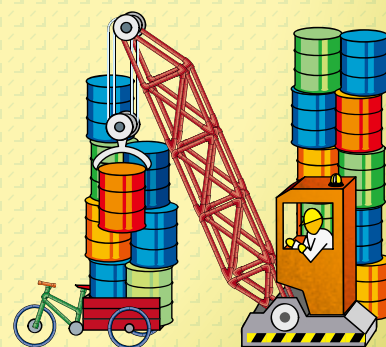
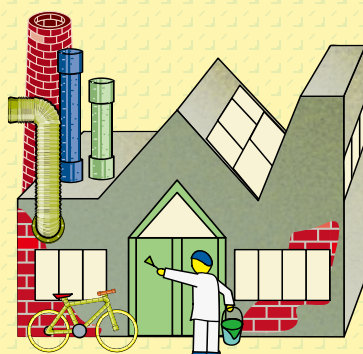
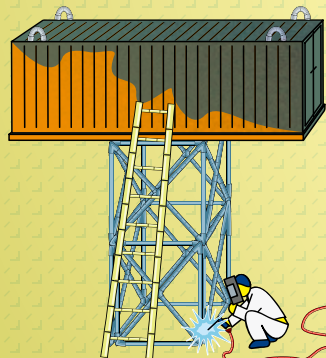
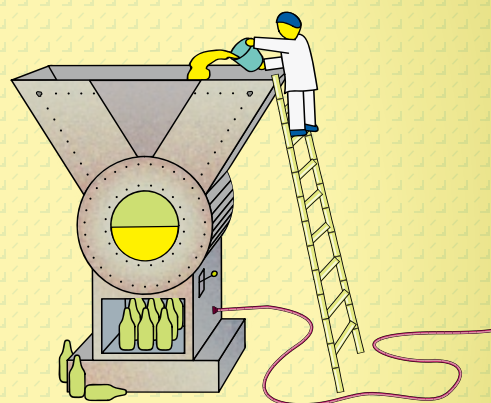
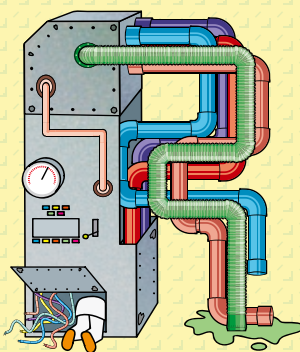
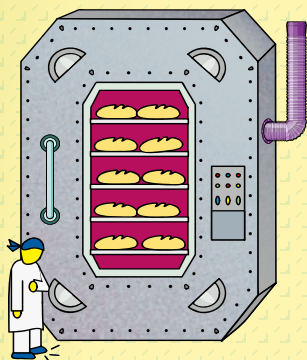
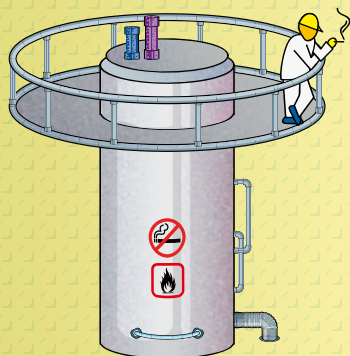
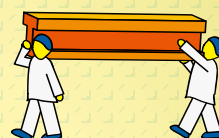
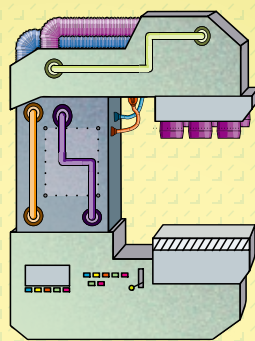
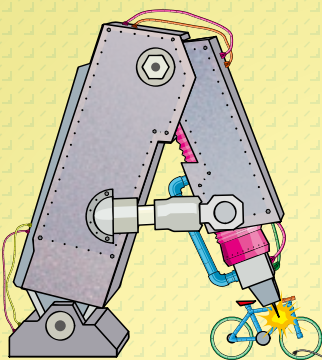
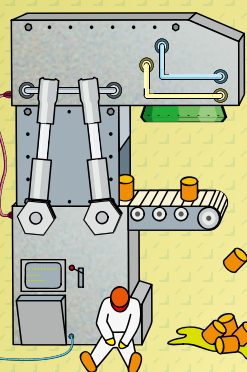


# SHANGHAI that's



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# ULTRAVIOLET

## A ODYSSEY INTO THE PSYCHE OF PAUL PAIRET

BY MONICA LIAU



The sounds of church bells enfold us in their resonant embrace as a line of monks emerges, single file, from the kitchen. Giant black platters are held out before them, like offerings on their way to the altar. We bring the solitary, glowing green wafer to our lips. A blast of bracing wasabi and apple granita coincides with the opening riff of AC/DC's 'Hells Bells.' Our palate cleansed, we're ready to rock.

Scott Wright of limelight Studios

This is how dinner commences at Paul Pairet's long-anticipated one-table, high-concept, multi-sensory restaurant Ultraviolet. For the next three hours, we 10 diners embark on a wild expedition through the slightly-twisted psyche of Pairet.

For those in the dark, Pairet originally made his name in Shanghai with quirky, avant-garde cuisine at Jade on 36, and then solid-yet-light-hearted cooking at Mr & Mrs Bund. He is a fast-talking, hungry-looking, ultra-ambitious beast of a Frenchman. As he tells it, he has been dreaming of opening Ultraviolet for 15 years. It's been a long road.

First up, funding for a culinary project that probably won't make money is hard to come by. Dinner here is RMB2,000 a head; factor everything in and Pairet says the real cost is around RMB5,000. Even after getting a host of forward-thinking sponsors – including Baccarat, Evian and Lavazza – on board, construction and logistical

problems served up a never-ending stream of trouble for the team.

So now, three years and several false dawns later – we have previously announced the imminent opening of Ultraviolet on these pages twice – Pairet now has to succeed against people's high expectations. Backed by a crew of 25, he is finally prepared to unleash his unbridled creativity on us all.

Promising Shanghai diners an experience like no other, Pairet slightly pompously claims he and his team appeal to all the senses in order to "bring the culinary experience to new heights." There are lighting technicians who control the four huge, high-definition screens that serve as walls and a DJ controlling sound effects and music. There's even a perfumer from MANE Flavor and Fragrance, who has created tailor-made scents for several dishes.

To many, this may border on the edge of ludicrous. In an era of

food one-upmanship – blindfold restaurants and breast milk ice cream are just two that spring to mind – it's easy to write Ultraviolet off as an elaborate, expensive gimmick.

As these reservations run through our head, we are surrounded by waiters again and a clever dish

*Ultraviolet succeeds, primarily because Pairet is an OCD perfectionist with the soul of an artist*

called 'Can't Quit' is before us. Biting into a candy coated cigarillo, our tastebuds quiver beneath an onslaught of silky foie gras.

Our doubts disintegrate like the funky, earthy ash of cabbage with which the dish is garnished.

There are a few reasons Ultraviolet succeeds, primarily because Pairet is an OCD perfectionist with the soul of an artist. He also imbues dinner with nostalgia and a heavy dose of wit, sometimes wry, sometimes wacky.

At course four, rain patters on virtual rooftops while enormous hi-def water droplets creep down the walls. The atmosphere chills, like a foggy day on the streets of London (where Pairet once found himself, broke and out of work).

Suddenly, The Beatles break out into 'Ob-La-Di Ob-La-Da' as projections of the Union Jack flag burst triumphantly across the table. Enter a gilded dish of 'Fish and Chips'; in Pairet's mind, all the elation and dour sensibility of that little island nation can be expressed in a single, oversized caper, stuffed with anchovy paste and fried to a tempura crisp. We glee-

fully accept the offer of a second.

Two dishes later, Pairet retreats to the coast. As waves break across a rocky shore, F&B Director Fabien Verdier (our “tour guide” for the evening) walks around the room with a pressure cooker, releasing a puff of warm sea air into each of our faces.

We snickered at the extravagant gesture. But then glass bowls appear with a generous chunk of lobster poised in seafood consommé, covered only with a strip of seaweed and salt-water scented foam. After some of the fussier dishes, the simplistic beauty of this composition is thrown into stark relief; the soup reminiscent of a rock pool, the tender lobster fresh beyond fresh. We were transported to a sunset evening, walking barefoot along the beach, ears tingling from the constantly shifting tide.

The journey continues. Sundappled French forests are epitomized by a piece of butter and truffle-soaked brown bread entombed in a bell jar wreathed with cigar smoke. Then Pairet tips the wink to Marseilles – where he was born – with a bubble of bouillabaisse encapsulated in a gel casing and topped with crisp basil and citrus. A burst of warm soup, sweet with concentrated seafood, a sip of musky Moeske (a southern France answer to Pastis) and we’re right there with him.

Carefully choreographed like a three-part play, these first 10 courses are a deeply personal experience. The music, images and food effectively wrap diners into a cocoon. There is little talking between guests, as we are totally immersed in the show. By the time we reach a palate-cleansing lollipop of cucumber with peanut

trickles merrily through the group.

With nine courses to go though, Pairet can’t risk his audience falling asleep on him. Just as torpor threatens to descend, there is a flurry of activity from the kitchen and things get deliciously silly again: a cherry tomato showcased in a vial of stained-glass caramel-

## *The host walks around the room with a pressure cooker, releasing a puff of warm sea air into each of our faces*

cream and dotted with spicy ginger and coriander, we’re elated and exhausted.

Thankfully, it was time for intermission – literally – where we were ushered into a second room and encouraged to chat, smoke and use the restroom.

Perhaps sensing that our synapses would start misfiring if the previous pace continued, the next three courses are more laid back. Served like a fancy, three-course dinner party, guests feel more free to break crispy baguettes to soak up the juice left behind by a truffle-infused rack of lamb or wagyu beef roast. The mood eased with softer music and the mellow good cheer that comes from good eats and booze, lazy chatter and laughter

ized sugar, stuck to a magnifying glass; a cheese course served alongside salad that’s been treated to a bath of frozen nitrogen. We chortle when gummi bears have a race around the screens.

Then there is the most perfect dessert imaginable. A medallion of whipped avocado encased in Nutella and chocolate, accented by a drizzle of white truffle oil and sea salt. The entire table slows to savor; the pungent truffle oil grasping the sweet, mellow flavors and forcing them to unlock secrets even they could not know existed.

Of the 22 courses we tried, there were inevitably a few misses. Peach perfume piped into the room for a cold tomato and peach

soup made us feel we were about to drink a bubble bath; an oyster got lost somewhere beneath an explosion of citrus and fizzling pop rocks. However, the mediocre is overshadowed by the enormous achievement of everything else.

We admit it, we may have drunk the Kool-Aid. The 200 percent effort that Pairet and his team have given this project has paid off. The music, scents and scenes serve to enhance, not distract, from the kitchen’s already immense culinary skills. We predict a throng of acolytes soon migrating here to work at the culinary research center Ultraviolet is setting up in the back.

By combining personal experience, culinary drollness and a heavy dose of science, Pairet asks us to rethink our relationship with food. Sure, his experimental dining experience may not be for everyone; it is a little pretentious, often abstract and a grand commitment. One thing is for sure, though – we will be talking about our meal at Ultraviolet for months to come.

// To book a seat at Ultraviolet visit [www.uvbypp.cc](http://www.uvbypp.cc). RMB2,000/person. Read an interview with Paul Pairet at [www.thatsmags.com/paulpairet](http://www.thatsmags.com/paulpairet)

