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LUNCH WITH THAT'S

PAUL PAIRET

Ultra ambitious and heading an avant garde evolution

BY MONICA LIAU



“I’m dying to be first. There is nothing like this in the world.” Paul Pairet is talking about opening his much-anticipated experimental restaurant Ultraviolet. “I’ve wanted to do this project for fifteen years. There was nothing like this in the market until I started working on this project. This is not pretension, it’s the truth.”

It has been a long time coming. The man behind Mr. &

Mrs. Bund, and arguably the most internationally recognized chef in the city since his days at Jade on 36, was aiming to open one-table, high-concept Ultraviolet (which he pronounces ultra-vee-oh-lay) in Shanghai last year (“This is definitely the least efficient project I’ve ever worked on. Every time I tell people when it’s going to be open, I end up being wrong.”) He has been dreaming of it since 1996.

Since then, his original concept of a single-table restaurant and no menu choices has evolved into a technology-fueled extravaganza directed towards a single purpose: to combine sight, light, sound and automation into the ultimate dining experience. It seems Pairet’s entire career has been guiding him towards this moment.

“I’ve been telling my story for years, but I don’t know if

I’ve ever told it in one go,” he says, settling into his chair. Handsome, hungry-looking and chain smoking cigarettes (“The only time I can stop smoking is when I can cook”), Pairet pinpoints three major events in his early life which were to shape his future and lead him down his chosen path.

The first was as a 9-year-old boy back in his native Marseilles discovering a cookbook that says much about Pairet, *La Manuel de Rosette de la Grand Mere Donald*. A book of recipes of Donald Duck’s grandmother, it was a lighthearted, irreverent collection of recipes that chronicled the adventures of the hapless Disney fowl. In Pairet’s mind, this compilation proved a dramatic foil to cooking in the mid-70s which, despite a nascent inkling of nouvelle beginnings, was still rooted in the classics.

“This book prefaced what cooking became in the late 90s,” Pairet asserts. “I really think this was a start to everything else.” The man who brought Shanghai the whimsical Lemon and Lemon Tart and innovative Shrimp in a Jar says he still uses *La Manuel* for inspiration to this day, the most recent return an orange and grenadine combination which he says is “a carrot thing that’s not really carrots. It’s not on the menu yet, merely an experiment.”

This passion for experimentation has always been in Pairet. He concentrated on science and mathematics in high school, paired with Latin and Greek, (“The track of children with ambitious parents,” he quips.) A future in cooking was not on the agenda. But his second jolt of inspiration was at age 18 while working at a summer camp.

The a-ha moment came while making his own French fries, the first time he was introduced to a detailed cooking process: washing, cutting, poaching and frying. “When you come from a scientific background, the

first things that strike you are the hows and the whys," Pairet says. "The chef I was under was probably the most average I've ever worked with in my life, but I owe him because it was at that point that I decided to go into cooking."

Pairet ended up at hotel school in Toulouse. "At the time there were three things I was interested in: photography, sports and cooking. The photography school interview was too technical and in the sports interview I nearly drowned in the swimming pool... so hotel school it was," he laughs. He studied under Jean Pierre Poulaine, "a genius of the trade," according to Pairet, and the man who presented what he considers his first real cooking lesson. It consisted of three glasses of water filled with three sets of carrots – one shredded, one sliced and one whole.

"The first glass was far more orange than the next glass, which was still more orange than the last glass because the cut determines the amount of surface contact." Pairet pauses, looking up expectantly. "Don't you see? This simple explanation defined all the interaction between liquid and solid cooking." For Pairet, it introduced the methods of diffusion and osmosis, the difference in flavor transfer between fast cooking and long braises all in one go. "I understood that you could learn cooking by understanding," he says. "I called my mother right away and said 'Yes, this is what I was meant to do.'"

From there Pairet homed in on his path and pursued it with single-minded determination. After graduating he began "selecting chefs," as he worked his way up in the restaurant world. Jose Lampreia of La Maison Blanche in Paris was first. People advised Pairet against working for the Portuguese-born non-traditionalist, known for his star-studded restaurant and simple ingredients touched with curious twists. He ignored them. "This is where I learned the reality of cooking," Pairet says. "It is an antisocial medieval kind of work. Nothing has changed much, even now."

But things in the dining scene were changing – what was being cooked and how it was being cooked. French food was tip-toeing towards nouvelle. Chefs were becoming personalities. Ferran Adria began bending

minds with his molecular creations in El Bulli. Chefs began asking the question "Why" and then, "Why not?" The dining scene, in France and around the world, was being turned on its head.

For Pairet, it was inspiring at the most basic and technical levels. He admired the eminent Paul Bocuse, who became one of the world's first celebrity chefs and father of French nouvelle cuisine ("At one point, he was more well-known than the President of France," Pairet insists), due to his ability to hammer down the procedure of cooking.

During Bocuse's heyday, when he was giving a lot of interviews, he only ever gave out one recipe. It was for a three-minute boiled egg. "A lot of people said 'That's it?!' but in fact what he was doing was valid," Pairet chuckles. "He was basically saying, 'Whatever — you think this is stupid, but I'm giving you the secret to cooking.'"

In the cookbook Pairet started in 1998 (but has yet to finish) he draws on this story for his first recipe, also for a boiled egg. It becomes far more complicated than throwing an egg in boiling water and setting the timer; Pairet documents everything, from how the temperature of eggs to the quality of the water affect cooking. The recipe takes up four pages.

After graduating from the hotel school, Pairet left France for Hong Kong. Not, he emphasizes, because he had any interest in traveling, but because opportunity came knocking. He first spent time teaching professionals in the industry, and then worked at the Bocuse-funded Restaurant de France at the Meridien Hotel. It was in Hong Kong that he discovered real Chinese food, an experience that would inspire one of his most celebrated dishes, Shrimp in a Jar, which is essentially a giant prawn steamed in a clay jar with citrus oils, vanilla and lemongrass.

From Hong Kong, Pairet moved to Sydney and well-regarded restaurant Mesclun. He says it was there that his food began to take on characteristics that would later make him famous at Jade on 36 at the Shangri-La. Difficult to pin down, Pairet's cuisine is considered by many to embody the heart and soul of avant garde cooking, while deeply rooted in French

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The 8th Annual Family Day

The 8th Annual Family Day held by Green City, the most famous community in Shanghai is on the 15th of October at Sunshine Stadium. In October 2004, Green City held the 1st Family Day which was designed to equip expat families for getting the most out of living in Shanghai. This event has now been held for 7 years, thousands of families get involved every year. This is not only an event but also an experience that epitomizes everything the Green City brand stands for.

From 2004 to 2010, each and every single Family Day has surprising turns and creative ideas on display. The "Horrific Halloween" of 2005, The "Mini Olympics" of 2007, The "See world in China" of 2009, The "Challenge Small Heroes" of 2010... All these creative ideas make the residents of Green City feel enthusiastic and welcome. Each family day attracts more than 4000 families, and this year, we would like to introduce the 8th Family Day - "My Discovery Farm!"

This year will follow the same style as previous events with the areas divided by main stage, games area, food area and football area. Each Family Day is devoted to providing an experience full of joy, warmth and harmony. We warmly welcome you to join us at the 2012 9th Family Day held by Green City!





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Don't think I'm not aware that Ultraviolet is completely in opposition to the politically correct movement of the time

techniques. His food is lauded for embracing the molecular movement, but adding his own sense of playfulness and honed, methodical focus. His food is plated without being precious, while its lightheartedness stops it from scaring people.

Sydney was also where Pairet first pitched the project that would become Ultraviolet. Frustrated by the constraints of restaurant à la carte cooking that had to be prepared in 15 minutes, he wanted to open a restaurant that allowed him to "master the time."

"Restaurant cooking is not you at your best by nature," he says. "The best way to cook is to know what you are cooking

and what time you are serving it." In his view, this could be achieved in a restaurant with a single table and no choices, an audacious concept for the time. It would invariably lose money, so he needed marketing and partner sponsorship to sustain it, and he could find no one in Sydney who considered the investment worthwhile.

Pairet would get closer during his time in Paris, where he ended up after an unsuccessful year in London ("I knew I was poor because I was eating pasta with oil. Can you imagine? I couldn't even afford olive oil.") Baccarat, a famous crystal company that currently has three showcase restaurants, showed a lot of interest in his

little 12 chair prospect. Pairet was cooking at Café Mosaic, housed inside the legendary hotel Relais Carre d'Or, and garnering adulating coos from the international press. "At the time I was in style. I was set," he says. But after working for two and a half months on the project, Baccarat pulled out. An investor in Miami then flirted with the idea, but to no avail.

Over the years, the idea of a small restaurant with one menu that gave chefs complete control started to come into vogue. The Japanese art of kaiseki dining, which features a seasonal, artistic set menu, became popular in New York City. Chefs began scaling their restaurants back in size. Meanwhile, experience restaurants, where restaurateurs played with light, sound and scent, were on foodies' lips.

Pairet says he will be the first to bring all these elements together into one restaurant though. "No one was doing this until I began to do it," he maintains. "There are a lot of people thinking of it, but many of them have been directly involved with the project under me."

He names Adam Mellonas, his sous chef at Jade on 36, who went on to work with Paco Loncero, an experimental Spanish chef in the same vein as Ferran Adria. According to Pairet, Mellonas wanted to do something similar in Dubai, which they were going to call a sensory restaurant. It never came to fruition. "Even this table of twelve [referring to David Laris' 12 Chairs in Sinan Mansions] is much inspired by my restaurant. It is all about what we do, even if it is different."

Ultraviolet is funded by the VOL group, the people behind both Mr. & Mrs. Bund and Bar Rouge. When completed, the end result will not just be a restaurant, but a carefully choreographed event in which Pairet controls every aspect of a meal. "We do this restaurant knowing that it cannot make money directly," he says. "It's a method of experimentation in which we not only take risks with the food itself, but in its organization and perception."

From start to finish, Pairet has worked out how to enhance the food experience. Doors open via remotes from a central node, mood lighting is carefully craft-

ed, 360 degrees of HD screen surround the table. Each dish will come with its own tailored concept. "The project is based on technology," he explains. "My project became technological along the way."

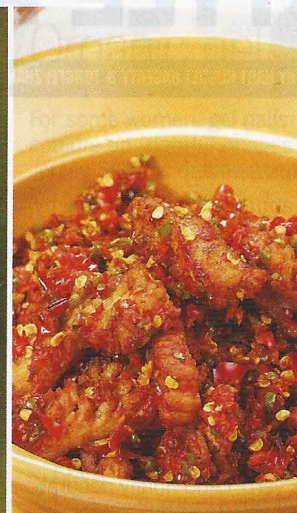
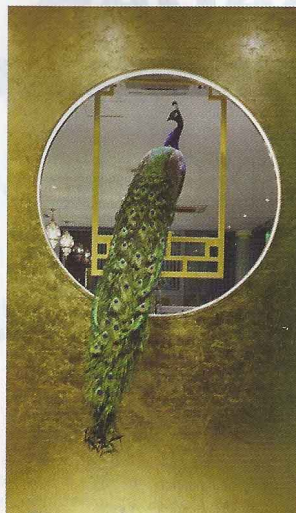
In some ways, Pairet's restaurant goes against the grain of current dining trends, with chef's focusing on local produce prepared simply. "Don't think I'm not aware that Ultraviolet is completely in opposition to the politically correct movement of the time... this return to self-sustained handmade farmed food." Pairet's voice rises and he pounds the table for emphasis. "I have nothing against this, but there is this potential perception of being artificial as compared to being natural. But we are only as natural as we can be here."

If all goes well in coming weeks with the menu, the construction (walls need to be rebuilt) and choreography (the automatic doors won't open), Ultraviolet should be open late November or early December. It's frustrating to be so close and yet so far.

"You know, I've been waiting 15 years for this moment," he muses. "The frustration comes from the fact that you don't control things. But what do you want me to do? The guy who built the wall built it wrong, and all I can do is tell him so."

Until it is open, Pairet piques our interest with one of the course concepts, fish and chips. "They are these ridiculous little capers filled with anchovy paste and then fried, which instantly reminds you of fish and chips," he explains. "But you are immediately immersed into a scenario. We'll have micro-rain with sound effects and mono-color on the screens and perhaps project a British flag onto the table. This works very well. You feel wet."

In effect, for this one little dish, diners will find themselves transported into a London drizzle. "For me it is about the memory of what we are trying to do that counts," Pairet says. "How much memory do you get from the food, the experience? That's what makes a meal for me, not one dish."



Maurya

Owned by the FCC group, newly opened Maurya is an elegant restaurant serving authentic, fiery Sichuanese fare – the head chef was poached from a well known restaurant in Chengdu and brought in other chefs from the same city, a place notorious for being sticklers for their spice types. In contrast to the fiery fare, the calm blue and pink interior tones help diners slowly unwind. // Maurya 75 Mengzi Lu, by Liyuan Lu. 孔雀, 蒙自路75号近丽园路 (3307 0770)

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