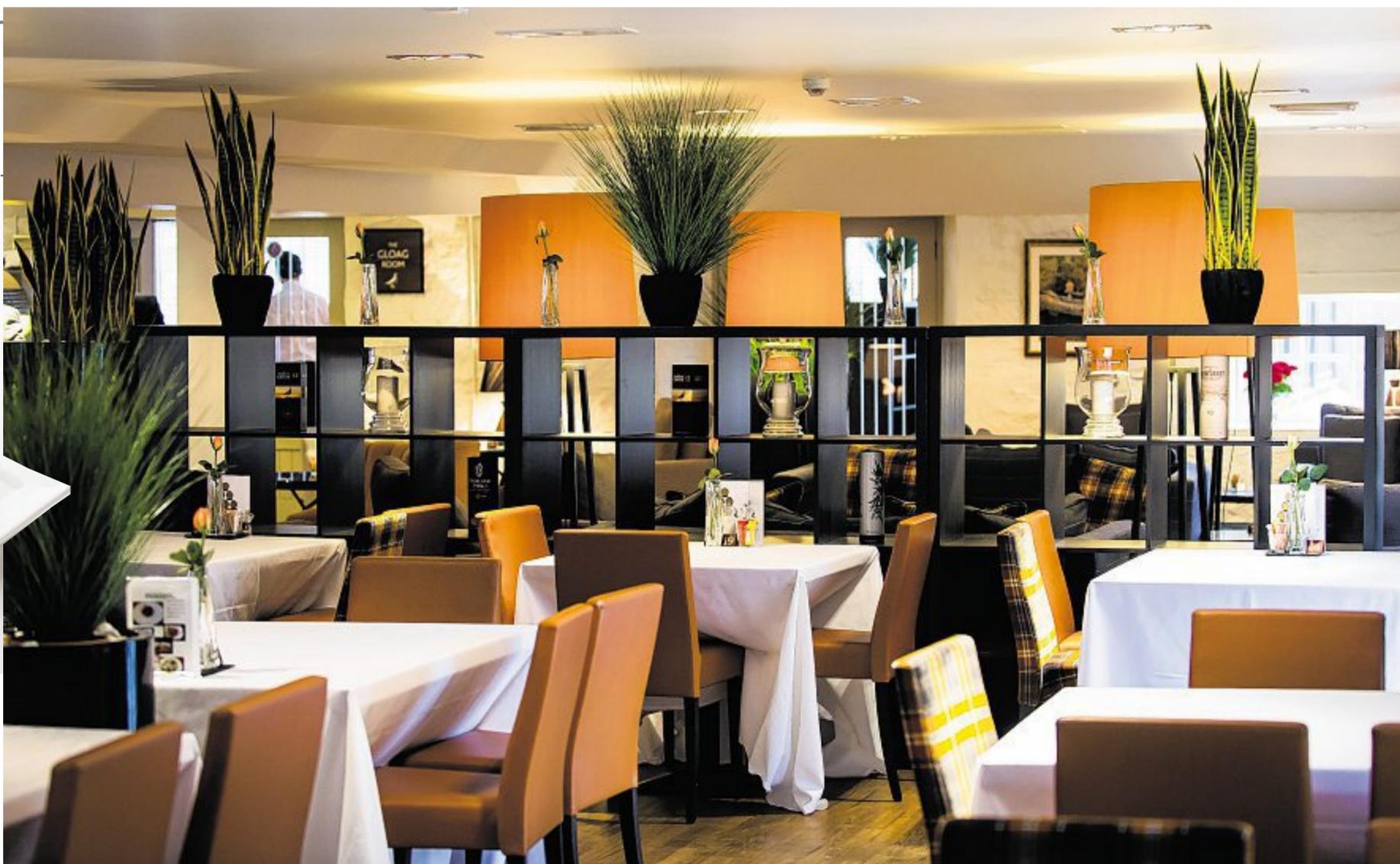


# EATING OUT

## Wilde Thyme at Glenturret



# A 'DRAM' FINE DINING EXPERIENCE

It's exciting to be in at the start of something new, which explains why I was tingling with anticipation. The restaurant is Wilde Thyme, a brand-new venture from the luxury event caterers of the same name, and housed within the five-star visitor attraction, The Famous Grouse Experience at Glenturret Distillery on the outskirts of Crieff.

Wilde Thyme's chef patron is Andrew Hamer, who was previously executive chef at Gleneagles. He's regarded as a role model by chefs who are now household names, and at this restaurant he's supported by head chef, Jonathan Greer.

While this was a special dinner for invited guests to showcase the venue and fare, the restaurant is open to the public for lunch and afternoon teas and by April, should be open for dinner and fine dining experiences like the one I was about to try.

Entry to the first floor restaurant is via the distillery's glamorous visitor centre, which in itself is worth spending time in because it's home to the world's biggest bottle of Grouse. Having your photograph taken next to it is a must.

Equally impressive is the Bafta award on display which it won for its interactive show, but what blew me away was the fabulous decor and

layout of the restaurant. It's a gorgeous mixture of up-market but comfortable Scottish country house and cutting-edge style, complete with chic lighting and subtle grouse wallpaper. There are soft tweeds, tartan chairs, rustic charm, plus bespoke Caithness glassware and the sort of lovely cutlery you only find in high-end establishments.

Having been shown to our seats by elegantly dressed waiting staff, our journey into culinary heaven began with an amuse bouche, mosaic of quail with young leeks and a crispy quail egg. This dainty little treat looked fabulous and demonstrated a high level of skill in creating something big on flavour but small in size.

Each course was teamed with a different whisky cocktail and to go with the appetiser we sipped The Famous Grouse frozen serve - a chilled shot glass filled with whisky straight from the freezer.

Dinner began with roasted hand-dived scallops from Orkney with Hugh Grierson bacon and confiture of fennel, accompanied by a Black Grouse Whisky Sour.

Served in a shell, the juicy scallop was perfectly caramelised while accompanying sauce, made with the scallop coral, was superb. The whisky sour, made with lemon juice, egg whites,

aromatic bitters and sugar syrup had a nice sharpness to it, which complemented the fresh from the sea flavours of the dish.

To cleanse the palate we were presented with a show-stopping treat. An apple and ginger Grouse sorbet, which for all the world looked like a shimmering green Christmas tree bauble.

It felt wrong smashing the glass-like but entirely edible blown sugar shell, but the reward was a refreshing and zingy sorbet that tasted like a Granny Smith apple.

I'm told each one takes at least 30 minutes to make by hand. The skill required to create such a masterpiece is simply outstanding. To accompany this we sipped a Stuffed Grouse, a dangerously moreish cocktail made with Apple Sourz, fresh orange, cranberry and ginger beer.

By now I felt like I'd been fully wine and dined, but the main course was still to come. Any doubts that I might not find room for it vanished as roasted Glenferate Highland venison with mini venison, juniper pie, tarragon and pumpkin puree and sauce grand venue appeared before me. Beautifully presented, the pie had a lovely richness to it while

the meat melted in the mouth. I'd never have paired pumpkin and venison but it added a layer of sweetness and went well with the earthy flavours of the accompanying roast beetroot and whole baby onion. This dish was served with a Naked Grouse old fashioned topped with orange zest. And still the food came. Much of it made with locally sourced produce and featuring whisky made here at Scotland's oldest distillery.

Served with a dram of the Famous Grouse Commonwealth Games Special Edition, we tucked into sweet roasted pineapple with slightly sharp carpaccio of mango and pineapple citrus jellies and a fabulous coconut and lemongrass sorbet.

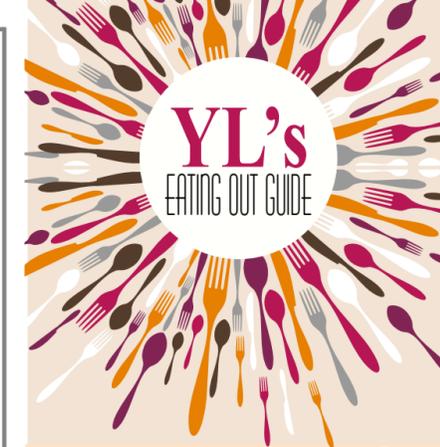
This was a showcase dinner, but as well as demonstrating the unrivalled skill of the chefs, it reminded us that Scotland has a fabulous larder which the chefs are clearly happy to plunder and use to create innovative dishes.

I predict Wilde Thyme at Glenturret Distillery will become a foodie destination. Although it's only been open for a few weeks, it's already picked up an award. I suspect they may need to enlarge that glass cabinet holding the Bafta.

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