

The Brief

ON-TREND

Fine Dining's Juicy New Frontier

With the rise of juice pairings at high-end establishments, wining and dining might soon not be the only way to eat and drink well.

At Restaurant Andre, diners tuck into a beautiful dish of crab, with delicate lobes of sea urchin, cucumber, elderflower blossoms – and wash the food down with a glass of apple juice. No cartons or bottles here, though; instead, the apples had undergone a three-month-long transformation, fermenting in pine needles and infused with the smoky aroma of charcoal.

This is part of the restaurant's juice pairing programme, where the fermentation of fruit, vegetables and spices is crafted to match the flavour profile of each course.

The concept was pioneered by Rene Redzepi almost a decade ago at his Michelin-star Noma restaurant in Denmark. Instead of the usual wine-matching, courses were paired with a "juice flight" of curated blends of cucumber and whey, apple and pine shoot, sorrel and nasturtium.

Andre Chiang was inspired to create his juice pairing menu when he observed that relatively little effort – compared to other aspects such as decor and service sequence – is put into curating non-alcoholic beverage options. He believes that while wine is limited to certain flavour profiles, his *jus des idées* ("juices of ideas") offer infinite possibilities and calibrations to create the perfect blend or create the best contrast of flavours with food.

But not every chef is in love with the idea. Some think that the concept is still too newfangled for diners to accept, and too much work for a small demographic of customers.

Julien Royer, chef-owner of Odette, says: "I tried to introduce juice pairings a few years ago, but diners weren't very receptive. I personally believe in classic pairings and to let food shine with wine."

Saint Pierre's Emmanuel Stroobant, however, disagrees: "It's a great alternative for people who do not wish to have an alcoholic drink – both because it is considered a healthier option, and juices are an upcoming trend, considering the many juice bars blooming in Singapore."

But even he concedes that juices are harder to pair than conventional alcoholic beverages. "The greatest challenge is consistency. In fermentation, with differences in humidity and temperature, we obtained different results, even when following the same exact recipe. With wine, it is established. With juices, there is still a lot to be explored; we are certainly entering uncharted waters." 

