

PSYCHO

DELI

ULTRAVIOLET

by Kee Hua Chee

A CHEF IN SHANGHAI SETS OUT TO CONTROL THE PSYCHOLOGICAL EXPERIENCE OF DINING

IMAGINE MAKING RESERVATIONS FOR DINNER AND NOT KNOWING WHERE YOU WILL EAT? This kind of mystery is one of the hallmarks of Ultraviolet, Shanghai's newest avant-garde restaurant. Just 10 diners are accepted nightly, and those who score a reservation are instructed to meet at Mr & Mrs Bund — another restaurant of the group — then bundled into two black vans and driven into the boondocks.

The secret location is just the first of many surprises for diners at Ultraviolet. The establishment, a brainchild of French chef Paul Pairet, features a unique concept where dining becomes a full-on, multi-sensory experience, complete with lights, visuals and infused aromas.

Each dish in the fixed 20-course menu is served in unison to all 10 diners, who are seated at the same table. Despite a price tag that others might consider hefty, the restaurant is not as one might expect — lavished with precious antiques, imperial artefacts or perchance a Van Gogh. In fact, it is as bare as Mother Hubbard's cupboard.

But as each dish is delivered, the room fills with a cascade of lights, a cacophony of sounds and a collection of smells. Projected images bounce off stark white walls that serve as an artist's blank





OPPOSITE PAGE

Born and trained in France, Chef Paul Pairet has travelled the world seeking inspiration for his distinctive style of cuisine

THIS PAGE (L-R)

Guests remain in the same spot throughout the meal, but the room changes around them as different visuals are projected on stark white walls

At Ultraviolet, dining is a multi-sensory experience. Images, sounds and smells are timed to complement the food

All images by Scott Wright of Limelight Studio



canvas. An Indonesian dish, for instance, is served with wall-to-wall images of Balinese masks, amid the beat of tribal drums and the tinkle of gamelan. The scent of holly fills the room when an apple-wasabi sorbet arrives. *Micro Fish No Chips* is served to The Beatles' *Ob-La-Di, Ob-La-Da* along with Union Jack visuals and — courtesy of the English gloom — projections of rain. It is paired with Scottish craft beer.

All this is achieved with wind generators, four scent diffusers, seven high-resolution projectors, 10 computer screens, 12 close-circuit television cameras, 56 speakers and 146 light bulbs. More than 4,000 pieces of tableware and 45 doors are also part of the line-up. It is a carefully choreographed sensory play, but Pairet would be piqued if you likened his concept to that of a dinner theatre. He says: "Ultraviolet is a restaurant, not Moulin Rouge, so don't expect live performances or sexy girls. We are the world's first experimental restaurant. It is food enhanced by ambiance, not a show supported by food. The food takes precedence."

The menu at Ultraviolet is wildly imaginative. Fresh cuttlefish is presented as one long, continuous strand, laid in a concentric circle; a lemon tart is made to look like a real lemon. "A dish is ready when there is nothing to add or remove. It can be

interesting, new, daring, beautiful. Shocking, even. Maybe comforting, or perhaps funny — but it should always be divine," says Pairet.

He confesses that the 20 dishes on the menu are his personal favourites. It took one year to develop them, so the menu does not change very often. Special requests or food allergies from diners can be accommodated but only for two or three courses. Not more, Pairet explains, because the dishes must relate to the pre-set ambiance.

Pairet first set foot in Shanghai in 2005 to open Jade 36 restaurant at Pudong Shangri-La hotel. He left in 2008 to set up modern French eatery Mr & Mrs Bund, before eventually launching Ultraviolet. He reveals that despite the restaurant's prices, it actually charges well below the real cost per guest. To manage this, he works closely with sponsors, partners and suppliers who absorb some of the costs in support of his vision, and presumably in exchange for publicity.

The restaurant has been well received since its opening in mid-May, with all seats fully-booked almost every night. It serves dinner from Tuesdays to Saturdays on a reservations-only basis. Considering that Pairet brought Ultraviolet from concept to life over a span of 15 years, its current wait-list of at least three weeks should well be worth it. 