

# The Wellington Arms

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Jason King, an energetic Australian, is delighted that British caterers are becoming more adept at utilising their local, seasonal produce. "In Australia we have always taken care to know all our ingredients' provenance and cooked seasonally, using produce at its freshest and least expensive. We'd never serve parsnips in summer or asparagus in winter. This awareness was around there long before the current interest here, so it's something that comes naturally to us. We even started keeping bees when a customer challenged our use of 'local' honey because it was made ten miles away!"

Jason and Simon Page are joint owners of The Wellington Arms, which they bought together in 2005.

chestnut dumplings; twice-baked Marksbury cheddar soufflé – a favourite of the keen regulars. Occasional special dinners indulge Jason's love of North African, Middle Eastern and south-east Asian flavours. Moroccan chicken and apricot stew spiced with his own ras-al-hanout; falafels with harissa and zhoug paste. Australian Murray River pink salt (coloured naturally by minerals) is one of several links to his homeland.

Out in the garden plum trees cast dappled shade over summertime tables. In the raised beds and polytunnel grow squashes, potatoes, cabbages, tomatoes and salad leaves. Herbs tumble from pots by the kitchen door.

"I've always grown my own veg and enjoy getting out into the garden between shifts. In the summer most of our



Jason has twenty years experience working for some of the world's best chefs and his considerable international experience gives some unique twists to their ever-changing menu.

Influenced entirely by what's in season as well as what's growing in their own garden, they always serve new and inventive dishes alongside enduring favourites. Local rabbit and wood pigeon terrine with a chutney of Angela's apples; wild venison stew with shallots and

vegetables come from the garden," says Jason. One of his specialities is crispy fried pumpkin flowers stuffed with ricotta, parmesan and lemon zest. Bagfuls of quinces, plums, apples and damsons are also brought by the neighbours to be magicked into chutneys and jams. Four Tamworth pigs live happily in the woods behind, on land that is rented in return for a supply of ham, and in the adjoining paddock there are one hundred and fifty rare-breed Welssummer, Maran and Cream Legbar

chickens. "Ham, egg and chips couldn't be better: home-cured ham, a fried egg from our hens and potatoes we grew, cut and fried." Their pork belly is slow-roasted and served with sticky red cabbage and tart damsons.

Surrounded by pastures and woods and neighbours who enjoy a shoot, The Wellington doesn't want for game. "Many loyal customers arrive with surplus pheasants, rabbits, geese, ducks and crayfish happy to see them put to good use. It can be chaotic out the back with fur and feathers everywhere, but it's a great chance for the team to learn new skills. I'm passionate about passing on my knowledge, and I'm really proud of some of our trainees – teenagers who couldn't even peel an onion when they started, but who are now reaching an extremely high

flowers look perfect and we're completely ready." Personal touches fill the pub's dining room: Simon's mum's hand knitted tea-cosies, Jason's preserves and hens' eggs for sale on the bar, two Norfolk terriers padding between the eight tables. Simon pots up bulbs in winter to ensure a continuous supply of hyacinths and miniature daffodils for table decorations in spring.

It's said that good things come in small packages but Simon and Jason feel the need to spread out: the dilapidated oak-framed barn is earmarked for development into guestrooms and extra dining. "We want to leave space in the bar for additional drinkers or late-callers who fancy just cheese or pudding with a glass of wine. Those people are as important to us as the diners."



standard." One local lad, Dan, impressed Jason so much with his regular visits and offerings of trout that they took him on in the kitchen. His trout is potted with shallots, chilli, lemon zest and dill or tea-smoked by Dan himself.

It's a relaxed atmosphere and having supper feels more like eating in with good friends than 'going out'. That said, you generally have to book well in advance to get a table here. Simon, who runs front of house says, "I love getting ready for service, when the tables are set, candles lit, the

**The Wellington Arms**  
**Evening main courses £10-£17.50**  
**Monday-Friday 2-/3-course lunch £15/£18**  
**No food on Sunday night**  
**Nearest train: Basingstoke**