

## Mr & Mrs Bund: Modern Chic That Makes Retro Timeless | TastyTrip

Posted on October 22, 2021 by Zhu, Daniel in Gourmet Column, Shanghai, 上海

Many chic eateries have popped up in Shanghai with flocks of visitors quickly filling up the place. However, after a recent round of reconnaissance of those restaurants with my friends, I asked myself, what was I looking for in a simple, delicious meal? One of the most painful things in life is having eaten a bad meal and realized it also causes weight gain. Perhaps a few of Shanghai's classic restaurants that have stood for years are the answer to end the suffering.

When I first arrived in Shanghai over a decade ago, the décor, atmosphere, and cuisine of Mr & Mrs Bund (MMB) at 18 on the Bund set my impression of the metropolis. The chef and partner founder Paul Pairet (PP) made a name for himself and laid the foundations for his illustrious career in Shanghai. The restaurant industry has been hit hardest by the pandemic, especially for those on the Bund, where the majority of their customers are foreign tourists. But that's not at all the case with MMB, it has survived for its timeless cuisine and stylish dining experience, standing out from the crowd even amidst the wave of newly popped-up restaurants after covid.



The pandemic may have been an opportunity for China's fine dining scene, at least from what I have seen in Shanghai, as the wealthy have turned their spending to the domestic market, saving many high-end restaurants from bankrupting. I've seen a lot of new restaurants opening these days, but I've also been disappointed. The other day I went to a restaurant and ordered a roast beef tongue, a bite of it was enough to drive customers away – that wasn't fresh. I paid the bill and left. Clearly that restaurant was in a hurry to open but wasn't fully prepared. Even if we all need new blood in these trying times, I can't say any compliments to those immature restaurants that are rushing to the market just because they fear lagging behind.

One of the restaurants I'd love to revisit is MMB, which was opened in 2009 as Mr & Mrs Bund by chef Paul Pairet and has been clustered with gourmards and oenophiles ever since. MMB is at its best when the Bund is lit up, and back then the restaurant had a night owl discount to celebrate the metropolis' glowing nightlife. The room is filled with dressed-up diners, mostly foreigners, making it a fashionable curation filled with dynamism and good vibes.

For over a decade this powerhouse has become Pairet's base of what has followed. Last fall marked the first key refreshment on the menu, where Pairet enlarged the idea of simplicity and French essentialist, enriched with characters of some other elements, including the Chop Chop Club menu – or at least I think so. Two starring sections, Seafood and Grill, remains the center of the menu. MMB's grill has the character of a New York barbecue restaurant but is closer in concept to Asador Etxebarri in the lush foothills of the Spanish Basque Country. Apart from signature dishes and the glam Seafood Towers that have been synonymous with France's legendary brasseries, a wide-ranging selection for Grill, various beef cuts, allow for mix-and-match. The must-haves that fans keep coming for are simply, indispensable.

This time around, I was surprised to find that I fell in love with MMB all over again, especially with the dim lighting that gives the view from the windows a soft, warm glow, which may be too dark by domestic standards, but I love the setting.

Paul Pairet likes to use a lot of grilling and smoking techniques, but maintains consistency and precision throughout the dishes, rarely missing a beat. In matters of taste, there can be no disputes. For me, the combination of a bit heaviness and acidity is both appetizing and satisfying.

From table settings to staff's modus operandi, Mr & Mrs Bund believes in sharing. Formal service, course by course, is eschewed for a more casual sequence that has much in common with Chinese-style service, though Pairet points out that, historically, it was just as French to present dishes concurrently as it is Chinese. "Food in France was served in exactly the same way as in China – communal, sharing style – not so long ago, before French nouvelle cuisine," the chef notes. "Before that, pre-1970s, all restaurants were serving food the same way I'm serving it at Mr & Mrs Bund." But to be honest, to enjoy the food slowly at their best temperature... I still avoid ordering everything together.

How does the kitchen work to ensure that every dish in a restaurant with 180 seats is perfect? It all boils down to precise control. Ultraviolet by chef Pairet takes its serving process by seconds, an almost stringent rule that Pairet applies to all his kitchens, including MMB. Meats and seafoods are cooked in more elaborate processes, such as slow cooking at low temperatures with open fire, to provide the exact level of readiness to be relished.

Each dish at MMB is characteristically simple in presentation but rich in at least two to three layers of flavour. Some dishes at MMB I particularly like, such as the crisp and sweet Scallops Tartare. Scallops are seasoned in a lime bath and hazelnut oil, mixed with caramelized hazelnuts, oyster leaves, soy lemon cream, lapsang souchong tea powder and two kinds of ponzu seaweed.

MMB's Charred Octopus is a most perfect version I've had in Shanghai. Grilled octopus is a common tapas fare in Spanish bistros and is also served at Chop Chop Club. It's crispy on the outside, tender inside, with a full blast of meaty flavors and aromatic tang of the whole. Octopus is cooked in vegetable broth in a pressure cooker and then fried, deglazed with Asiate sauce then flashed under salamander. It's served with fried garlic chips and pepper on top, soy aioli on the side with grilled lemon. A delectable work of art.

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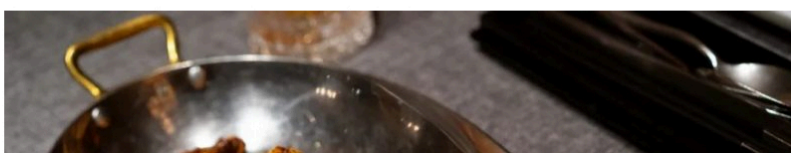


Meunière Truffle Bread is one of Pairet's finger-licking good signature dishes. Grilled whole wheat bread is toasted strongly on one side, the other side soaked in a light meuniere sauce, and one layer of truffle slices topped with lemon meuniere foam to give it a hint of acidity. The dish is also available at Ultraviolet but is done with more complexity – smoked with cigar. MMB's method is similar but the result is different.

Perfectly charred on the outside and tender on the inside, it is easily one of the best grilled chickens I've had in Shanghai, which is almost unrecognizable as a chicken given by its unusual look on the iron plate. The chicken is slowly cooked first, grilled, lacquered with mustard and Asiate sauce, before re-heated with red onions with a garlic lemon sauce made with coriander and chive.

Shitake mushroom is seasoned with lemon juice, olive oil, salt and pepper then roasted in the oven and finished with a nice torch touch. This Torch-Charred Shitake is a common target by other copycats.

This is one of chef Pairet's signature dishes, Black Cod in the Bag. The black cod is simmered in a special heatproof bag with Cantonese sauce made with soy sauce, scallion, mushroom and dried orange zest, and served with steamed jasmine rice on the side. Fork-tender cod and Thai jasmine rice combined to offer an almost Chinese touch to the dish.









The Lemon & Lemon Tart by chef Pairet is never to be missed as well. A whole fresh lemon is removed of its inside and candied for three days before filled with lemon curd, lemon sorbet, vanilla Chantilly, orange and grapefruit, and finished with coconut sable on top. The acidity of the lemon curd is perfectly balanced with the sweetness of the lemon zest. It's highly suggested that diners eat the skin, the filling and sable all together. A dessert that makes all rejoice.



How intriguing; most of MMB's dishes are dotted with traces of lemon, including the finishing touch – Lemon & Lemon Tart. Such a thoughtful arrangement.

MMB was the first restaurant in mainland China to have won the World's 50 Best Restaurants and was the first cooperative project between the VOL Group and Pairet, which has led to the birth of Ultraviolet after its successful establishment on the Bund. Even though domestic customers are gradually increasing and weekends are fully booked, the restaurant still lost some of its foreign customers since the pandemic, with the lively atmosphere of the previous years faded a little. On the other hand, Pairet's Polux in Xintiandi is an all-day dining bistro with fans coming every day for its familiar service and satisfying dishes.

For many Shanghainese, MMB has always been a classic place, a unique presence, a gorgeous restaurant on the Bund. Unlike the fleeting restaurants that come and go, it has existed for over a decade, for good reasons. Even though Paul Pairet has his way of pursuing timelessness, he is in fact making new history. But if we always choose to abandon the old for the new, we may miss the better things that come with the days.

As known by the city, this place is neither grandma's French bistro, nor a typical Bund supping spot. Denim-and-sneakers-clad service staffs glide around diners. Guests leave their seats to the terrace, to the popular tune of handpicked soundtracks. It removes pretentiousness but without sacrificing the elegance, a restaurant with a self-assured but relaxed attitude. A bespoke dining experience built on a foundation of the world's favorites.



An approach to service that is lightened up, without sacrificing an ounce of chicness. Nostalgic and yet adventurous, a restaurant that goes beyond modern French, and makes elegance timeless.

Timeless is eternal. MMB is on my monthly must-visit list.

📍 Mr & Mrs Bund

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