

Talk

MAGAZINE

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DINING Food For Thought

JAMIE BARYS

Every month, our dining columnist Jamie Barys gives you all the news that's fit to dish. Find out the newest hotspots and the latest closings, as well as the tastiest events in town for June.



Photo Courtesy of Liz Grabenstein

Kaiba will finally be getting some company over at **Taikang Terrace** (171 Jianguo Zhong Lu, near Ruijin Er Lu) with **Larder**, **Sakesan** and **The Plump Oyster** all expected to open in the next month or two (barring any construction delays). Both Larder and Sakesan are charcoal-heavy, with the former run by former **Mesa Manifesto** executive chef Steve Baker billed as a bar & grill, while Sakesan focuses on the same robata-yaki dishes that made it a hit in Hong Kong's Soho. The Plump Oyster is, as its name suggests, dedicated to all things bivalve, from the aphrodisiac-promoting gents behind **Osteria** (226 Jinxian Lu, near Shaanxi Nan Lu).

The former French Concession has become awash in new bakeries that capitalise on the district's colonial past.

Brioche Doree, the French bakery chain that is currently taking over airports, shopping malls and petrol stations around the world, opened two very corporate cafes in two weeks last month (7 Donghu Lu, near Huaihai Zhong Lu and 98 Yanping Lu, near Xinzha Lu). Putting up some stiff competition just a block away is **Ravaud** (136 Xinle Lu near Xiangyang Bei Lu), a café that boasts a French owner, several branches in Hangzhou and Nanjing and a charming art deco tile floor. Additionally, the closing of **Cocon**, the short-lived home décor store in Anfull Court, has given its neighbour **Sunflour** (322 Anfu Lu, near Wukang Lu) the floor space it needs to accommodate its Sunday morning spillover.

In more carb-heavy news, Shanghai's top bagel delivery service **Spread the Bagel** (www.spreadthebagel.com) has expanded

its line to include garlic bagels (RMB 50 for a half dozen), which tastes mighty good with last month's newly-launched lox cream cheese. For the month of June, all orders of six or more garlic-flecked bagels come with a free On the Go MQ Coffee pack.

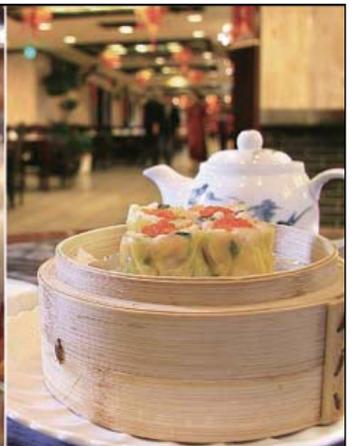
Just in time for summer, **Geisha** (390 Shanxi Lu, near Fuxing Zhong Lu) introduced its new seasonal menu, including a delicious tofu and shrimp shinjo. The dish's name hardly does it justice; a trio of small bites, the plate offers a deep-fried shrimp and tofu fritter, perfectly-seared scallops topped with bamboo shoots and a minced meatball pumped up with a summery sprinkling of mint. And if you come Thursday - Sunday, they've got a great digestif deal: from 10pm-12am, RMB 100 will get you five drinks.

And last but not least, in a nod to the chef

that has kept the whole Shanghai restaurant scene buzzing with the opening of **Ultraviolet** (see p 39 for more), we'd like to congratulate Paul Pairet and the rest of the crew at **Mr & Mrs Bund**. Restaurant Magazine ranked the modern French eatery (Bund 18) 95th in its prestigious list of the World's Best Restaurants, making MMB the only spot in the Mainland to crack the top 100.

Jamie Barys is the Chief Eating Officer of UnTour Shanghai. With authentic culinary tours designed to take visitors and residents alike off the eaten path, UnTour Shanghai offers street food experiences, market adventures, cooking classes and more. For more information visit www.UnTourShanghai.com or email Jamie at info@untourshanghai.com

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New & Noted: Ultraviolet Unveiled

JAMIE BARYS

I try to keep my expectations low when I visit a restaurant for the first time, but Chef Paul Pairet made that next to impossible when he first announced the concept of Ultraviolet three years ago. The idea is that guests get a "full sensory dining experience" that promises "psycho-taste," by pairing each dish with not just a drink, but a sound, visual and, occasionally, a scent. Unfortunately, the restaurant has been plagued with delays, pushing back the opening date for over a year, while investors sank more than US\$2.5 million into the 10-seat project. But finally, Ultraviolet is here, and 'Table Zero,' for the first official diners, pulled in a cool RMB 70,000 at a charity auction.

So, when I was invited to participate in a rehearsal at Ultraviolet, my expectations weren't just high; they were located somewhere in the stratosphere. Amazingly (astoundingly, even), Ultraviolet wowed me.

(For those who are already planning to experience Ultraviolet for themselves, I should add a spoiler alert. Half the fun of the dinner is the surprise, so let me just say that it is well worth the RMB 2,000 per head, and you can stop right here. But for the insatiably curious, read on.)

Paul Pairet has always had a flair for the dramatic. If you've witnessed a proposal at Mr & Mrs Bund, you're already well aware of the pyrotechnics he produces on a regular basis. But Ultraviolet is where Pairet lets his imagination run wild.

The evening starts with a drink at Mr & Mrs Bund before the other nine diners and yourself are loaded into a van and spirited off to an 'undisclosed' location in the backwoods of Shanghai. The squalor and street food just beyond the window is a taste of what's not to come, while a video of spliced together scenes from old movies plays overhead accompanied by a schizophrenic soundtrack that leaves you more confused than when you buckled up. Upon arrival in a deserted car park more suitable for a well-planned homicide than a haute cuisine meal, you step past a sliding door, and the dinner (if you can call it that) begins.



The idea for a meal designed to elicit emotions from its patrons came to Chef Pairet more than two decades ago, and to cast it in the most simplistic terms, it's elevated dinner theatre. Like a play in 22 edible acts, the degustation menu is complemented by tongue-in-cheek audio and visual cues from the man behind the curtain. The waiters play supporting roles complete with costume changes, fading into the background as the star of the meal – the food – takes centre stage, turning the potentially over-the-top farce of a dinner into a magnum opus.

After you've (literally) tumbled down the rabbit hole and into Paul Pairet's wonderland, nothing is off-limits; metaphors and pop culture abound, with Catholicism and nicotine addiction playing minor roles. Even Francis Ford Coppola makes an appearance, albeit on the wine list. The environment transforms with each course, one minute becoming a natural extension of the food, the next a dining destination.

The lobster essential, which smacks of the sea as the crustacean is bathed in a juice of its own making and garnished with a strip of seaweed, is accompanied by waves crashing against the walls, gulls cawing and salty sea spray perfume. Micro fish & chips transport the diner to rainy London, complete with a soundtrack by The Beatles and a digital Union Jack tablecloth. The Space

Invaders theme maximises the bewildering effects of the Sichuan peppercorn in the Cuttlefish Guimave, a spiral of "marshmallowed" sausage with a charred shallot on the side. By the end of the evening, you'll have tucked into medium rare wagyu beef on the Seine, enjoyed charred eggplant in Greece and licked your way through a frozen cucumber lollipop stuffed with *gado-gado* (peanut sauce) in Bali.

The meal often borders on kitsch, but never veers into tacky, and the menu becomes increasingly mysterious with edible non-sequiturs standing in for the typical descriptions. Tendon-tahine? Tomato pomadore a la magnifying glass? Ispahan dishwash? I literally didn't know what to expect from the kitchen half the time and looked to the silverware for clues. This is a place where the host can say, "The fake carrots are prepared with real carrots," with a completely straight face. And when each dish comes out, it all makes sense.

It would all feel frivolous, if each step wasn't so meticulously executed, each dish so delicious.

Fans of Paul Pairet's food will find parts of the menu familiar. He invented the technique for the engloved truffle lamb in 2008 while at Jade on 36, wrapping the loin in truffles before encasing it in a gelatin that stays solid at high temperatures, allowing him to cook it to perfection

without losing juice or flavour. The crunchy fierce salad from Mr & Mrs Bund is on the menu, pumped up with edible flowers and frozen tableside with liquid nitrogen for an icy crackle.

But about half of the 22 dishes are making their international debut at Ultraviolet, to much fanfare. By the end of the meal, Paul Pairet runs laps around the diners with gummy bears. And I don't mean that as a figure of speech.

If you want to experience the meal for yourself, get in line. As Talk Magazine was going to print, June was completely booked and July was filling up quickly. But don't have any doubts about not having your sky-high expectations met. Trust me - Ultraviolet is worth the wait.

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