

Waitrose Food Illustrated

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HAMPSHIRE HIGHLIGHT
by Tonia George

If Tom and Barbara from the 1970's sitcom *The Good Life* had a pub it would be very much like this one. Except Tom would be better-dressed and named Simon, and Barbara, a very capable Aussie chef called Jason. And it's cosy, as opposed to twee; with a herb garden just outside the kitchen door and a sizeable vegetable patch, 35 rare breed hens and 7 beehives beyond the carpark. Other ingredients are sourced with dedication from local organic farms or further afield – as in the case of the pink Murray River salt from Jason's home country.

Clearly, these people are living the dream, but with a modest eight tables to feed, it all seemed very achievable to me. A special of deep-fried courgette flowers stuffed with ricotta was exquisite, with a frilly batter providing the perfectly crisp counterfoil to the creamy cheese. Quality diver-caught scallops on samphire sautéed in garlic and butter showed that fine ingredients are key to the success of dishes at this place, not cheffy trickery. The steak and lamb were cooked to perfection demonstrating skill with the meats although the chips could have been crisper. Homegrown runner beans were as sweet and tender as allotment vegetables always are, but the puddings were the highlight.

A sponge pudding, topped with burst damsons sitting in the most delicious custard was the sort of dish that makes you wonder if it is ok to lick the plate. A rhubarb jelly was a little too set, and covered in a quirky pistachio floss that prompted my companion to remark, "it looks like loft insulation." Thankfully, it tasted of sugar and nuts, and evoked nostalgic trips to the fairground, not the roof.

The Wellington Arms is a place where a great deal of care has been invested to excellent effect. We even took home half a dozen colourful eggs from the resident hens.