

Three young entrepreneurs talk about crossing over from the fashion, music and design industries to make their mark as restaurateurs. **By Debbie Yong**

# Fresh F&B faces

## A whole new roll

**Frederick Yap**  
**Pince and Pints**  
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 www.pinceandpints.com  
 Opens Monday

WHEN'S the last time you had lobster on a casual dress-down dinner with friends? Or have you ever?

Ponder no longer, when Frederick Yap's lobster specialist Pince and Pints unrolls its shutters next week. For the 46-seater will serve only three dishes uniformly priced at \$48: a whole lobster either steamed or grilled with a side of fries and salad; a lobster roll that encases hearty chunks of mayonnaise-coated lobster flesh in a butter-fried white bun; and chilli lobster, a take on the classic Singaporean chilli crab dish served with golden-crust *mantous*.

"Not many people get to eat lobsters on a regular basis in Singapore as they are typically very pricey and only found in fine dining restaurants. But we wanted to make it accessible to the masses and serve lobsters only, which hasn't yet been done in Singapore," says the 27-year-old co-founder of fashion e-tailer Love, Bonito of his first F&B foray.

Except for the meat in the lobster rolls, which are steamed, deshelled and chilled ahead of dinner service daily, the whole lobsters are slaughtered after you place your order. Only American lobsters, or the *Homarus Americanus*, are used – a species picked for its durable hard shells and year-round availability – says Mr Yap, and each lobster typically weighs between 600 and 650g, which yields about 160g of edible lobster flesh.

If you think Pince and Pints bears uncanny resemblance to London's immensely popular Burger and Lobster chain, you aren't far off the mark. After all, Mr Yap calls the Burger and Lobster's business model "an inspiration" and sources his lobsters from the same seafood suppliers in Maine, Boston and Nova Scotia in Canada. He's even met up with the chain's co-founder on his last trip to London.

Rather than launch a franchised outlet of the brand here, however, Mr Yap says his aim is to create a made-in-Singapore brand designed for the local market. The buns in the lobster rolls are baked by a traditional bakery in Chinatown, for instance, while the mayonnaise sauce in the lobster rolls are based on a recipe the hobbyist chef concocted himself. With two wok stations in the kitchen, Pince and Pints plans to roll out more dishes adapted from local *zichar* classics such as a deep-fried XO lobster and lobster e-fu noodles when it expands to all-day dining hours eventually.

"I'd rather build a brand myself. Pince and Pints can grow as a name," believes Mr Yap, who has his sights set on regional expansion. "There's plenty you can do with lobsters, the business opportunities are immense as they are a very sustainable, scalable product. I definitely see myself in the F&B industry for a long time, but we want to take it one step at a time."



fully automated.

Last year, the brand nudged its way into the high fashion ranks when it partnered with Parisian couturier Julien Fournie to launch a collection during the Fide Fashion week. It was also the same year that Mr Yap and his wife stepped down from the company as its managing director and creative director respectively. Part of Mr Yap's liquidated shares went into funding Pince and Pints – "a close to \$1 million venture" – as its sole proprietor, while wife Velda Tan has enrolled in fashion designing courses at Central Saint Martin's in London.

On the difference between the fashion and F&B industries, "I'm no longer one of the only two guys in a company of 40 people," he laughs. But more seriously, he adds: "F&B gives you a chance to connect to customers directly while e-commerce is very 'offline' – you reply to queries over email. And it's nice when you get to see your customers genuinely happy as they dine."

Besides Pince and Pints, Mr Yap has also launched a distribution arm supplying lobsters to restaurants such as Tanjong Beach Club and the Naked Finn, and ultimately aims to launch a central kitchen to package retail products such as lobster butter and lobster oil from the restaurant's lobster spare parts. A retail shop front will also be plugged into Pince and Pints' Bedok holding facility in a month for lobster-seeking home cooks.

Now there's definitely no need to dress up for that.

Though the concept seems to be one that can be easily copied, Mr Yap believes the crux of his business lies in keeping his prices unbeatably low, "and the only way to get the low prices is to import everything ourselves to cut out middle-man costs".

Like Burger and Lobster's 950 sq ft lobster holding facility within the UK's Heathrow Airport, Mr Yap has set up a 1,000 sq ft holding facility for 1,200 lobsters in Bedok – picked for its proximity to Changi Airport – where lobsters flown in live from the US and Canada are rested before they are transported to the Duxton restaurant, which can hold up to 200 lobsters in tanks.

Lobsters are kept bound up in cold waters between 5 and 7 degrees Celsius, "to keep them in hibernation mode to stop muscle degradation", explains Mr Yap.

A total of 1,000 lobsters are currently flown in three times a week, which means each lobster that ends up on your plate hasn't been caught for more than a week, assures Mr Yap, who earlier spent a month working at Fish & Co to better understand kitchen inventory and live-stock management.

Sounds very technical? That's exactly what drives him. "I've always like building things, from warehouses to supply chains," laughs the amiably earnest diploma holder in mechanical engineering.

While his wife Velda, her sister Viola and their friend Rachel Lim fronted Love, Bonito as fellow founders, Mr Yap presided over the brand's back-room operations, stretching from its China-based manufacturers to its local distribution channels, which he has since



### YOUNG AND EAGER

From top: Frederick Yap of Pince and Pints; Darren Wee of Babette; and Ivan Yeo of The 1925 Microbrewery and Restaurant

### STARRING LOBSTERS

Left, from top: When it opens next Monday, Pince and Pints will serve only three dishes: a whole lobster either steamed or grilled with a side of fries and salad; a butter-fried roll filled with hearty chunks of mayonnaise-coated lobster meat; and chilli lobster, a take on the classic Singaporean chilli crab dish served with golden-crust *mantous*

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