

At two new malls, Bedok Mall and Westgate, many new food concepts are being run by young people



Eunice Quek

Over the next two days, two new malls – Westgate and Bedok Mall – are scheduled to open and will roll out new food offerings, which will all open by the end of this month.

Both malls are managed by CapitaMalls Asia, which adopted a slightly different approach to curating the food and beverage selection.

It has given opportunities to young entrepreneurs who have little or no experience in the F&B industry to set up shop.

At Westgate in Jurong East, which opens tomorrow, food kiosks opening at basement two of the mall include fruit juice stall Fruiti, and Proofer Bakery & Pizzeria, which specialises in freshly baked pizzas for takeaway.

Two restaurants in the mall are owned by food service provider Select Group, but the concepts were spearheaded by two Singapore Management University undergraduates.

Griddy is a savoury waffle outlet, while Pho Street is a casual Vietnamese restaurant.

Ms Alicia Chua, 24, Select Group's senior executive for business development, says: "We are always exploring such special projects with the intention of teaching the next generation about the F&B business."

Hoping that this may be the start of his future in the industry, Mr Joshua Chia of Griddy says: "I would like to develop a local brand that is able to stand up to the likes of international brands such as McDonald's and Starbucks and help to bring it overseas eventually."

Some new tenants are looking to expand their brand into the shopping mall arena for the first time.

Mr Edmund Chi, 30, second-generation owner of Guan Chee Hong Kong Roasted Duck's first restaurant at Bedok Mall, says: "We cannot just stay in the coffee shop or food courts. Once we are successful at Bedok Mall, we will look to open at other malls too."

Guan Chee Hong Kong Roasted Duck was started 30 years ago by Mr Terence Chi, 58, and has outlets in food courts as well. They sank in about \$300,000 for their restaurant, which will open by the end of this month.

Vegetarian eatery GreenDot at Bedok Mall has a "green fast food" concept. It began two years ago at Temasek Polytechnic and two other schools at a "lower start-up cost" and targets youth.

One of the owners, Mr Justin Chou, 24, says: "In the schools, we would have students – both vegetarian and non-vegetarian – queuing for our food. We hope to get everyone to reduce meat consumption and go green."

On getting young entrepreneurs to open at the malls, Ms Teresa Teow, head of retail management in Singapore for CapitaMalls Asia, says: "We are happy to work with young F&B entrepreneurs, who bring with them fresh ideas. As their business partner, we are pleased to lend them our support, such as sharing of market knowledge



Ms Anita Chia opened Proofer Bakery & Pizzeria because she loves food.

PHOTOS: SEAH KWANG PENG, PHOSTREET, SELECT GROUP, GRIDDY, PROOFER BAKERY AND PIZZERIA, FRUITI

and expertise in store design which we hope will help them realise the full potential of their F&B concepts.

"We also encourage our young F&B entrepreneurs to leverage on our network of 85 malls outside Singapore and expand in the region."

Frasers Centrepoint Malls, which also has new food offerings in the pipeline, says its strategy for getting new F&B tenants is directed towards "new and family-wholesome dining experiences".

A spokesman for Frasers Centrepoint Malls says: "We are always on the lookout for opportunities to refresh our tenant mix by striking a good balance of actively seeking new tenants and working with existing tenants to show our support for their businesses."

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WESTGATE

Where: 3 Gateway Drive
Percentage of F&B outlets: 25 per cent
Opens: Tomorrow, 10am to 10pm daily

Among the prominent food names gathering at the new Westgate mall in Jurong East are two new eateries thought up by two undergraduates from the Singapore Management University.

They are Vietnamese quick service restaurant **Pho Street**, spearheaded by finance major Seah Yiyuan (above right), and **Griddy**, a savoury waffle restaurant managed by business major Joshua Chia (right).

Both are owned by Select Group, which hired Mr Seah as an intern with the company, while Mr Chia is the first scholar under its SME-Spring Scholarship Programme.

On planning a Vietnamese restaurant, Mr Seah says: "During the research phase, we couldn't find a good gauge of how receptive Singaporeans are to the cuisine. There were a few restaurants serving Vietnamese food but they did not appeal to the locals. The market still has much room for growth."

He says the steepest learning curve was in the execution phase, which involved hiring a Vietnamese head chef, as well as bringing the concept to the masses in the future. Pho Street at Westgate opens on Wednesday and its second branch opens at the new Bedok Mall on Dec 10.

Prices start at \$10 for a bowl of pho and \$2 for snacks.

Mr Chia of Griddy says product development was the toughest part of going into the food and beverage business.

He says: "It was challenging to pinpoint what would be the right taste for each waffle sandwich or how big the portions should be as we had a small sample size for our taste tests and there wasn't a clear indication of which tastes or portions were about right. "We wanted to offer Singaporeans a fresh take on the waffle, where they can enjoy it as a gourmet sandwich with their choice of savoury or sweet flavours. This helps us to stand out from burgers and sandwiches."

A Griddy Burger, for example, has a hand-made beef patty, lettuce, tomato, cheddar cheese, and sauteed mushrooms with a mushroom waffle. It costs \$6.90.

Those looking for a healthy option can head to fruit juice outlet **Fruiti** (right), which specialises in sugarless and water-free juices and smoothies.

The juice blends (from \$4.30) are divided into three categories: Daily Booster, Total Wellness and Beauty Cleanse; while the smoothies are divided into two sections – Slim & Lite and Power Punch.

Owner Angel Ang, 30, says: "It was quite challenging to convince suppliers to have confidence



New bites (clockwise from top) include Proofer's signature pizza, pho from Pho Street and Griddy's signature burger.



in me, and have a similar mindset of what I'm trying to achieve with this healthy living and eating concept."

Proofer Bakery & Pizzeria's owner Anita Chia, 34, who used to work in the banking sector, says she is hoping that she has picked the right location.

She says: "It will be a good business hub and we hope to do deliveries in the area once everything is ready. I love food and have always wanted to venture into the industry."

She recently opened the first Proofer Bakery & Pizzeria at Changi City Point last month.

Pizza flavours with a twist include The Carbonara, which has crispy bacon, ham and potato with a light cream sauce; Proofer Signature, with pineapple, fresh ground beef, ham and grilled oregano chicken; Sausage Fest, which has pepperoni, bockwurst sausage and chicken cocktail sausage with smoked barbecue sauce; and Singapura Satay, which has pineapple and chicken with peanut sauce.

A 10-inch pizza costs \$11.90, while a 1/4 slice costs \$3.60. Milkshake prices start at \$2 (with any pizza purchase).

These four restaurants join other new food offerings at Westgate; including **Huang Ji Huang**, a stewed pot restaurant with about 400 outlets in China and its first overseas branch here.

Restaurants opening their first branch outside of the city include ramen outlet **Ippudo**, Japanese beauty pot concept **Tsukada Nojo** and Thai steamboat chain **MK Steamboat**.

Westgate's anchor tenant **Isetan** will feature new food offerings too. In addition to its supermarket, there will be new brands such as **Johan Paris**, a Japanese bakery known for its French breads; **J-Dining**, a Western deli serving take-away meals; Japanese deli counter **Nagomi Deli**; and **Juice Bar by Yaoya**.

Adding to the Japanese food craze – 30 per cent of the mall's dine-in food outlets are Japanese – are **Kinoshita** from Osaka, famous for its teppan nabe (hot iron pot), and **Robata Robata**, a robatayaki grill restaurant by Singapore's Shin Group.

