

Juice for Caviar, Soda for Foie Gras

THE tagliatelle with black truffles and butter was a stumper.

At the French Laundry in Yountville, Calif., the perfect beverage matters as much as the food. Thomas Keller, the chef, insists on it. Paul Roberts, his wine and beverage director, makes it happen.

For the pasta white Burgundy diner didn't out a small whole mill

That's right The drink contrast with the butter to carry the

Throughout a succession of dishes during a fall meal at the French Laundry, Mr. Roberts poured the unexpected. Lobster fricassee needed the tart effervescence of Meyer lemon Gus soda pop. Coho salmon roe sprinkled over a buttery porridge called for a wineglass filled with chilled chamomile tea. Foie gras took well to Boylan root beer. "The root beer has a wonderful herb cream thing that's going on but with a little bitterness to keep the palate clean," Mr. Roberts said.

The diner who ch out during a multi the merits of an ex one wants to say, " and I'll have the tas pregnant woman wa while her husband s Valley.

Now there's a way fo avoiding alcohol fina the table: the nonalco

"In the past we'd say, and we'd give up on th "But we need to be as as we are for a guest w ent wines." He charges beverage pairing at botl Se, Mr. Keller's restaura Center. A wine pairing a as the multicourse dinne

The inspiration came wh Se last year. Mr. Roberts out when he was a boy ea his parents, so he matched for drink, with the wine pa he did the same for an adu colonic pairings spread, and now it is ordered by four or five diners a week at both restaurants. The desire to hold back on alcohol is not limited to people who never drink. Especially during the holidays, when palates are pounded with cups of good cheer, diners long for a break. Some might

opt for a glass of Champagne to start the meal, then taper off. Even for the true wine geek, several glasses during a lengthy multicourse dinner can obliterate taste buds. And wine pairings are especially risky for anyone driving.

"It's a much bigger group than you think," said Clark Wolf, a restaurant consultant who divides his time between New York and Northern California. "There are more people who absolutely don't drink at all, and people who will not drink at all at any time or, as we say, on a

consumption of the food: midimen-ctly fine, it

Mitchell, the meal paired popular at lunch and on Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday evenings. A recent menu included steamed citrus sea bass en papillote with Orangina; green mint iced tea paired with short ribs braised in Asian black tea; and a glass of house-made cherry-lime ginger ale served with semolina-fried oysters and cucumber mâche salad spiked with lovage

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The juice is a favorite at Per Se, but the real star is a line of Gus sodas. Drawing its name from the acronym for grown-up soda, this Manhattan company produces a less sweet, slightly crisp drink made with cane sugar instead of high-fructose corn syrup.

Mr. Roberts discovered Gus during lunch at the Whole Foods in the basement of the Time Warner Center when the soda company's founders, Steve Hersh and Jeannette Luoh, were pouring samples. The flavors — star ruby grapefruit, crimson grape and Valencia orange — are sophisticated enough for Mr. Keller's complex food.

Deborah Cahn and Ted Bennett, the owners of Navarro, a small winery in the Anderson Valley, began bottling the sterile-filtered varietal grape juice 26 years ago, when their baby developed a milk allergy. Ms. Waters was their first customer. This year they sold out of their supply of 4,000



Fred R. Conrad/The New York Times

HOLD THE ALCOHOL

At Per Se, above, Meyer lemon soda accompanies a crisp fish fillet with sautéed mushrooms and spinach.

cases and expect to repeat the feat with 4,200 cases next year, with restaurants increasingly their customers.

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It's just the sort of thing Ellen Rubin of Rosendale, N.Y., is looking for. She eats out almost every night with her husband, Harold. She never drinks; he rarely does. So they seek out restaurants where they can still share a festive drink with dining companions.

"I've always wanted something that comes in a pretty glass that has a special taste to it," Mrs. Rubin said. "I want to feel like I am part of the party."