do this at home but that's not the point. Don't we all go to a restaurant for a dining experience different from those we enjoyed at home?" In addition, it has always been Chef Clift's goal to introduce a dining experience that is better, more interesting and one that is full of flavours; as he opined, "taking it to another level, so to speak". So, it made me wonder then what Chef Clift has to say about this cuisine and he swiftly pointed out, "Diners should realise that this is not a style of cooking, this is the future of cooking." And this makes Chef Clift a visionary too.

Chef Stephan Zoisl recently came back to Singapore after a short stint at the three-Michelin-starred The Fat Duck, Chef Heston Blumenthal's revered restaurant in England's Bray. Bringing with him new culinary experiences he picked up from the legendary chef himself, the executive chef of Novus Restaurant, Bar & Courtyard (Novus) successfully translates his newfound techniques and skills to his cuisine as evident in the two culinary interpretations he prepared on pages 7 and 33. Though he is based here, Chef Zoisl revealed, "My menus at Novus are based on the seasons. I change them almost every two months and it's very important to me. It gives me a great opportunity to work with different ingredients and allows me to be constantly challenged creatively." Believing that "we are what we eat", he always stressed that product knowledge is of utmost importance when it comes to cooking (and eating). In fact, it might as well be his culinary philosophy. He said, "When creating a dish, I always think of the main ingredient first. Then, I search for the most important component that will pair well with it. But I just don't stop there. I'll always look for a third ingredient that will act like the gelling agent of the two. And this is how I complete my dish." So, now you know it's no easy task creating a dish. But for Chef Zoisl, the constant inspiration he gets from working with different ingredients through the seasons makes it easier for him. In his own words, "It makes my days." But does deconstructivist cuisine make his days? He revealed, "You can call it avant garde, you can call it deconstructivist, you can call it molecular gastronomy. It doesn't matter because at the end of the day, it's all about how best you present a certain ingredient. It's still about the essence of cooking – the techniques used. And to me, as long as I can showcase the best qualities of these ingredients, that's still the most important."

Along with Chef Clift, Chef Michael Han was also one of the finalists for this year's WGS Awards Of Excellence Meat & Livestock Australia Rising Chef of the Year. Chef Han, who has a Master's in law from University of Bristol, decided to take a bold move and start a culinary journey because of his passion for the craft. A meal at his restaurant, 53 (named after its address at 53 Armenian Street), is proof that he has indeed made the right choice. And the fact that he has created two amazing dishes for this feature is also testament enough. With a restaurant that only seats about 30 diners and a kitchen that does not depend on direct heat (Chef Han uses only induction heat), it is only apt if he tells you that bringing

## Be Inspired By The Avant Garde Masters

- 53 53 Armenian Street, Singapore 179940, Tel: (65) 6334 5535

- BLU**  
Shangri-La Hotel, Singapore  
22 Orange Grove Road  
Singapore 258350  
Tel: (65) 6213 4598
- Le Pan**  
Tianjin Goldin Metropolitan Hotel  
16 Hai Tai Hua Ke Ju Lu Bin Hai Gao  
Xin Qu, Tianjin 300384, China  
Tel: (86) 22 8373 6666
- Novus Restaurant**  
93 Stamford Road  
#01-02 National Museum of Singapore  
Singapore 178897  
Tel: (65) 6336 8770
- Private Affairs Kitchen & Bar**  
45 Joo Chiat Place, Singapore 427769  
Tel: (65) 6440 0601
- Tippling Club**  
8D Dempsey Road, Singapore 249672  
Tel: (65) 6475 2217
- UltraViolet by Paul Pairet**  
Shanghai, China  
E-mail: info@uvbypp.cc

*Mediterranean by Edward Voon*



out the best of each ingredient he uses is truly vital. One of a handful of advocates for deconstructivist cuisine in the local industry, he spoke with conviction of his cuisine, "Most of my dishes are based on my experiences, often inspired by nature or something that I read about. It's how I interpret these inspirations and turn them into the dishes I serve at my restaurant." An evident example would be the raw striped shrimp dish. Deconstructivist cuisine is about how well the dish connects with the diner. As showcased by Chef Han, the shrimp dish was done to depict the shrimp's natural living environment, complete with the best ingredients from the sea. At the end of the day, perhaps the most important factor would be how well the dish brought the diner on a culinary journey. Chef Han's former mentor,



foie gras apple by Ryan Clift

Chef Heston Blumenthal once served an oyster dish together with the sounds of the sea played through an iPod, done to help enhance the dining experience. Moreover, cooking with seasonal ingredients is also of utmost importance. Though Singapore may not be blessed with the four seasons, he revealed, "I'm still able to work with the seasons here. Perhaps even more so as we are able, for example, to buy strawberries all year round from wherever in the world they are in season; though they are not always of the highest qualities." This is only testament to his belief.



Russian oyster by Kevin Cherkas

Chef Paul Pairet is perhaps one chef who is synonymous with avant garde cuisine. Back in 2008, when *Cuisine & Wine Asia* first talked about this cuisine, he was one of four chefs we featured along with Chef Voon (the other two chefs were Chef Ramon Freixa and Chef Bart De Pooter). Today, he is preparing to introduce an exciting dining experience simply called Ultraviolet. A restaurant of only one table of ten seats, diners will be wowed with a carefully choreographed play on the senses. Chef Pairet revealed, "I introduced this concept to influence, entertain, challenge, interact, celebrate, boost, immerse or simply support the perception of taste through a tailored atmosphere." At the same time, he also aspires to look into the role of the rather elusive psycho-taste (a view into everything about taste but taste itself) and how it impacts the mind. He said, "Taste matters most when it comes to a dish but that being said, taste is very subjective from different standpoints. Hence, I want to offer a bold dining experience that engages all the senses [not just taste] to create the ultimate luxury of emotion." Taking inspiration of just about anything and anyone, Chef Pairet has a belief that avant garde cuisine is about feeling and genuine creation. "It can be done with century old techniques and existing ingredients. Offering a fantastically ripened peach within the context of a highly creative meal could be considered as the most avant garde part of the menu," he concurred. JS

## 保留传统



"Cooking is my passion and my objective has always been to cook with a twist, turning classics into modern culinary sensations."  
Kevin Cherkas

## 接受创新



"Diners should realise that this is not a style of cooking, this is the future of cooking."  
Ryan Clift