

The Wild Ones

Restaurateurs Steven and Maudi Schultz like it fresh, and French-inspired. Their foothills restaurant takes everything from salads to seafood to sirloin to the next level.

By **Elizabeth Hunter**
Photography by **Shannon Christine Photo**



Pan-seared Maple
Leaf duck breasts

Tucson Chef Steven Schultz wouldn't swap his "trade" school education for all the baguettes in France. Before crossing the big pond years ago, the ambitious young chef earned an advanced diploma from the storied École de Cuisine La Varenne — one of the finest cooking schools in Paris. Decades later, with many time-honored techniques under his belt and creativity in his soul, Schutlz creates dazzling food at the Wild Garlic Grill.

A patio filled with whimsical art and a bountiful herb garden welcomes diners and hints at the vibrant mood and delicious offerings inside the Grill. The popular foothills gathering spot is run by Steven and his wife Maudi. It's a tag team that more than works. "I love riding his coattails of energy," says Maudi. The Paris-trained chef not only creates beauty on the plate, but beautiful art on the restaurant walls as well, painting bold abstract landscapes in his rare free time. "I'm self-taught," he admits. "It's fun, it's my way to relax."

While Steven manages the kitchen, Maudi is all things front of the house. "It's like putting on a show each night," she says of her duties. She, too, is possessed of multiple talents as an in-demand hair stylist.

The balance of the art that furnishes the Grill is curated by neighboring gallery owner Jane Hamilton. In addition, Maudi rounds up huge floral bouquets in vases that perfume the space. The dining room — in polished mahogany and cherry woods — is a lovely complement for the art bursting with color. Mirrors reflect the ambient glow of huge etched-glass ceiling fixtures as big as a kid's snow saucers and accentuated with bronze finishes. A double take is necessary for the ceiling; what at first looks like stamped tin actually is clay tiles the diminutive size of a cocktail coaster. The dark wood bar right angles around the performance kitchen where the kitchen crew makes magic happen.

Behind a podium on the tiled entryway, a host welcomes guests. An A-frame sign features pastel-chalked specials. Many diners have favorites, "We do have a program so guests can reserve their favorite dish up to 72 hours before they dine. Regulars check our website often," notes Maudi. Reservations are highly recommended for prime-time seating on weekends, 6 to 8 p.m.

Chef Steven's neat, more-pepper-than-salt hair has a cowlick at the crown that fits his

Top: Pan-seared New Bedford sea scallops
Right: Grilled filet mignon and lobster tail





Grilled Cabrilla
Sea Bass

“Our menu is quite healthy. Each plate is surrounded by the freshest vegetables sautéed in extra virgin olive oil. There’s a protein and light sauce and a starch.” — Chef Steven Schultz

easy-going charm. Simple wire-frame glasses punctuate his cherubic face. “I love working with my husband because I have a front row seat to his creative genius every day,” enthuses Maudi, the owner of an impossibly beautiful tumble of blonde hair and eyelashes so lush that concentrating on what she’s saying is made difficult. Says Steven, “I love Maudi because she is a people person, and I’m kind of shy. She’s helped me come out of my shell. She makes everything better.”

Wild Garlic Grill bills itself as California French Accent Cuisine. “Once you know French techniques, it enhances any kind of food you’d like to make,” says Steven. “Our menu is quite healthy. Each plate is surrounded by the freshest vegetables sautéed in extra virgin olive oil (EVOO). There’s a protein and light sauce and a starch.” Chef’s twist this week is a garlic mash using little purple potatoes. A salad completes the plate: frisée, radicchio and micro greens lightly dressed in house-made balsamic vinaigrette.

Appetites are whetted with warm-from-the-oven sourdough bread baked to order. Most popular starters include the grilled garlic shrimp — large prawns striped from their turn on the flame, swimming in beurre blanc with grilled veggies, roasted corn salsa and wedges of melting brie. Oregon wild mushroom soup is buttery and pungent with herbs, while the ceviche delights with shrimp and scallops made bright by marinating in citrus, cilantro and onion. The roasted garlic fries are a favorite, says Maudi. “They are perfect to share; everyone loves them.” The crispy French fries are tossed in EVOO that’s been infused with California heirloom garlic. Steven estimates he goes through four to five cases of Christopher Ranch garlic a week.

Fresh California-inspired salads fly out of the kitchen for lunch. Crisp greens are topped with generous amounts of grilled garlic shrimp, mesquite honey barbecue chicken or grilled salmon and

stepped up with crisp veggies. Flavorfully balanced house-made dressings include Caesar, bleu cheese, ranch, honey mustard, raspberry and blood orange. Piles of peppery pastrami or rosemary-spiked chicken breast are grilled for next-level sandwich status. Burgers at the Grill mean premium Black Angus chopped sirloin from Sonoita’s Vera Earl Ranch.

Dinner entrées also are available for lunch, making choices even more difficult. The grilled Duroc pork loin — a variety of pork prized for its tenderness and flavor — is sided by hearty Anasazi beans, roasted corn salsa and garlic mashed potatoes. Braised lamb shank, spice-rubbed St. Louis BBQ ribs and grilled NY Strip are further temptations for carnivores. Fish-lovers are assured of the freshest offerings as the daily catch arrives whole from L.A. and San Carlos, weighing in at sometimes 60 to 70 pounds to be boned and fileted on site. Herb-roasted Alaskan cod, roasted salmon and San Francisco Pier Stew (Steven’s take on Bouillabaisse) laden with white fish, shrimp, mussels, roasted peppers tomatoes and basil in a Chardonnay broth, are among the choices.

Vegetarians love the Grill’s braised red quinoa and French lentils with braised green, organic veggies, roasted corn salsa and avocado tapenade with taro chips. Veg-forward diners also may request the Chef’s Choice. Says Maudi, “They’ll have a beautiful dish curated by the chef based on the fresh organic produce and grains we have available. You don’t know what you’ll be served, but it will be exquisite.”

It’s difficult, if not impossible, to go wrong when ordering wine at Wild Garlic Grill. Blessed with a very discerning palate, Chef Schultz curates a collection that not only is of excellent vintage but well-priced. Options are primarily from California, but labels from France and Australia also are included.

Six gelato choices are to be pondered for a sweet close, each more decadent than the next. Salted caramel, roasted banana and Dutch chocolate vie for attention. Limoncello cake, chocolate mousse caken and bourbon pecan tart also are there to tempt you.

For the Schultzes the party rarely ends, says Maudi. “I love hosting parties at our house. I’m quite the entertainer — that’s why we’re a perfect match. I love the pageantry that goes into it: setting the table, the stemware and flatware. We’re pretty traditional in that he cooks, and I clean.” Steven mixes up his home entertaining menus but highlights his passion for grilling over mesquite. His go-to kitchen tool: “A really good, well-balanced knife.” His go-to home kitchen knife, a 10-inch Sabatier, was purchased on a trip to France.

The Schultzes often sojourn to France for a recharge and this fall is no exception. The couple’s fondest desire on this junket is *not* to secure a coveted reservation at a Michelin star restaurant, but instead to find a chateau in the Loire Valley in which to lay their heads, and to dine at small family run restaurants nearby. **TL**

2870 E. Skyline Dr.; (520) 206-0017;
WildGarlicGrill.com
Hours: Wed. & Thurs.: 12-9 p.m.;
Fri. & Sat.: 12-10 p.m.;
Sun.: 12-9 p.m.; Closed Mon. & Tue.



Grilled veal tomahawk chop



Watermelon mojito

