

Wild Garlic Grill

*Story by Katherine Jacobson,
Photography by Robin Stancliff*

Executive Chef Steven Schultz and Maudi Gourdin-Schultz are co-owners of Wild Garlic Grill. Partners in life and in business, they have created a dining atmosphere that is both casual and elegant.

Desert Gourmet

(This is another in a series of articles profiling DesertLeaf’s restaurant- and food-related advertisers. This is not a review.)

Wild Garlic Grill has been serving the Tucson community for more than 10 years. Originally located near Grant Road and First Avenue, the restaurant moved to the larger and better-appointed space at Skyline Drive and Campbell Avenue in 2017. There the story of Executive Chef Steven Schultz’s contributions to the Tucson culinary scene continues.

A Tucson native, Chef Schultz began working in restaurants when he was in high school, and in 1986 he went to Paris, where he earned an advanced diploma from École de Cuisine La Varenne. After gaining experience working in Parisian restaurants, he returned to Tucson and became the executive chef at the since-closed Ventana Room, the formal, high-end restaurant at Ventana Canyon Resort.

Following that successful stint, Chef Schultz became the executive chef at the Lodge at Ventana Canyon, then at the Carmel Valley Ranch Resort in California. After returning to Arizona, he continued honing his culinary skills as the executive chef at the Hyatt Regency Gold Swan Room and at Vincent’s in Scottsdale. He went on to the Palm Court Restaurant in the Scottsdale Resort and Conference Center, where he trained under French, German, Austrian, and Swiss executive chefs.

In 2000, Chef Schultz returned to his roots in Tucson and opened Red Sky Café. Serving California fusion cuisine, he brought a style of dining not then common in Tucson. After 12 years, he closed Red Sky and soon opened Wild Garlic Grill. With a loyal following of diners who missed Red Sky and the Ventana Room, Wild Garlic had a ready customer base.

What sets Wild Garlic apart from other restaurants? Its cuisine blends classic French techniques with the flavors of the Southwest and California, explains Chef Schultz. Maudi Gourdin-Schultz, Wild Garlic’s co-owner and the chef’s spouse, adds that the in-house menu presents the chef’s and diners’ favorites, while

the chalkboard at the front door displays daily specials. Owing to demand, the rack of lamb has an almost permanent spot on the specials board while other dishes are Chef Schultz’s new inspirations. Responsive to customer requests, he also has been known to add requested items to the specials board.

The menu provides a range of meals and price points. For example, one can enjoy Prince Edward Island mussels or wild mushroom soup for lunch, as well as a variety of salads and sandwiches. The dinner menu includes lamb, pork, steak, seafood stew, and classic linguini bolognese. Regional flavors include Anasazi beans, Las Cruces chiles, Gilroy garlic, wild mushrooms, and herbs from the chef’s own garden.

Wild Garlic has an extensive and eclectic wine cellar. The chef curates that collection emphasizing boutique-quality wines that pair well with the dishes he creates.

The atmosphere at Wild Garlic is both casual and elegant. Gourdin-Schultz explains that the interior of the restaurant is “Smithsonian-esque” with its sarcophagus, and hand painted garlic bulbs in the bar. Modern landscape paintings adorn the room; paintings on the north wall were created by Chef Schultz himself. And guests can’t miss the bright buffalo sculpture as they enter the restaurant.

Gourdin-Schultz explains that the clientele is as varied as the cuisine and décor: “Every night is different. A first date, business meeting, family reunion—we never know what to expect when we open our doors.” Anniversaries and birthdays are celebrated. Happy hour runs all day, with drinks at the bar specially priced, and appetizers and the full menu available. The take-out business is also steady.

Patrons have the option of dining indoors with its various booth and table configurations or on the outdoor patio. Heated in the winter, misted in the summer, that patio offers a quiet space with views of the interior courtyard of Plaza Colonial.

Chef Schultz explains that he has learned “over 37 years of cooking that the

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culinary world is ever changing. It requires you to be resilient and adaptable as times and the needs of ... customers change."

To be prepared for change, Chef Schultz and Gourdin-Schultz have built a staff, from dishwasher to head sous-chef, that Chef Schultz has personally mentored. Gourdin-Schultz adds that the staff at Wild Garlic is a family—a work family—that supports one another in running the restaurant. Some servers have been with Wild Garlic for more than a decade, and all, she reports, have adopted the chef's emphasis on teamwork in service to the guests.

In his spare time, Chef Schultz paints landscapes, tends his herb garden, and spends time with his grandkids and poodles. He is also working on a cookbook that will contain both recipes and cooking techniques developed at Wild Garlic Grill and over his career.

Wild Garlic Grill, 2870 E. Skyline Dr., Suite 120; (520) 206-0017; wildgarlicgrill.com.

Chef Schultz offers *DesertLeaf* readers the following recipes.

Grilled Sea Bass Fillet with Roasted Corn and Bell Pepper Salsa Sides of Carrots and Taro Root

Serves 4

4 7-oz sea bass fillets
1/2 cup plus 1 tbsp extra virgin olive oil
1 tbsp basil, chopped
1 tbsp parsley, chopped
1 tbsp chives, chopped
3 cobs of corn
1 red bell pepper
5 orange bell peppers
1 yellow bell pepper
1/2 red onion
1 jalapeño
1 bunch cilantro
2 vine-ripened tomatoes
1 tbsp lime juice
1 tbsp sherry vinegar
5 cups chicken stock (or just enough to

cover peppers)
1 tbsp garlic, minced
1/2 white onion
white pepper to taste
3 baby orange carrots
3 baby red carrots
3 baby yellow carrots
1 tbsp fresh dill, chopped
1 long taro root
salt and pepper to taste

Sea bass: Marinate fillets in 1/2 cup extra virgin olive oil with chopped basil, parsley, and chives. To prepare, simply grill sea bass on each side for approximately 3 minutes or until opaque. Salt and pepper to taste.

Salsa: Roast the cobs of corn over an open fire until lightly charred. Remove corn from cobs and set aside. Dice red and yellow bell peppers and 1 orange bell pepper. Dice red onion, jalapeño, cilantro, and tomatoes. Blend corn, peppers, red onion, jalapeño, cilantro and tomatoes together. Season with extra virgin olive oil, lime juice, sherry vinegar, salt, and pepper. Serve with sea bass.

Coulis: Dice remaining 4 orange bell peppers. Add to a sauce pan with chicken stock, 1 tbsp minced garlic, 1/2 white onion, salt, and white pepper. Cover and simmer until bell peppers are soft. Purée simmered mixture in blender, and strain. Just before serving, spread coulis on plate and place sea bass fillet on top.

Carrots: Simmer orange, red, and yellow carrots in salted water for 5 minutes. Drain. Finish with a drizzle of extra-virgin olive oil, salt, pepper, and fresh dill.

Taro root: Peel and slice into sheets, each about the thickness of a penny. Fry at 350° for 3-4 minutes or until light brown. 🌿

Katherine Jacobson is a local freelance writer. Comments for publication should be addressed to letters@desertleaf.com.



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