



Frederic Duval is a perfectionist in the kitchen

# TABLE *for* TWO

*As The White Onion in Wimbledon celebrates its first anniversary, we meet the two men who brought a prime cut of French cuisine to SW19*

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Duval is 'hungry and curious' for new ingredients



Charley Harper artwork adorns the blue interior

south west London. At the front of house is the young proprietor Beggy Ashurov, who has already welcomed the likes of Rafael Nadal, Judy Murray and the US tennis team through his doors.

Unlike our other gourmet star, Adam Byatt, Duval wasn't classically trained. 'I studied philosophy,' he tells me. 'I grew up with books, so I learnt to cook from books – but since most chefs go through technical training, it was a fight for me to show I could do it.'

After eight years at The French Table in Surbiton and a stint running a bakery in Dorset, he's found his niche at The White Onion, which is celebrating its first year on the High Street. In France, he says, regional cuisine and traditions are held sacred, whereas in England, a chef can be more creative.

'If you want to use an ingredient in a different way in France they say you're crazy,' he explains. 'In England, you can take ingredients from all over the world and do whatever you like with them. I would say the way I cook is French and Mediterranean, but I try to incorporate my roots in Normandy. When I was growing up I ate lots of apple tarts and crêpes at the seaside.' Recently, he's been preparing cuts of veal sirloin with grilled lettuce, cep sauce and miso-glazed gnocchi. 'The idea is to incorporate Japanese flavours while staying true to the original dish,' he explains. How else does he go about reinventing the classics? 'It would be pretentious of me to say I am reinventing anything,' he demurs, 'I'm just having fun. I'm very hungry and curious for new ingredients.'

'My cooking depends on my mood and on the weather,' he says. 'As it gets colder, you want something richer to make you happy. My favourite restaurant in London is L'Atelier de Joel Robuchon. He's famous for his mash – it has almost as much butter as potato. Alain Ducasse is an inspiration, and I really like The Connaught.' Each morning, he speaks to his fish suppliers in Cornwall to find out what they've caught that day, and he sources his vegetables from New Covent Garden Market at Nine Elms.

Despite his love of fine food, when Duval goes back to France, he likes nothing better than to go to the local fishmonger and cook a meal for his parents. 'We spend hours eating, talking and drinking wine,' he says. 'I'm open to trying new wines, but I like the Côte du Rhône for wine and cheese from the Alps. I also love Munster from Alsace, where my mother is from.'

Next up on the agenda at The White Onion, Duval and Ashurov are planning on adding cheese nights and wine pairings to their offering. Expect a night to remember whether you're booking a table for two or heading to SW19 with a group of friends.

As summer draws to a close, we say sit back, admire the quirky Charley Harper artwork adorning the blue interior, try some of the sommelier's choice of the best 'off-the-beaten-track' wines, and tuck in to Duval's latest creations. Just make sure you save room for dessert.

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*Once a dish is finished  
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**R**oasted perigord goat's cheese with pine nuts and watermelon, tender suckling pig with apple curry puree and a thyme jus, lamb shoulder terrine in aioli – the tasty, creative dishes served up on our exclusive shoot at The White Onion in Wimbledon left us speechless.

But the talented chef at the helm, Frederic Duval, is never entirely satisfied. 'Once a dish is finished on a plate, it's still moving,' he contemplates in a meandering, contemplative French accent. 'I'm always changing things and there's always a way to make it better. I'm always looking for something new.' It's perhaps this perfectionism that has proved the secret weapon of The White Onion, which although billed a neighbourhood restaurant, serves up some of the finest three course meals in