



Dover sole meunière, mussels, parsley, garlic and matchstick potatoes

The Dining Room

The Wild Rabbit, Kingham

Words: Harry McKinley

Opened in 2013, The Wild Rabbit was Lady Bamford's first sortie into the overnight sector. The wife of a billionaire industrialist and an early proponent of organic farming, she is perhaps best known for Daylesford: her swish group of farmshops and cafes that started life on the family's country turf, but which have since sprung up 'town-side' in the likes of London's Notting Hill and Marylebone.

These idylls of organic produce offer comfortable urbanites everything from cashew nut butter, made by hand on the Cotswolds farm, to London Honey, collected from bees that have set up home on the Thames's barges.

There's a placid sophistication to it all – a world where everything bar the food exists on a sliding scale of neutrals and in which, inevitably, a candle somewhere breathes bergamot or lavender or fig leaf into the air.

Billed as a 'modern British inn' – a place to eat, drink and sleep – The Wild Rabbit

embodies the same organic philosophy in concept and the same pastoral-but-pristine attitude to design.

Situated in Kingham, in the Cotswolds, The Wild Rabbit is just a few minutes drive from the Daylesford Gloucestershire estate, along a road that perhaps sees more waxed sports cars than tractors. It is a deeply picturesque part of the country: home to former prime ministers and former Top Gear presenters alike.

The inn features 12 bedrooms – with private cottages also available a short stroll from the main building – and the whole ground floor is given over to the restaurant and bar.

Already a popular spot with Cotswolds residents and weekend city dwellers, The Wild Rabbit is experiencing a new wave of interest thanks to its recently achieved Michelin star – a coup for the restaurant, and certainly for Chef Tim Allen, who took the reins at the end of 2015, formerly head chef at Launceston Place in South Kensington.

"The star has made a big difference," he

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says. “It’s increased demand and we’re finding more of our guests are passionate about their food and the quality of what they eat.”

Food, of course, has always been a vital component of The Wild Rabbit’s appeal, accounting, as Allen notes, for “about two and a half times more of the revenue than rooms.” But under his direction, the menu has been elevated. The produce was always organic and the quality high, but Allen has brought with him a certain flair for the creative and infused the food with more personality than was present previously.

“If we can find local and organic then that’s great, but the focus remains on the quality,” he explains. “For example, we have a monkfish dish on the menu where the fish is from Scotland and the English asparagus from the Wye Valley, but with garlic that is foraged from about three miles down the road. Produce is important but so is originality, and the ideas stem from us.”

Inventive dishes include roasted quail breasts with Morteau sausage, smoked shallots and a verjus reduction; fricassee of braised veal with confit onion, truffle purée and baby capers; and Amalfi lemon cream, granita, iced curd and poles of crispy white meringue that stand up in the bowl like winter tree trunks.

The modest tableware – evoking the country kitchen style that pervades the dining room – is a mix of pieces from Daylesford, with plates by John Julian. Stately bottles of water are from Blenheim Palace, which, at a mere half an hour’s drive away, is an added local touch.

It’s not just what’s on the plate that is seeing an additional nudge, there’s a newfound focus on wine, spearheaded by award-winning sommelier Marcin Ozielby

– another new addition to the team. He’s overseen a dramatic expansion of the inn’s offer, broadening the wine menu from one page to 12, with a few renowned and difficult to source vintages included amongst the 100 varieties now available. A wine cellar is also in the works, featuring temperature-controlled storage that will allow The Wild Rabbit to build upon its collection and grow the menu even further.

The Wild Rabbit’s Michelin star is undoubtedly reward for the attention and investment currently being slathered like hand-churned butter on sourdough over its F&B offer. And indeed the star is already helping to ensnare a fresh and more varied audience for the country spot. But one element that has remained unchanged since its opening is the overall attitude and design.

True to form, Bamford was personally responsible for The Wild Rabbit’s look and feel, both in the grand sweep and in the smallest detail, handpicking cutlery and glassware. In appearance the bar and restaurant exist somewhere between classic country pub and high-end homewares catalogue. Comfortable and lived-in, it’s far from a stage set, but it would be disingenuous not to acknowledge the polished veneer that clings to everything from the wooden bar stools to the tabletop plant pots. It has all of the hallmarks of the countryside but – put together as it is, with such self-consciousness and thought – it affords guests an experience that straddles traditional notions of hospitality, with all of the refinement and gentility that suggests.

www.thewildrabbit.co.uk

IN A BITE Owner: Carole Bamford • Executive Chef: Tim Allen • Sommelier: Marcin Ozielby • Interior Design: Carole Bamford • Covers: 50 • Cutlery: Daylesford Plates: John Julian • Water: Blenheim Palace



Selection of three sorbets:
bitter chocolate, blackberry,
apple, pear and rhubarb