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The alternative realities of Shanghai's Ultraviolet, the world's most innovative restaurant



Shanghai's pioneering Ultraviolet restaurant CREDIT: SCOTT WRIGHT

By John O'Ceallaigh, TELEGRAPH LUXURY TRAVEL EDITOR

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Why go: Set in an anonymous bunker on the outskirts of central Shanghai, Ultraviolet offers a fine-dining experience that is staggeringly innovative. Over a 20-course menu, just 10 diners a night are immersed in an environment that manipulates and melds light, sound, scent, temperature and theatre to create a culinary experience beyond compare.

The experience: Furnished simply with five chairs standing on either side of a communal dining table, windowless and ostensibly featureless Ultraviolet can in fact legitimately claim to be the world's most pioneering restaurant. As different dishes arrive, highly advanced video projection technology turns its blank walls into a canvas; bespoke scents emanate at requisite points; and a cleverly chosen soundtrack sets the appropriate mood - over one surreal, delicious evening, diners are transported to one alternative, all-enveloping environment after another. Think of the setting as an early incarnation of the Star Trek Holodeck.



To ensure precision is maintained but staff boredom mitigated, the Ultraviolet team serves a rotation of three avant-garde, European-style set menus: UVA, UVB and UVC, each sophisticated and beautifully presented enough to command attention even when surrounded by such discombobulating trickery.



Egg gruyere raviolo with truffle and asparagus CREDIT: SCOTT WRIGHT

From UVB, I dined on a rich egg gruyere raviolo with truffle and asparagus; veal with tahini and a kick of salted lime; and the confounding Tomato Mozza and Again dish, composed of two aesthetically identical plates carrying different savoury and sweet ingredients - what might be olive oil and tomato granite on one plate perhaps being vanilla oil and raspberry granite on another. While dining on oysters with caviar and pepper, my companions and I heard seagulls cry and smelt the sea; we later enjoyed a picnic of fish, rice and fennel (served in tupperware-style metal containers) on a grassy knoll, with birdsong and the scent of freshly cut grass rousing dormant memories of long, lazy childhood summers. A chill took hold later, while in the middle of an Alpine scene we dined on an ice cream of Yakult and orange blossom.



The scene is set for a picnic with a difference CREDIT: SCOTT WRIGHT

Many more surprises unfurled as the night progressed, but to elaborate further would be to negate their potency. With each distinctive, well-practised dish impeccable - 12 versions are prepared, and the best 10

served - epicureans will find the food alone reason enough to visit; for others, Ultraviolet's incredible ingenuity will likely position an evening here near the top of any most-memorable-meal-ever list.



Tomato Mozza and Again CREDIT: SCOTT WRIGHT

Who's behind it: A one-time science student, French chef Paul Pairet first had the idea for Ultraviolet in 1996 but technological and budgetary limitations meant his idea could only be realised in 2012.

Having worked in Paris, Istanbul and Hong Kong, he settled in Shanghai in 2005 and is recognised as one of China's most creative, provocative chefs.

Though not affiliated with his venture, a strikingly similar dining concept was revealed at Ibiza's Hard Rock Hotel in 2014. There Sublimotion restaurant charges its guests €1,700 for a set-menu dinner - a price that has often seen it touted as the world's most expensive restaurant - but Pairet's Ultraviolet is the pioneer here, and the accolades he has accrued in the industry (from Michelin, The World's 50 Best Restaurants etc) are indicative of the incontestably high standard held by his cuisine.



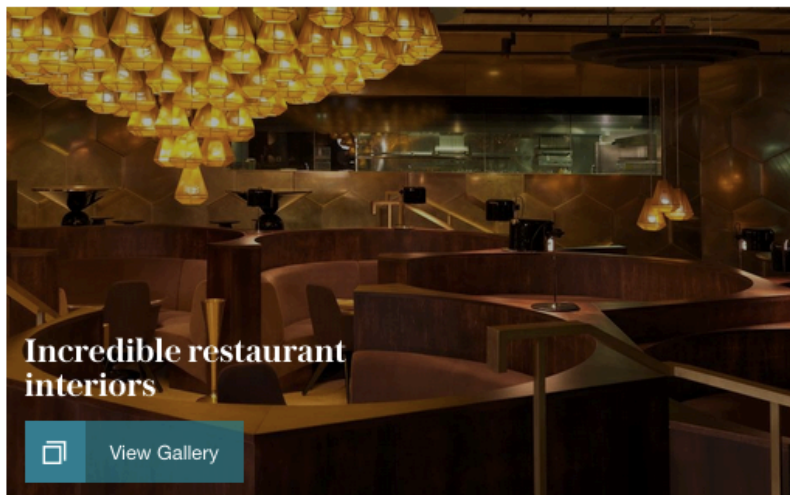
What else to do: Should bookings at Ultraviolet be hard to secure - or Pairet's cooking prove so impressive you'd like to try more - his modern French restaurant Mr & Mrs Bund is a far more accessibly priced eatery set right on the river. Opened as a cradle for the carnivorous in December, his newest venture The Chop Chop Club serves hefty cuts of meat for immediate consumption to whoever should be in the restaurant at that time (rather than allowing produce to degrade in storage while punters mull over their orders).



The spectacular view from Sir Elly's Terrace

Its broad avenues shaded by mature plane trees, the French Concession is an unusually genteel, tranquil district in the middle of a metropolis - its innumerable boutiques and cafes make it a diverting place for a pre- or post-prandial amble. A fascinating repository for all manner of Chinese art, the Shanghai Museum's collection includes exquisite examples of ancient jade, ceramics and Ming furniture. The world's second-tallest building, the 2,073ft Shanghai Tower trumps Dubai's Burj Khalifa in one significant respect: its observation deck stands

The details: Seats at Ultraviolet are made available three months in advance and can be booked through the restaurant's website. Dinner, with wine pairings, costs CNY4,000 (£450) from Tuesday to Wednesday and CNY6,000 (£680) from Thursday to Saturday. Rooms at the Peninsula Shanghai (+86 21 2327 2888) cost from £325 per night.



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