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Timbre+, which is not air-conditioned, is painted with vibrant graffiti designs. It opens on Friday. ST PHOTO: MARCUS TAN

New venture in one-north offers 21 hawker stalls and 14 restaurant brands in an industrial-chic environment

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Food may not be the first thing people think about when it comes to the Timbre Group. It is better known for its live music venues, music festivals and pizza parlour 12-inch Pizzas & Records.

But that is changing. It has embarked on its most ambitious food and beverage venture so far, one that has been three years in the making.

The 24,000 sq ft Timbre+ opens on Friday at JTC Corporation's LaunchPad at one-north, just across the road from Fusionopolis, a research and development complex in Ayer Rajah.

The sprawling 700-seat non- air-conditioned venue houses 21 hawkers and 14 restaurant brands, and will cater to the working population of more than 40,000 in the one-north district.

JTC tore down the canteen that used to occupy the site and built a larger space for Timbre+. Large containers are part of the industrial- chic aesthetic, complete with vibrant graffiti designs.

Instead of the usual hawker centre-type stalls, some stallholders will operate out of repurposed containers, while others serve and cook food in specially imported Airstream caravans from the United States, food-truck style.

There are also dedicated restaurant spaces in Timbre+ for some brands, good for 20 to 30 diners.

And in line with the Timbre brand, the space also has a stage for live music from Wednesday to Saturday nights.

Timbre Group's managing director Edward Chia, 32, declines to reveal the cost of the project, saying only that it is "still investing further" because of plans to use the space for festivals.

On setting up Timbre+, he says: "We took a long, hard look at the future of Timbre. We cannot photocopy Timbre so many times anyway. It took a long time to get the right concept, along with an efficient layout."

He hopes that Timbre+ can help address issues facing the food and beverage scene, such as manpower shortage, high rents and cost of investment.

"With small menus, you can still give customers variety without reducing productivity and keep things affordable," he says.

He adds that curating the list of brands at Timbre+ was like a "personality test".

"Diners now want to have interaction with the people making their food, so I need to have chefs who like to meet people."

Indeed, the mix of stallholders is an interesting mash-up of restaurant chef-owners, young hipster hawkers and experienced old-timer hawkers. Eighteen hawkers from the old canteen have returned. They will operate on weekdays from 6am to 6pm, while the restaurants will open from 11am.

The hawker stalls include ones selling economy rice, chicken rice, soup and fruit juices,

Restaurant offerings include Spanish tapas and paella from Portico Platos; deep-dish pizzas with unusual toppings and crusts from The World Is Flat by Tanuki Raw and casual French fare from Garcons.

Other familiar names include chef Damian D'Silva, who declines to say what he will serve; Big Bern's American Grill by Bernie Utchenik, creator of Botak Jones; and Cajun seafood chain Dancing Crab by the TungLok Group. Timbre will also run a bottle shop with an island bar selling craft beers and whisky.

Two "incubator" spaces have been set aside for first-time entrepreneurs. The spaces, one of which is a caravan, can be leased for three to six months.

Stallholders whom The Sunday Times spoke to are clearly excited by the new space, especially the older hawkers.

Mr Boh Chuang Kheng, 50, third-generation owner of Nam Heng Hainan Chicken Rice, is happy to be back with his old hawker friends.

He says in Mandarin: "I think the (Timbre+) concept is good and it's very comfortable for diners too. The bulk of our business comes from the lunchtime crowd. Over the years, we notice that people start to order takeaway food from 10am onwards.

"The restaurants don't worry me, they give more variety to diners. When it's pay day, they can eat there for a while. After that, diners still come back to us."

Mr Vincent Koh, 47, who will sell fruit juice from one of the converted container stalls, says he considers the new space an "upgrade". He says in Mandarin: "The place has changed so much, but we need to keep up with the rest of Singapore."

Amid the excitement of Timbre+'s opening, many of the young owners also admit to being uncertain of its prospects.

Chef Chung Deming, 34, who will open Kush, selling modern Singaporean skewers and rice bowls, says: "It is anybody's guess how Timbre+ will work out. Whether it is sustainable will be a challenge for all of us."

Portico Platos' chef Nixon Low, 30, says: "Timbre+ is a huge opportunity for us. Yes, there are many brands here and it can result in a price war. But I see this as a collaboration rather than competition."

- **Timbre+ opens on Friday at 73A Ayer Rajah Crescent, JTC LaunchPad @ one-north, from 6am to midnight (Monday to Thursday), 6 to 1am (Friday and Saturday). It is closed on Sunday. Live music at night from Wednesday to Saturday . Go to www.facebook.com/timbreplus or www.timbreplus.sg**

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