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The Nose Knows 香氣撲鼻

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Chen: The Nose Knows ????

The nose knows

香氣撲鼻

PHOTO BY SCOTT WRIGHT OF LIMELIGHT STUDIO

With scent being one of the most important factors in distinguishing different flavours in food and drinks, the world's top chefs and bartenders have learnt how to use aroma to enhance, intensify and even have fun with their creations. 頂級名廚和調酒師深明氣味對分辨食物和飲品味道的重要性，因此紛紛利用香味來提升和加強菜式和飲品的吸引力，以至為自己的創作增添趣味。

By Mamie Chen

Chef/founder Paul Pairet had a very special guest at his avant-garde restaurant in Shanghai. He had specially curated an Ultraviolet x Ron Zacapa dinner pairing, and there sat master blender Lorena Vásquez, tasting his dishes and nosing out the aromas with startling accuracy. In one instance, she correctly identified all 15 ingredients that made up an instant grog mix, including one that the chef himself had forgotten about.

"She has the strongest nose," Pairet recalls. "She really impressed me with her capacity to extract all the singular ingredients."

Of course having a superhuman sense of smell and taste is not crucial to the enjoyment of a meal, and Pairet notes that the practice of deciphering the specifics can in fact completely change its overall perception. But he admits that it does make for an interesting exercise and experience for both guest and chef.

Food science writer Harold McGee notes that the ability to dissect smells is actually an uncommon and unnatural skill for humans. "Our brains developed to do the reverse, which is to take all the information that is available in a given split second and put it together as a whole to make sense of," he says. "It's something you have to learn, and you do get better at it the more you do it."

McGee doesn't claim to have a super nose, but he has spent the past decade exploring the osmocism – what he calls all things olfactory – sniffing, pondering and documenting his findings in his new book, *Nose Dive: A Field Guide to the World's Smells*.

Smell, it turns out, is one of the most important factors in distinguishing different flavours in foods. When we eat, receptors on our taste buds register a subset of molecules as sweet, salty, sour, bitter or umami. Meanwhile, volatile

上海Ultraviolet餐廳的大廚老闆Paul Pairet在其裝潢前衛的餐廳裡接待了一位特別的客人，專程為她策劃了一場Ultraviolet x Ron Zacapa美酒佳餚晚宴。調酒大師Lorena Vásquez一邊享用美食，一邊用鼻子極其精準地分辨菜式的各種香味。她甚至能夠準確地分辨出一款即席調配的美酒的全部15種材料，其中一種材料甚至連廚師本人都忘記了。

Pairet憶述：「她的鼻子真的極度靈敏。她可以準確無誤地分辨出所有食材，讓人歎為觀止。」

當然，超乎常人的嗅覺和味覺對享用美食而言並非關鍵，但Pairet發現，解構菜式食材的過程會改變你對菜式的整體觀感。他亦承認，這對客人和廚師都是一次有趣的經歷和體驗。

研究食物科學的作者Harold McGee指，人類一般不常有細分氣味的能力，這並不是我們與生俱來的本事。他解釋：「我們大腦的功能其實是相反的，它可以瞬間收集所有可知的訊息，然後化零為整變成有意義的資訊。你必須透過訓練才能夠細辨各種氣味，經驗越多就越準確。」

McGee不覺得自己擁有超級靈敏的鼻子，但他花了十餘年時間來探索一切與嗅覺有關的事，由嗅聞到分析等，並將全部發現都記錄在他的新書《Nose Dive: A Field Guide to the World's Smells》裡。

嗅覺是分辨食物中不同味道的重要工具。當我們進食時，味蕾上的感官細胞會記下一組組甜鹹酸苦鮮的分子。與此同時，咀嚼期間和融化在嘴巴裡的食物所釋出的易揮發分子，就會經過喉嚨後端進入鼻腔，被嗅覺的感官細胞捕捉下來。

McGee稱：「我認為味覺能讓我們嚐到最基本的味道，而嗅覺可以令味道的結構更豐富和多樣化。」大腦會將味覺和嗅覺提供的報告，結合視覺、觸覺收集到的感官數據以至記憶等，歸納成整體印象。是大腦為我們偵測到味道濃烈的甲基丙酸分子，為我們分辨食物的內容，以及決定是否要吸入瑞士芝士的氣味或掩鼻不聞腳汗的臭味。

廚師早就注意到嗅覺的力量，並明白嗅覺有助提升用餐體驗。Uwe Opocensky是港島香格里拉大酒店和Petrus餐廳的行政總廚，他指出：「不管菜式如何好看，能讓人垂涎的卻是氣味，尤其是能喚起回憶

Opposite page:
Chicken in a Jar by
chef Paul Pairet

對頁：Paul Pairet創作的
菜式「瓶中雞」



molecules are released by the chewing and dissolving of food in our mouths and breathed out through the back of our throats and up to our nose bridges, where they are sensed by our smell receptors.

"I think of taste as providing the foundation and smell as providing the superstructure and all the diversity in flavour," says McGee. The brain receives these reports along with other sensory data like sight and touch – and even memories – to create an overall impression. It's this brain process that allows us to detect the strong odour of methylpropionic molecules, recognise the context, and comprehend whether to savour the flavour of the Swiss cheese or recoil from the stench of the sweaty feet.

Chefs have long been cognisant of the power of smell and how it enhances the dining experience. "A dish can look visually attractive, but it's the enticing aroma that makes you salivate," says Uwe Opocensky, executive chef of Island Shangri-La Hong Kong and Petrus, "especially when it evokes something in your memory bank. I always like to play with that, bringing familiar flavours and aromas a little more forward in a dish."

A Hong Kong resident of 18 years, Opocensky is well-acquainted with how the warm aromas of Asian herbs and spices can trigger the memory banks of his local clientele, and he often uses them to his advantage when introducing lesser-known ingredients and flavours to his

menu. "There may be initial resistance, but if I add some ginger and other familiar smells, my guests can think, 'Okay, I get it.' Subtle hints like this help them feel more comfortable and enjoy a new dish."

Likewise, Pairet utilises aromas as extra ingredients that positively influence a guest's perception of the flavour of the dish. "Everything about smell triggers what I call the psycho-taste," he says. "You eat with your brain before you physically start to eat. Smell preconditions you to what you will taste."

Taking a cue from the popular sentiment that seafood tastes better by the seaside, Pairet brings the ocean to his guests and strengthens



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– Harold McGee

的氣味。我一直喜歡利用氣味作出各種嘗試，藉此突出菜式裡熟悉的味道和香氣。」

在香港生活了18年的Opocensky深知亞洲香草和香料的味道的味道可以喚起本地客人的記憶，因此每次推出採用較少見的食材和味道的菜式時，他都會利用這些亞洲特有的香味來吸引客人。「客人最初可能會抗拒，但只要我加入薑等熟悉的氣味，他們就會想『好吧，我明白了。』這些細微的暗示會讓他們放心嘗試一道新菜式。」

同樣地，Pairet也會善用氣味來影響客人對菜式味道的觀感，增加菜式的吸引力。他說：「氣味可以觸發我所稱的心理味道，在嘴巴真正吃東西前，大腦其實已先吃了，氣味會影響你品嚐到的味道。」

為什麼總覺得在海邊吃到的海產更美味？就是因為這個道理。Pairet為了加強一道帶子菜式的味道，特意將海洋帶到客人面前，讓客人在海浪拍岸的聲畫和鹹鮮的海洋氣味中享用這道菜式。

他說：「氣味不應該是主角，而應該是出色的綠葉，其作用是將人的注意力引到菜式本身。氣味只應該用來加強菜式的吸引力，而不是喧賓奪主。」

芝加哥米芝蓮三星餐廳Alinea大廚兼老闆之一Grant Achatz表示：「香味跟味蕾上能嚐到的味道一樣重要。刻意運用的香味，尤其是用來觸發情感的香味，是廚師的重要工具。」

用套著枕頭袋的枕頭墊著一碟青豆鄉村火腿端上桌，期間讓枕頭慢慢洩出薰衣草的香氣，可以瞬間將客人帶到一座英式花園裡；製霧機吹出朱古力味濃郁的香氣會讓客人驚歎不已；用橡樹葉悶燒一小塊天婦羅野雞所散發的懷舊氣味能讓人落淚。Achatz也跟Pairet一樣，會利用氣味作為聯繫情感的輔助角色，但也會偶爾故意用惱人的氣味來令客人混淆，讓他們停下來注意某個菜式的細微差別。

他會透過控制食物的質感、濃稠度和黏度，來改變食物味道的釋放程度。舉例說，他利用過濾和攪打將一道濃稠的海鮮湯變成如海綿一般輕盈，入口即化。當這道海鮮湯配搭切成薄片的貝類海產、

This page, from top: Truffle Burnt Soup Bread from Ultraviolet; the restaurant's chef/founder Paul Pairet

Opposite page: King Crab with Yoghurt, Green Peas and Mint by Uwe Opocensky

本頁上至下: Ultraviolet餐廳的招牌菜 Truffle Burnt Soup Bread; 餐廳總廚兼老闆Paul Pairet

對頁: Uwe Opocensky創作的皇帝蟹配乳酪、青豆和薄荷





☞ Smells should help people immerse themselves into the main idea of the dish. They should only strengthen and never distract from the perception of the dish

氣味的作用是将人的注意力引到菜式本身，只應該用來加強菜式的吸引力，而不是喧賓奪主 ☞

– Paul Pairet



THIS PAGE, TOP: COURTESY OF THE ALINEA GROUP; THIS PAGE, BOTTOM RIGHT: PHOTO BY MATTHEW GILSON

the perception of his scallop dish by immersing them in the sights and sounds of crashing waves and a diffusion of briny, seaweedy ocean scents.

“Smells shouldn’t take centre stage,” he says. “They should be obvious and even redundant to help people immerse themselves into the main idea of the dish. They should only strengthen and never distract from the perception of the dish.”

Grant Achatz, chef and co-owner of three-Michelin-starred Chicago restaurant Alinea says, “Aromas are just as important as the flavours you can detect on your palate. The intentional use of aroma – especially harnessing it as an emotional trigger – is an important tool for us.”

Guests are transported to an English garden by a dish of spring peas and country ham served atop a linen-covered pillow that releases a lavender fragrance as it slowly deflates. They are astonished by fog machines billowing out dense vapours redolent of rich, chocolate aromas. They have literally shed tears over the nostalgia-laden scent emanating from a smouldering twig of oak leaves skewering a morsel of tempura-fried pheasant. Like Pairet, Achatz generally incorporates smells in a connected, supportive role. But he also likes to occasionally provoke intentional confusion with jarring elements that cause guests to pause and take notice of the nuances of that particular course.

He also manipulates the textures, densities and viscosities of foods to change their level of flavour release. For example, he strains, thickens and whips a seafood broth into an airy “sponge” that instantly dissolves on the palate. It’s served with thin slices of shellfish, celery granita, gooseberry sauce and horseradish cream, which all release their flavours differently. “We know which flavours will be released first, which will be delayed, which dissipate quickly and which will linger. If the edible portion has to be chewed, we might punch things up at the beginning with an intentional aroma from the pillow. That’s how we create layered effects.”

With the blurring of lines between food and drink, mixologists are also emphasising creativity and innovation in the world of smells. The rotary evaporator might well

*This page:
Nikita Matveev, centre,
with fellow bartenders
at The Old Man*

*Opposite page,
clockwise from top:
Spring peas and country
ham served over a
lavender-scented pillow
at Alinea; Grant Achatz;
Matveev’s Dangerous
Summer cocktail*

本頁：Nikita Matveev
(中間) 與The Old Man裡其
他調酒師合影

對頁上圖起順時針：Alinea
餐廳以一個會慢慢洩出薰衣草
氣味的枕頭墊著一碟青
豆鄉村火腿端上桌；Grant
Achatz；Matveev調配的雞
尾酒「危險夏日」



be head bartender Nikita Matveev’s most cherished piece of equipment at The Old Man, a modernist Hong Kong cocktail bar known for inventive, flavour-focused cocktails. The sky’s the limit when it comes to the aromas he can extract and capture in alcohol or water and the ways he can employ them in his cocktails.

For Cat in the Rain, a twist on the Paloma, Matveev transforms rotovap calamansi into foam, which is spooned over a mix of mangosteen tequila liqueur, salted bianco vermouth and tonic for a refreshing drink with layers of tropical aromas. The Dangerous Summer looks like a thick mango lassi, but a last-minute spritz of the earthy, leathery, masculine scent of vetiver gives guests a moment of bewildered bemusement.

“For me, a drink isn’t finished if it doesn’t have an aroma. Sometimes I want to highlight something. Sometimes I want to surprise someone. How do I decide what I want to do?” Matveev asks with a smile. “It depends. That’s the game.” ☺

芹菜蓉、醋栗汁和綿滑的辣根醬食用時，每樣食材釋放味道的過程都不同。「我們知道哪種材料的味道會先釋放，哪種會滯後，哪種會很快消失，哪種會持久不散。遇到需要花時間咀嚼的食物，我們會在開始時就先讓枕頭刻意釋放香味，以增加菜式的層次感。」

至於介乎食品與飲品之間的雞尾酒，調酒師也同樣強調調味上的創新。在裝潢時尚的香港雞尾酒吧The Old Man裡，旋轉式蒸發器可能是首席調酒師Nikita Matveev最重要的工具。酒吧以創意豐富和注重味道的雞尾酒聞名，他能夠用酒或水將任何香味萃取出來，然後運用到他調配的雞尾酒裡。

以改良自Paloma的雞尾酒「雨中貓」為例，Matveev用旋轉蒸發器將酸柑的味道打成泡沫，然後用湯匙舀到由山竹龍舌蘭酒、加了鹽的白苦艾酒和湯力水調成的雞尾酒上，在層次豐富的熱帶味道上增添一點酸爽的口感。「危險夏日」則看起來像印度的芒果奶昔，但最後噴發的泥土、皮革、濃烈的香根草味卻讓人有點茫然不解。

「對我來說，沒有香味的雞尾酒是殘缺的。有時我想強調一些東西，有時我想給人驚喜，我如何決定想要什麼？」Matveev笑著自問自答：「視情況而定，沒有一定規則可言，好玩就行。」 ☺