

All mixed up

Mixologist Steven Heng shows **Aneeta Sundararaj** the way to drink the food and eat the drink

Fallen geisha
(dry ice creating foam effect).



IN most fine dining restaurants, your waiter might say something along the lines of, "Let me tell you about our specials today. We have a miso-glazed Chilean Garoupa with a side of mashed potatoes and sauteed spinach."

He might then suggest beverages that can accompany this meal. This statement presupposes that what you eat is the focus of your meal. What happens if it's the other way round — where what you drink is the focus of the meal?

"Why not we make the drink complement food rather than food complement the drink?"

This is what Steven Heng, a 24-year-old mixologist with Classic Coffee and Beverage, asked when he prepared for the J-Infinity



The salad drink, **Velvet Kult**.

Drink Gustation showcase.

"A bartender follows recipes. The moment he creates a drink, he becomes a mixologist," he explains. His aim was to combine degustation (taking a small amount of food or drink into the mouth to test its quality) and the art of mixing.

Inviting you with, "You will drink the food and eat the drink," Steven divides the showcase into a set of eight-course drinks that include aperitifs, salads, pasta, main course, dessert, coffee and tea.

Unlike most dinners, where every dish is paired with an alcoholic beverage, Steven chooses to make his drinks "mock-tails" (non-alcoholic versions of alcoholic beverages). "My idea is to use the things you will get in a kitchen. For example, I will use something like balsamic vinegar or beef stock. Or even a masala. I will infuse the spices and learn the scent or taste that it creates, such as Lapsang souchong tea has a smoky taste. I can use this as a substitute for smoky beef bacon."

With that, Steven introduces the salad drink — Velvet Kult. This drink contains beetroot, cucumber and basil. While it sounds strange, the dose of rose lime vinaigrette make it lovely.

The added bonus is the knowledge that all the ingredients are super foods advocated by healthcare specialists. Indeed, one of the guests at the showcase is overheard saying, "I wish I had known about this when I was a child. I would have taken more salads."

For the pasta dish, Duo Spag, Ste-

ven says, "The most common sauces for pasta are Carbonara and Napolitana. One is cream-based and the other is tomato-based. I also want to awaken all your senses, especially taste." So, he makes pasta using peach puree and the Carbonara is made using a mango-thyme cream sauce.

Preparing a drink can take up to two weeks, says Steven. "I'm like a mad scientist in the R & D room in the office. I use molecular techniques to test all my drinks and like to give a twist to dishes we all know about."

This statement is exemplified in the next drink he highlights, Paris Kiss. Steven was inspired by a dessert created by a French chef (Pierre Herme) called Ispahan. In its original form, Ispahan is a rose macaroon filled with lychee cream and fresh raspberry. Steven uses the combination of the all the flavours in this dessert and enhances it with orange zest. To add texture, he mimics the lychee cream in the drink by using lychee foam.

In most restaurants, a meal ends with coffee. Similarly, here, Steven serves Illy Cube. In the style of serving a cappuccino, the resulting beverage is one that combines espresso, illy crema (a thin layer of foam at the top of a cup of espresso), milk foam with a hint of orange and cinnamon.

"I hope that, in future, people will see that there are many things you can do with the things in your kitchen to make interesting drinks," says Steven.

Indeed, his enthusiasm to explore how versatile food can be infectious and you might find yourself believing him when he says: "Mixing is always fun, creative and borderless."

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Steven Heng is into the art of **mixing**.



Explore the **versatility** of food.

A visual delight.