



Paul Pairet lives in the heart of Paris within walking distance of the Relais Carré d'Or, a luxury, all-suite hotel where he is executive chef. He talks to David Tarpey

Parisian pacemaker

I'M VERY lucky as I live only 376 foot-steps from the hotel, which is just off the Champs Elysées and close to the Arc de Triomphe. So I get up at 8.30am and am at the hotel by 9.30am. I never eat anything during the day as this would stop me tasting the food I prepare. I'm trying to get the younger members of my brigade to skip their meals, but they're not interested.

09:30 When I arrive I have a cup of coffee, talk with the suppliers and organise the mise en place for lunch. We dress the plates here like the Chinese chefs do.

I've been here for just over a year now, but before that I spent seven years working and travelling around the Pacific. I cooked in Hong Kong, Jakarta and Sydney. I got to taste and cook real South-east Asian food. You could call my food fusion cuisine, but that term is confusing and overused. It's more about discovering and adapting new techniques of cooking from different cultures.

Sydney was the most interesting place to work because of all the movement in Australian cuisine. Because white Australia has very little past, they are happy to experiment and blend their products. Also, British and Australian cuisines are having a great influence on each other.

Many people in France think British food is all about lamb and mint sauce, but they've never been to the UK. They don't realise what's happened there in recent years.

The beef issue has become so political and is all a bit beyond our control, but I must say that when I worked in Hong Kong I used top-quality Angus beef and it was very good.

Yet, as a dish, beef has never been popular in France. And I only put it on the menu as a fall-back. I wouldn't attempt to put on British beef right now because I wouldn't want to upset people. I'm afraid the current episode of the beef issue will only reinforce the British image of the

French as arrogant and stubborn. BSE was certainly a shock to us all because we realised that we'd somehow lost control of the food chain. But I'm not sure that French beef is any better or safer than the British product.

At 12.30pm I'll take a break for an hour or so once lunch is up and running. I always go home.

14:30 After 2.30pm I prepare tasting dishes so I can experiment with different ideas. I like to involve the staff with this. You have to keep creating new compositions if you want to stay honest and build a new repertoire. This keeps me passionate about food.

I'm originally from Perpignan near the Spanish border, and the cuisine there is typical Mediterranean food. It has strong flavours and little subtlety. So I go the full hog with my flavours. I also make my own spices.

But the service in this hotel is very subtle and discreet. The guest profile here is of company presidents and chief executives, diplomats and show-business people. Some of these include Kim Basinger, Billy Crystal, Stevie Wonder and Michael Jackson.

18:00 So, in the evenings dinner is very special, and our waiting staff advise the guests on what combinations of foods and flavours go best together. I'm in the kitchen the whole time and making sure everything is just right. Last April Michelin awarded our restaurant, Café Mosaic, a "three forks" status. Not bad, considering it was only a tearoom before I arrived six months earlier.

I head home some time after midnight, and my wife always has something for me. But I tend to eat the same things, such as bacon, egg and soy sauce or a tin of cassoulet. It's very boring.

When I worked abroad, I used to work my way through a 2.5kg tub of Nutella. It saved my life. ■



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Relais Carré d'Or

46 Avenue George V, 75008 Paris
Tel: 00 1 40 70 05 05
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Rooms: 23 VIP suites ranging in price from Fr4,350 (£442) to Fr18,950 (£1,800) for the presidential suite

Owners: an anonymous Middle East consortium

Director: Charis Kyriacou

Chef: Paul Pairet

Restaurant: Café Mosaic