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Man at His Best

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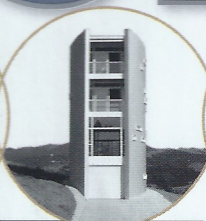
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[THE CHEF]

You want comfort food? **Paul Liebrandt** is not your man. You want America's most challenging, daring cuisine, give him a call. And bring a blindfold.



THE INGREDIENTS—lime blossoms from Nice, ham from a Spanish pig fed exclusively on acorns—are odd enough. The fusion of those ingredients—eel with watermelon, scallops with chocolate—is still more peculiar. But that's not even the end of it. That's not even to mention the bizarre ways chef Paul Liebrandt's bizarre food has been served. Diners have been blindfolded, fed dessert soup through the nipple of a baby bottle, ushered into a smoke-filled room to peel jelly from the back of a naked woman. "Half of them didn't even realize it was a real woman until one guy poked her bum," he says.

These days Liebrandt—a twenty-six-year-old Brit transplanted to New York—has renounced the flashier, Buñuelian performance art. But it's still a good glimpse into his technique: He toys with stimuli, taste, and texture to create new responses to food. Sometimes his dishes are great, sometimes you'd rather eat nails, but his food is always fascinating and daring.

Liebrandt first turned heads at New York's Midtown standout Atlas, where he became a three-star chef at twenty-four years old before moving downtown to Papillon. He recently left Papillon and will open his own place in New York next year, but until then, try this, the perfect dish for Esquire men, he says. The Dover sole is a manly fish, yet elegant and stylish: the Sean Connery of fishes. —MATT CLAUD

Dover Sole with Vanilla and Black Truffle

By Paul Liebrandt

24 oz Dover sole
(depending on size,
either 2 small fillets or
1 large fillet)
2 cups duck fat
salt and pepper
2 tbs sherry vinegar
1/4 cup truffle juice
2 tbs heavy cream
1 vanilla bean
1 oz black truffles, chopped
2 tbs chives, chopped
3 oz black truffles, sliced

» Dice the sole into very small pieces. Warm the duck fat in a pan to 118 degrees, then add the sole. Turn off the heat, but let sit in the hot fat for 10 to 12 minutes. Then remove sole from duck fat and let sit on a paper towel to drain off excess fat. Keep warm and season with salt and pepper. Set aside.

» In a small pan on medium heat, reduce sherry vinegar and truffle juice by one third, add cream, and reduce to a coating consistency. Split vanilla bean and scrape out vanilla. Add vanilla and chopped truffles. Let sit off heat for 4 minutes to infuse flavor, then add chives.

» Arrange sole in the center of a large warm plate. Drizzle the sauce over and around the fish. Lay the black truffle slices on top. Serves 4.