

**I** think you would be hard pressed to find better food, or better value, than that which delights diners at Le Champignon Sauvage in Cheltenham.

Unbelievably, considering the prices, this little gem has two Michelin stars – which it has held for 13 years – and is run by the enthusiastic and welcoming husband-and-wife team of David and Helen Everitt-Matthias.

We popped over for lunch one very hot Saturday in July, and beyond the unobtrusive entrance of the building – which looked as though it may have been a pub once – we entered into a cool oasis, far removed from the busy street outside.

Serenely overseen by the lovely Helen, Le Champignon Sauvage is the most unpretentious Michelin-starred establishment I have ever visited. It does exactly what it says on the tin – offering the most divinely delicious and innovative food and drink in a relaxed setting, without a sniff of a rip-off.

When I think of two Michelin stars I think of other elite restaurants I have visited – Raymond Blanc's Le Manoir aux Quat Saisons, Tom Kerridge's Hand & Flowers at Marlow, and Marcus Wareing at The Berkeley – all superb, but not what I would describe as relaxed, and definitely very expensive.

Le Champignon Sauvage is quite different – professional without being overly slick, amazingly delicious and intriguing food that doesn't come in minute portions, and wine that will not break the bank.

Yes, you probably get my gist – I am sold on this Cheltenham icon. David and Helen love what they do, and that is enough for them.

"We live above the restaurant, and we do not have any children – just our dogs," David explained to me in his small-but-immaculate kitchen after a busy lunchtime service. "We both love what we do, and this restaurant has been our lives for 26 years."

David's many awards reflect the esteem in which he is held as a chef. He is always in the kitchen and has never missed a service. He is also known for his tireless experimentation with anything from the most humble to the most expensive ingredients.

But he is totally grounded in his approach to business: "We do not have to charge ridiculous prices, so we don't. We are happy, and our customers are happy."

How very refreshing. So if you want to celebrate a special occasion, lunch at Le Champignon Sauvage is an affordable £26 for two courses or £32 for three.

And a three-course dinner is just £59, which is nothing short of amazing for a place with two coveted Michelin stars. Add in that a bottle of their house white wine is £20, or £10 for half (ideal for a glass each at lunchtime), and it would be plain silly not to say 'yes please'...

Le Champignon Sauvage is easily located in the upmarket Montpellier district, not far off the A40 as you enter Cheltenham. There's a shoppers' car park nearby, which is ideal.

And so to lunch in the pleasantly low key restaurant with its neutral colours, tables with plenty of space, and comfy chairs.

Helen made sure the place ran like clockwork, though I do wish our French waitress had been a bit more smiley – but that is my only negative comment.

The food was absolutely exquisite – a feast of flawless craftsmanship on a plate, or several plates to be precise.



**David and Helen Everitt-Matthias, of Le Champignon Sauvage**

## A shining example

Denise Barkley enjoys exquisite food at down-to-earth prices at Le Champignon Sauvage in Cheltenham

My gastronomic journey took me via melt-in-the-mouth crispy belly pork with hispi cabbage to a sizeable piece of cod served with squid ink quinoa, salted lemon confit and red pepper. The slicks of brightly coloured food on the plate looked like a painting, and it was almost too beautiful to spoil. The flavour from each component was separately defined, but melded


together as one delicious whole.

Sue started with salmon, with an unusual citrus cure, and served with summery accompaniments of grapefruit, radish and sorrel, moving onto a platter of the most tender Cinderford lamb cooked in three flavour-enhancing ways, and concluding with a shiny dome of chocolate delice served with milk ice cream, beurre noisette and butterscotch.

A match made in heaven, Sue declared between mouthfuls.

David also insisted we try one of his latest dishes – Salcombe crab served with an unusual coconut veloute, white asparagus and crab jelly. It really worked as a wacky flavour combination.

We ended a simply superb lunch with coffee and petit fours (just £3 extra), and a vow to visit again very soon.

If you are planning to attend the renowned Cheltenham Literature Festival (October 4-13), it would be the perfect lunch venue. 

■ **Le Champignon Sauvage, Suffolk Road, Cheltenham GL50 2AQ, call 01242 573449, [www.lechampignonsauvage.co.uk](http://www.lechampignonsauvage.co.uk)**

We have three copies of David Everitt-Matthias's third book: *Beyond Essence: New recipes from Le Champignon Sauvage* (Absolute Press, £30) to give away. To be in with a chance of winning, just send your name, address and daytime phone number, on a postcard, to Oxfordshire Limited Edition Beyond Essence Cookbook Competition, Promotions Department, Newsquest Oxfordshire Ltd, Osney Mead, Oxford OX2 0EJ, to arrive no later than Friday, September 20, 2013. Normal Newsquest competition rules apply and the editor's decision is final.

