

## **The Madman and the Meal**

by Tom Peters

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On the chalkboard at Zingerman's deli in Ann Arbor in the mid '80s I read truffles \$1,600 a pound. What could be so good about these mushrooms to cost so much freaking money. It remained a question in my head for 10 years. It's 1994, I'm in Paris and on an afternoon walk I happened upon a handsome, art deco-ish restaurant, Maison de la Truffe. Ah, House of truffles! It's a beautiful spring day so I have the host seat me outside at a small table. There's no mistaking I'm in France and I'm going to try to take the mystery out of these expensive mushrooms. My French sucks so I just point to a truffle pasta dish. Only one of the other five tables lined up outside the restaurant is occupied, it appears to be an American couple judging from their Eddie Baur apparel. I sip water and pass the time buttering a roll while waiting for this special dish. The plate comes and it's piled with steaming, curly flat pasta noodles and topped with a mound of thinly sliced black truffles. The wait person signals me to mix the sliced truffles in with the thick creamy pasta.

The aroma is like something of never experienced before, very earthy is the best way I can describe it. They're musky and pungent enough to not please everyone. But for me, it was love at first bite. I start to take another spoonful, but now distracted by a man walking in the middle of the intersection nearby...screaming into a cell phone. Strutting around the intersection like a madman as cars are beeping and maneuvering around him. I look at the American couple and we share an inquisitive look of bewilderment. I slowly take a few more bites to confirm my love for these rare treasures. However, the madman rages on and making quite the spectacle of himself. I'm sure nobody's going to confront this man because he looks like he's plotting a terrorist attack. The screaming and frantic pacing goes on for 15 or 20 minutes then suddenly stops. The couple and I look up and he's gone. We all smile at each other. I dig back into my dish and 5 minutes later he's back at it again. Even madmen must find a restroom occasionally. Although urinating on the curb would have been consistent with his bizarre behavior. I found the love for these magical mushrooms and a disdain for people yacking on cell phones in public.

Back stateside I find a little restaurant in Beverly hills called Maude's who's famous chef Curtis Stone set aside the month of December for nine course meals centering around truffles. A friend and I went every year. I was thankful Maude's didn't have outdoor seating.