

Chefs step out of kitchen to ensure satisfaction

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SINGAPORE – Be it their food allergies or which wines they prefer, no detail is too small for the staff of French restaurant Cocotte when it comes to their regular customers.

An IT system keeps track of such details, while a daily briefing apprises staff of the requirements of each customer ahead of his arrival, said the restaurant's Head Chef Anthony Yeoh.

The traditional idea of a chef is one who concerns himself mainly with the food, but as more chefs helm their own restaurants, they are also making it their business to ensure customers get top-notch service.

At the Singapore Management University's Institute of Service Excellence Industry Forum held last month, Chef Christophe Megel, Executive Director of At-Sunrice Glo-

balChef Academy, said in chef-run restaurants — where leadership is “more prominent” — staff have “a greater vested interest” in the business. This, he said, is why the overall service experience tends to be better in such restaurants.

Mr Megel, who delivered a keynote speech at the forum and was a speaker at a panel discussion, noted more such “freestanding” restaurants have been established in Singapore in recent times.

These restaurants, which are operated by stakeholders — like chefs — rather than investors, tend to put their focus on three areas: Personalised service, genuine care and needs anticipation, he said.

“These three major drivers will change the landscape tremendously,” Mr Megel said. “They (the chef-owners) know it's their lifeline. If they do not focus on these, they can't survive

... (and) compete.”

Although Mr Yeoh, 32, does not own Cocotte, he makes most of the key decisions and has been hands-on in making sure customer service remains of paramount importance.

The restaurant's management spends “a lot of time” sitting down with the staff to emphasise this point. “We train the staff ... (and) want to give them a sense of ownership about what they do and that translates to the guests,” he said.

Chef Frederic Colin, who owns Brasserie Gavroche and Cafe & Bar Gavroche on Tras Street, noted chef-owners have a greater understanding of how to run the kitchen and the business, and have more flexibility and control in making changes to better cater to the needs of the diners and the restaurant.

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CHEF-OWNER

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Being at the helm of their restaurants also means the chefs have more control over the menu and the food served to customers.

For Ms Alysia Chan, 33, Chef de Cuisine at WOLF — which revolves around the “nose-to-tail” concept — calling the shots in the kitchen means she has the freedom to inject her own style into her food and create a unique dining experience for customers. “I am French-trained, but I like British food because I was brought up in London. And I also like Southern food ... (and) I get to express (my passion for these cuisines) here,” Ms Chan added.

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