

Inside Paul Pairet's Latest: The Chop Chop Club

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Introducing the big one this week. And probably for longer than that.

The Chop Chop Club

2/F, 3 Zhongshan Dong Yi Lu, near Guangdong Lu

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Quick Take: The latest restaurant from Shanghai's most internationally celebrated chef Paul Pairet. The Chop Chop Club is now open in Unico, serving "honest home cooking" in great slabs of meat priced to move, move, move.

What is it: With his most recent accolades being two Michelin Stars for Ultraviolet, the number 42 slot in The World's 50 Best Restaurants 2016 (for Ultraviolet) and two slots in Asia's Best 50 Restaurants 2016 (for Ultraviolet and Mr & Mrs Bund) — the only Mainland-based chef recognized in those last two, incidentally — it's safe to say that when French chef Paul Pairet opens a restaurant every couple years in Shanghai, it's... kind of a big deal. Opened last week, Pairet's latest The Chop Chop Club assumes the space of Unico every night, serving 60 seats in their lounge dining atmosphere before the pounding Latin drums of the nightclub take over.

If Ultraviolet — with its video installations, custom audio, space age lighting, and scents pumped into the dining room is the most avant-garde restaurant in the world — The Chop Chop Club is a pronounced move into the opposite direction: traditional dining as inherited from the kitchen of your parents. (With the expected flourishes and conceptual idiosyncrasies one would expect from Shanghai's resident "chef-provocateur" and his team, of course.) "The Carvery" menu is comprised of a nightly-changing menu of 7 or 8 meat mains — all manner of beef cuts, chicken, lamb, ox tail, seafood, and more — prepared and deployed according to the Chop Chop Club's own schedule for two seatings. These meat mains — available in portion or whole servings — are available to be ordered at specific, 15-minute time intervals of the night — say the "Vineyard Chargrilled *Cote de Boeuf* Bernaise" is available at 8.30pm and the "Chargrilled Chicken *Americaine* Lemon & Garlic" is available at 9.30pm — and guests are waiting for their preferred meat main according to a schedule announced on a giant digital display screen at the head of the dining space. It's a bit like bidding on an auction. Tables are competing for dishes as they come out. Once the given menu item has been snapped up, it's gone for the seating.

The concept is meant to replicate both dining as a shared experience — sharing even between unrelated tables who are splitting whole portions of meat — and the idea that in your home kitchen, once the food was prepared, that's when you went to the dinner table to eat it with your family. Not the other way around. Your mum or dad doesn't hand you an *a la carte* menu and prepare your given choice to order. You're at the dinner table at a certain time, eating what they've prepared. They like to say: "We like to say 'food doesn't wait'." Hence the name "Chop Chop" — you've got to be quick to get in your order to The Carvery.

Despite the overtures to tradition, sharing, and honest home cooking, it all requires some highly orchestrated service. From the open kitchen, in which Pairet himself — with the hat on of course — is positioned behind a giant cutting board flanked by a small armada of assistants, the floor service fans out with giant trays of meat — whole chickens, whole legs of lambs, great slabs of beef — to signal it's impending availability on the big board. It's kind of like a pop-up restaurant that's taken over a deli. Seating, currently at 60 seats, is set to expand to 70 or 80 in the coming months, with the Chop Chop Club spilling out into the bar area. Seating times are 6.30pm-7pm; 8pm-8.30pm; and a planned later seating launched when they get going. They'll also be serving an extraction menu available at Unico after The Chop Chop Club closes up for the night.

Let's see some food.



Roasted-Grilled XL Turbot - 350rmb portion / 1300rmb whole



Vineyard Chargrilled Cote de Boeuf Bernaise - 650rmb portion / 1300rmb whole



Bertha Charred Oxtail Terryaki - 250rmb portion / 450rmb whole

So these are representatives of the main event at The Chop Chop Club — sections from The Carvery menu. Depending on the size of your party, you'd be ordering one or two portions from that section, and then rounding it off with an array of sides to munch on while you steak out (:P) your Carvery choice. The sides are split into Charcuterie, Hors D'Oeuvre, Sides, and Hot Starters, and feel like elevated bistro-ish sort of fare, rounded off with a bit of that humor-centric, pyrotechnic razzle dazzle the chef is known for.



Grilled Piquillos & Watermelon - 70rmb



Country Pate en Croute - 90rmb



Bertha's Shitake - 100rmb

Man, I've eaten a lot of shitake mushrooms right off the friggin' log before, but this one was exceptional. It's like 'oh, here we go with another log imported from Fangorn Forrest with shitake mushrooms growing on it, how sick I am of seeing this friggin' thing' but this one was great!

First Impressions: Rich, creamy, heavy, saucy, coma-inducing meat episodes broken up with bright, pronounced, and sparkling fruits and veggie flourishes. Deep flavors of the country, flavors of the bistro, flavors of the deli, flavors of the home kitchen, flavors of The Shire. What can I say man, it was good. I doff my cap. Salute. It was good. A classicist French bistro sort of experience with elevated character, an interesting concept, and lots of singular vision in the execution of the dishes.

Standout dishes for me: The Chicken Americaine (not pictured), the *Cote de Boeuf*, and a Roasted Pumpkin Peasant Soup (also not pictured) which came out in an entire pumpkin itself. *Magnifique*.

One thing: Stay on top of your Carvery schedule. I couldn't see the big board from where I was sitting. Missed a bit of the action on the trays of meat coming out.

Damage: Ever been to Ultraviolet? Shit's expensive. This is not as expensive. Dinner for two, which is one or two portions off the Carvery menu and a few sides plus a bottle should be around 400rmb-500rmb per person.

On Reservations: As of this writing, The Chop Chop Club is dealing with a full house about 2-3 days in advance of a given day. Maybe by now this weekend is full, but you should be able to get in if you're calling a few days in advance for a weeknight dinner or looking ahead to the weekend after this one. Don't wait! Chop chop!



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