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## Hotel review | The Wild Garlic, Dorset

The best thing about the new apartment above this Beaminster restaurant, owned by MasterChef winner Mat Follas, is that you only have to go downstairs for top grub



**Sally Shalam**

The Guardian, Saturday 6 November 2010

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MasterChef winner Mat Follas runs The Wild Garlic, which now has room for overnight stays.

With the exception of Thomasina Miers, the most recognisable MasterChef winner is surely genial, goateed Mat Follas, who scooped the title last year showcasing his love of foraged food. Victory has enabled the Dorset-based former IT consultant to follow his star. The Wild Garlic is it, a small, unassuming restaurant in tiny Beaminster (I say tiny because one minute you're approaching the town square, the next – if you do not park right away – you will be swept out of town by the tide of traffic, next stop, Bridport).

### The Wild Garlic

4 The Square,

Beaminster

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[thewildgarlic.co.uk](http://thewildgarlic.co.uk)

Lewin apartment, from £120 per night, private dinner upstairs, £50 for two. Expect to pay around £35 per head for three-course dinner excluding drinks in the restaurant.

Gastronomes will, of course, have read the [opening reviews](#) last year. The reason I am coming is to try out a new apartment, just opened above the restaurant. It proves a devil of a job for me to book the apartment and get a table on the same night, but eventually I pull it off.

My private domain is reached via a staircase from the restaurant (or a side door when The Wild Garlic is shut). So here I am, in the late afternoon, watching the light fading through the stone mullion windows and the 4x4s emptying out from the square.

I'm in the large bed-sitting room looking through to a kitchen-diner, off which is a shower room. I like the personal touch – a good eye has put this together, it's a personal selection, rather than handing over cash to Laura Ashley's design service and saying, "There you go, get on with it." Purple velvet, orange leather, black and white toile de Jouy, a bit of Ercol furniture here, and Scandinavian glass there. It's a posh bedsit, that's what.

Time for a bit of my own foraging. Disappointment. No little plate of brownies to have with a cup of tea. There is milk, butter and – nice touch – a bottle of wine in the fridge

though, and a basket on the counter-top contains tea and coffee things and Dorset cereals. It's on the basic side, however, and I cannot find a teapot or cafetière.



The Wild Garlic's apartment. Photograph: Philippa

Gedge

No news tonight, either – the telly is only a DVD screen. When I ask about the heating though, chef himself comes up to sort it. Blimey.

Dinner, with a friend (Sophy has been itching to come for months), is everything we'd hoped and more. Exciting food, served by smiling and knowledgeable staff, in an unponcey atmosphere.

An inter-course amuse bouche arrives after the starter of hand-dived scallops with garlic on seaweed and salad of butternut squash and goats' cheeses. It's a plate of tiny leaves, nasturtium, oyster leaf, red sorrel and red Russian perilla.

"Bloody good – worth the money, which most restaurants round here aren't," says my pal, savouring every mouthful of her £20 plate of rose veal fillet with almonds. Venison, the best I've ever had, comes on a bed of the only red cabbage I've ever liked and accompanied by a mini game pie. By the time autumn berry clafoutis and chilli chocolate soup turn up, we've slowed to a crawl. All credit, we agree, to Follas, frankly, for opening off the beaten track, but thank goodness I only have to get upstairs.

The Wild Garlic is a bijoux restaurant-with-a-room, but I can't help thinking that very soon Mr Follas and his worthy team are going to need more restaurant – and more rooms.

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## What to do in the area: By the locals

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### A pub meal

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The Fox & Hounds ([foxandhoundsinn.com](http://foxandhoundsinn.com)) in Cattistock is a warm and friendly country pub, where Scott, the Landlord, serves great food. This is my "local", not that I get there very often any more and it's the place where I had my first experience of running a professional kitchen. Before I opened my restaurant, Scott & Liz were generous enough, or foolish enough, to invite me to do a couple of try-out nights at the pub, where I designed the menu and cooked it. It was very stressful but made me realise just how much fun cooking professionally could be; it was an unforgettable experience.

**Mat Follas, co-owner of The Wild Garlic**

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### Take a hike

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Lying in the hills of west Dorset, the town of Beaminster is a hub for walkers. One of my favourite hikes takes you from St Mary's church in Beaminster, via St Mary's in Netherbury, and ending at St Mary's in Stoke Abbott. It's about five miles in all and there are pubs at both ends. The walk takes you past Parnham House, once the home of John Makepeace and his furniture school, then on to Netherbury and Stoke Abbott, two of the prettiest villages in Dorset.

**Amanda Follas, co-owner of The Wild Garlic**

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### A shopping trip

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The historic square in Beaminster is surrounded by 18th- and 19th-century houses of golden limestone. Although there's a small supermarket in the square, Beaminster has managed to buck the usual high street trend and retain a glut of independent retailers.

There's the Green Drawers eco shop ([greendrawers.com](http://greendrawers.com)), Cilla & Camilla (gift shop), Strummer Pink (interior design), @Home (kitchenware), three ladies' clothes shops, four cafes and two galleries, not to mention wonderful local food producers Nick Tett (family butcher) and Fruit 'n' Two Veg. **AF**

Surprisingly Bridport (six miles from Beaminster) has one of the best hat and millinery shops in the UK. T Snook ([snooksthehatters.co.uk](http://snooksthehatters.co.uk)) was founded in 1896 and is on West Street. This year saw the first Bridport Hat Festival, held on the third weekend in September, and it is likely to be an annual event. If you wear hats, a visit to "the greatest little hat shop in the land" is a must.

**John Dean, Colly Farm Bridport ([collyfarmbridport.co.uk](http://collyfarmbridport.co.uk))**

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## A day trip

Take the kids to quirky West Bay near Bridport to enjoy an excellent rope-themed playground that recalls the area's rope-making history. Follow that with fish and chips on the pier as the sun dips into the sea. (Boxing Day sees the [West Bay Wallow](#), a fancy dress swim for charity. Brrr!)

**Shirley Samways, Cafe@AnnDay ([annday.co.uk](http://annday.co.uk))**

The village of Symondsburry lies a mile west of Bridport and nestles under Colmers Hill, a landmark in the area. It is a typical west Dorset village, with its manor house, tithe barn and church. Park and visit the pottery in Manor Yard, before walking up Duck Street from where you can walk to the top of Colmers Hill and have a stunning view of Golden Cap and the Jurassic coast. If you wish, you can walk on and join the Monarch's Way, the escape route taken by Charles II in 1651 as he fled to France after the battle of Worcester. On return, your efforts deserve a stop at the Ilchester Arms in the village, where you can enjoy a drink and an excellent meal by a roaring fire. A warm welcome is a given! **JD**

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## Local culture

The first week in November sees the annual Bridport Literary Festival, which started last Friday and ends tomorrow (7 November). Still on the bill are talks on Rosamund Barlett's Tolstoy biography and a talk by economist Howard Davies on the financial crisis. Events are held at the Bridport Arts Centre and the Bull Hotel. For full details of the schedule see [bridport-arts.com/bridport-literary-festival](http://bridport-arts.com/bridport-literary-festival). **JD**

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## Readers' tips

### **London: [Magic Wok](#)**

It's only a tiny place near the Thistle Barbican among a row of small shops.

Me and a few friends used to come here on a Friday night after a few of...

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The Rat and Ratchet pub in Huddersfield cask ale house with a large selection of handpulled ales.

The pub is owned by Ossett brewery (an independant...

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Quite close to the university. The Kashmir is not the most attractive of curry houses.

However they do serve an excellent curry at a price that even a...

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