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RachelQuigley, November 8, 2012

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Over the centuries, Shanghai has brought people together from all parts of the globe to congregate and conduct business. The trading centre of the east still displays its multi-cultural history both in its built environment and through its social ease with its European residents and visitors.

In recent years, its cosmopolitan image has also been reflected by the contemporary cultural barometer that is a city's restaurant scene. In short, Shanghai is buzzing with great new places to eat, with renowned chefs and restaurateurs from the west eager to explore the opportunities that this vibrant city has to offer.

This year saw Mr & Mrs Bund, the haute bistro owned by the VOL Group with French-born chef Paul Pairet at the helm, become the first restaurant in mainland China to make it into the top 100 places to eat in the world, as voted for by the World's 50 Best Restaurants academy of over 900 industry figures. It seemed fitting to celebrate such an occasion with a big party, where we also announced the launch of Asia's 50 Best Restaurants, set to make its debut in Singapore in February 2013, and sponsored by S.Pellegrino and Acqua Panna.

The event saw 165 chefs, restaurateurs, writers and critics from across the region – as well as many of Shanghai's social and business elite – gather at Mr & Mrs Bund. They were treated to a feast including signatures such as foie gras crumble, picnic-chicken aioli, long short rib with marrow and ceps and candied 'lemon and lemon' tart.

Our brief but intense gastronomic sampling of Shanghai also took in Pairet's new venture, Ultraviolet – surely the most avant-garde restaurant of note in the world. Jason Atherton, T8 and Jean-Georges Vongerichten.

The new venture at 3 on the Bund from Mauro Colagreco, chef patron of Mirazur in Menton, southern France, is a stylised and low-lit affair designed by co-owner and Paris-based architect Marcelo Joulia (like Colagreco, an Argentinian by birth). The food is signature Colagreco, of course, which means an emphasis on vegetables and the bounty of the French countryside.

Standout dishes included a simple but wonderfully flavourful beetroot amuse, and 'The Forest' – an array of wild mushrooms with parmesan cream and quinoa served on a broad slab of tree trunk. An artfully presented raspberry and lychee dessert with rose water blossom was a delicate bow to the east.

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'The Forest' at Colagrec, 3 on the Bund

Colagrec also sits alongside Unico, a more casual tapas-style joint with a fantastically designed bar and high-quality cocktail list. Both restaurants are open for dinner only.

Upstairs in the same building lies Jean-Georges, Chef Vongerichten's highly successful and longstanding Shanghai outpost. Menu highlights included egg caviar and sea scallops with caramelized cauliflower and capers. The next day saw a lengthy diversion to the superb T8 to sample, among others, tataki of sesame crusted tuna with daikon radish carpaccio (pictured) and truffled black cod, baby potato and roe.



Finally, we managed to squeeze in an all-important visit to the Shanghai restaurant created by our friend London-based chef Jason Atherton: Table No 1. Situated within the Waterhouse Hotel, owned by Singaporean hotelier Peng Loh (who also owns the New Majestic in Singapore and the Town Hall Hotel in London), Table No 1's kitchen is in the capable hands of Scott Melvin.

Our too-brief lunch featured superb razor clams with chorizo, coriander and chilli; vegetable chips with vinegar foam; seared sea bass, broccolini and Spanish rice; pork belly with cassoulet beans; white chocolate panna cotta and passion fruit mille-feuille. This is substantial, unfussy but expertly executed fare served in a simple but relaxed and highly convivial dining space at the southern end of the Bund.

A rapid-fire visit to China's largest city this may have been, but it certainly had us eager to return – not just for the food but also for the sense of energy and ambition that prevails. I, for one, am confident we will see more restaurants from China come to global prominence in the years ahead – with a little bit of help from the World's 50 Best Restaurants and Asia's 50 Best Restaurants, of course.

<www.worlds50best.asia>

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