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## The Wild Garlic, Beaminster

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**By James Tourgout**

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IT IS nearly a year since Mat Follas won BBC's Masterchef and just over six months since he opened his Wild Garlic restaurant in Beaminster.

He has already earned plaudits for his restaurant in the Square, Beaminster, while establishing his name in Dorset's culinary elite alongside such celebrity chefs as Mark Hix and Lesley Waters.

The Wild Garlic scored near-perfect marks in the respected monthly food magazine Olive and also gained a glowing review from Guardian food critic Matthew Norman.

Follas may be gaining a growing reputation at the upper echelons of the catering world but the emphasis at the Wild Garlic is very much on the homely, and quality local produce.

The restaurant is itself intimate, but not cramped. Its design means that tables are close enough to create a warm and convivial atmosphere but far enough apart so that you aren't accidentally eavesdropping on your fellow diners.

Mat's unpretentious drive for good honest, local food is reflected in its décor and wooden farm house style tables.

The staff are friendly and prompt without hovering at your elbow or being overbearing.

Following the arrival of bread soon after our arrival, we were soon handed our menus but also given the choice of a specials board.

Our party plumped for such selections for the starter as paprika fish soup and pigeon breast salad.

The fish soup looked and tasted delicious, with a generous serving although we seemed to have polished off the bread before it arrived.

Main courses on the day we visited included local sika venison with roasted vegetables and a port wine reduction and smoked mash, roasted pork belly, and whole baked plaice, with capers and lemon butter, and a fillet of beef, with roasted vegetables and smoked mash.

The food was beautifully cooked and presented. My venison, from a local estate, was juicy, tender and brimming with taste.

The vegetables were fine but it was the smoked mash – a house secret, apparently, which set the dish off.

My fellow diners' dishes were also top notch although the beef was too rare for one companion, who would have preferred to have been asked how she liked it cooked.

The Wild Garlic's eye to detail and delightful touches extended to a delightful cameo of garnished clams between courses.

For dessert I tried a dessert of champagne and lemon verbena jelly with Somerset brandy cream.

It was a revelation for someone usually plumps for the chocolate option every time.

It finished off the meal perfectly. Presented with panache, the combination of cream, jelly and champagne gave the final course a frisson so often missing from many menus.

The wine list ranged in prices from about £13 to £40, although we settled for the Chateau Fontenille at £23.

Overall, the dishes did give value for money although, obviously, it all depends on how much you consider how much a good meal is worth.

Starters were at the £7 or £8 mark, while mains were at about £17 to £20.

Crucially, the Garlic did not scrimp on the servings and the whole dining experience itself was one to savour.

The amiable Follas seems like a man who would naturally shy away from the limelight as a celebrity 'chef proprietor' but there is no getting away from the fact that his status as a Masterchef winner is a draw for some diners.

It was a lovely surprise when he came out to talk to the diners after cooking the main dishes although it's clear that the quality of the food and restaurant speaks for itself.

The Wild Garlic, 4 The Square, Beaminster, 01308 861446. Opening hours: Lunch: Tuesday to Sunday, noon-2pm (11am-2pm Sun brunch); dinner: Thursday to Saturday, 7pm-11pm.

My The Wild Garlic bill:

Pigeon breast salad (x2), £16.00

Sprats, £7.00

Fish soup (x2), £16.00

Venison (x3), £54.00

Plaice, £17.00

Sirloin, £18.00

Chateau Fontenille, £23.00

Cheese, £7.00

Champagne jelly, £8.00

Cappuccino, £3.00 TOTAL: £169

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