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# MADRID FUSIÓN MANILA

TOWARDS A  
SUSTAINABLE  
GASTRONOMIC  
PLANET...

# JULIEN ROYER

THE ESSENTIALS OF  
ESSENTIAL CUISINE

ODETTE  
SINGAPORE

Award-winning chef Julien Royer is co-owner of Odette, a Modern French restaurant located at the iconic National Gallery Singapore. Established in collaboration with The Lo & Behold Group, Odette offers a constantly evolving menu that showcases globally sourced produce underpinned by classic French culinary techniques.

Odette is named in tribute to Royer's grandmother, one of his greatest influences in life and in the kitchen, and reflects her belief in always ensuring that the fundamental pleasures of enjoying a meal are delivered in the most thoughtful, welcoming and hospitable manner.

Royer has devoted years to forging lasting relationships with some of the finest boutique producers from around the globe—including suppliers from Japan, France and Australia. He takes pride in offering guests a unique opportunity to taste these exceptional ingredients at their peak in his restaurant in the heart of a city that is itself at the crossroads of the world. The result of this devotion to sourcing is an inspired effort that celebrates and respects seasonality, terroir as well as the skills of some of the world's top boutique producers.



In 2016, Royer will be the only Singapore-based Chef and one of the headlining personalities at the Ubud Food Festival in Bali, Indonesia. He recently presented in a Four Hands dinner with Chef Arnaud Bignon from 2-Michelin starred London restaurant, The Greenhouse. Royer will also serve as mentor and judge at the San Pellegrino Young Chef 2016 Competition held in Seoul, Korea.

Prior to Odette, Royer won over diners and critics during his four-year tenure at JAAN at Swissotel the Stamford, Singapore. The restaurant received numerous accolades under Royer's leadership, including 11th place on the Asia's 50 Best Restaurants 2015 and 74th on the World's 50 Best Restaurants 2015 long list. Royer was also named Chef of the Year at the World Gourmet Series Awards of Excellence 2014.

WG Magazine catches up with Julien Royer...

It's interesting to learn how chefs find their passion for cooking and where they grew up. Julien Royer tells us how he found your way into the culinary world...

My journey to becoming a chef started from an early age in the French countryside of Cantal, Auvergne. My family's rich agricultural background meant that I was growing up surrounded by nature. This gave me a deep sense of respect for seasonality and the integrity of ingredients.



I started out wanting to be a baker. Growing up, I spent a lot of time in the kitchen with my Grandmother, Odette. Some of my greatest childhood memories are tied to tarts that she would make. From prune tarts and blueberry tarts to cheese tarts, there was always a tart for every season.

I began my career as a chef training with Michael Bras in Laguiole, and then moved to Durtol where I worked for Chef Bernard Andrieux. From there, I went to London to be sous chef to Antonin Bonnet at Michelin-starred Mayfair restaurant, The Greenhouse. In 2011, I moved to Singapore to take up a four-year tenure at JAAN at Swissotel, and in 2015, I was thrilled to be given the opportunity to start Odette.

To be honest, it's not so much of being innovative, but rather focusing on developing a good understanding of taste. I've come to realize that the more I've matured as a chef the more confident I've become in removing elements from a dish rather than adding to it.

It's all about bringing the focus back to the fundamental pleasure of eating and allowing remarkable ingredients to shine through strong cooking techniques with a touch of garnishing and sauces. While technique and sourcing are important, I don't enjoy artifice in my dishes.

Julien's cuisine is unique, it is a dining experience inspired by a combination of fresh and quality ingredients with an impeccable balance on a plate...

Bringing balance on the plate is a constant and daily task. You have to taste everything – from the basic mise en place of coulis, puree, sauce, jus down to the product itself. Part of the work is to taste and educate the palate on a daily basis and to be able to visualize where modifications need to be made to strike that balance. It's tricky, but it's really about tasting and developing an understanding of ingredients in its various forms, textures and natures.

For example, the flavours of lamb continues to evolve throughout the season so you'll need to keep tasting the product and tweaking the seasoning according to the day's offerings.

It is also extremely important to maintain balance on the menu on the whole. The tempo of the meal is of utmost importance and has to flow stylistically in terms of intensity of flavours, with crescendos and decrescendos in the right places. It has to have a sense of coherence from start to finish. For example, you would never start off with a dish of burnt charcoal and serve a delicate raw scallop after.

If I had to draw the flow of the menu – it'll be like heartbeat. It needs to build and get stronger, then end smoothly and softly.



MARINATED FREMANTLE OCTOPUS



HAND DIVED SCALLOP 'AU NATUREL'



Julien Royer worked with some of the best chefs – Michel Bras and Bernard Andrieux, he tells us how it helped him as a chef...

As one of my early mentors, Chef Michel Bras has had a great influence on my journey as a chef. His belief in allowing vegetables to take equal footing on a plate with the proteins, has instilled in me a deep respect for the integrity and purity of each ingredient in every dish.

Beyond that, he has also taught me the importance of humility, open mindedness and respecting the individuals who play a part in delivering the restaurant experience. He has always had a way with people and treats every member of the team with great respect. He's played a huge part in opening my mind and seeing how a chef should conduct himself outside of purely cooking.

With Chef Bernard Andrieux, I developed a firm understanding of classic French culinary foundations. He was always a bit tougher in the kitchen and more old school. He was very focused on training all the chef de parties on making quality consommés, jus, stocks, vegetable broths, and sauces.

I've been very lucky to have served under the tutelage of both chefs. You always try to take a bit of all your experiences and make them your own.

Julien describes his culinary philosophy, and takes us through the process of creating a new dish...

My cooking style is very much produce-driven. It is guided by the best available produce and is continuously evolving. I also try to stay grounded to the values I learnt as a young chef, which are to respect the taste, terroir and integrity of ingredients. At Odette, every ingredient has its place and purpose, and is treated with the utmost care to highlight its purest flavours.

The core of Essential Cuisine is to offer honest cooking that makes remarkable ingredients shine. It's all about honesty, honoring the integrity of ingredients and giving heart to the people who cook, serve and enjoy the food.

When I create a new dish, I think of the best available produce and ingredients and work together with the team to produce a dish that pleases all our palates. For example, we're currently working on a dish with sweetbreads and garlic. We've continuously tasting and trying to find the sweet spot between my preferences and that of my sous chefs. When we finally find that mid-point which pleases everyone, it is more likely to please our diners as well.



THE 55' SMOKED ORGANIC EGG



Julien tells us what ingredients inspires him, his favourite ingredients and ingredients that he may have given up on...

Asparagus from Asperges de Roques Hautes in the Marseille region. It's a truly exquisite ingredient. Typically with asparagus, you'd use the top of the spear and remove the bottom third as it's often too hard and fibrous. With this, we're able to just shave off 2-3mm. We are the first restaurant in South East Asia to use it.

Black preserved Japanese shallots from the Fukuoka prefecture are also a stunning ingredient. They are similar to black garlic but are Japanese baby shallots or Rakkyo. It has a pungent taste and is oniony, velvety and yeasty without being overly strong. The product is very unique and is not commonly used, even within Japan.

This is really dependent on the mood and the season. One thing that often comes back is citrus. Lime, yuzu, calamansi, kaffir lime, lemon, sudachi – a touch of citrus can transform a dish and add depth and dimension to it.

Bread. We've tried it many times but it's a difficult job. You need to have an understanding of the flavours and technical complexities of baking and most importantly, the right hands. It takes years of practice and understanding. I have a lot of respect for bakers.



CHOCONUTS

Special cooking techniques behind Julien's signature dishes...

We are not the most avant-garde in terms of the use of cooking techniques. Instead, we try to keep the essence of classic French cuisine with the use of sauces. The DNA of French cuisine to me are these sauces. Every meat course, for example, will always come with a jus.

We also try to use every part of the produce we work with. For example, seafood and poultry are always transformed into bouillon, consommé or sauce. We try to make the most of every ingredient.

Creativity, Technique or Produce...

Without question: produce... Chef Michel Bras has a great saying which guides my approach to food – "Technique serves produce and not the other way". You may have a strong grasp of technique, but if the product is bad to begin with, you may be able to make it less bad but you are still unlikely to transform it into an exceptional dish.



LEMON T'ART

Julien Royer tells us what motivates him...

Seeing my staff grow within the team is extremely rewarding. We have two members on our service team who had never worked in a fine dining setting prior to joining us. I have been very impressed by how much they have grown in their 1 year and 4 months with us. It is very humbling to know that they have grown their skillsets with us and know that they will use us as a reference when they eventually move on to new challenges in their future careers.

As a chef, the changing seasons, working with remarkable produce, discovering new ingredients and meeting people is also a great source of motivation and inspiration.

Being a chef is perceived as a glamorous profession, Julien's advice to chefs who are entering the kitchen for the first time...

While being chef may be perceived as a glamorous profession now, this was not the case 10 to 15 years ago. I think it is dangerous for this consideration to be the main motivator for young people to become a chef as they might not have the patience for it. The reality is, being chef is a vocation that requires a lot of sacrifice. For example, instead of hanging out with friends on the weekend, you will have to work. Instead of getting off work at 6 or 7pm, you'll likely be stuck in the thick of the dinner rush and will only likely leave the restaurant closer to midnight.

The first few years of my career were not glamorous at all. I spent months washing pots and pans, peeling potatoes, and scaling fish.

If a young chef is really passionate, I'd tell them that it's the best job you can have with endless progression from day one. Whether you want to make the best burger in the world or open the best restaurant, if you are passionate you can do it. It's difficult, but if you have the heart for it and are willing to put in the hard work and make the necessary sacrifice, you can do it.