



# All FIRED UP

A TRIO of travelling chefs are cooking up a storm, as REBECCA RITSON experiences

PHOTOGRAPHS: VICKY WALKER



**T**ransforming humble hedgerow beginnings into gourmet fare presented with ingenuity and flair, the Wildfire trio do more than cook a meal; they conjure a banquet.

The three wizards of Wildfire, Andi Richardson, Stephen Knowles and Barry Horne, are young, motivated and unique. Reinvesting any surplus cash back into the secrets of their sorcery – foraged, super seasonal and wild ingredients – seems to sum up the Wildfire collective’s attitude: pleasure above profit and wild above tame.

“We always joked that if the three of us had our own restaurant we’d put dishes on the menu that we love so much but could never afford normally,” says Andi. “Well, the banquet doesn’t have many overheads so we can actually do it! Wildfire is our own outlet for us to be as creative as we can.”

The magic is cast with the ever-changing nature of the banquet’s venue. Stephen explains the feeling they are trying to inculcate: “It’s meant to be special, you’re there with a small group of people eating in one place for a night...then you’re gone

again. I love the way people feel a bit special to be there; like it’s a secret they’re in on. They’ll never eat that meal in the same place again and they seem to realise that.”

I experienced the pop-up gourmets when they gather in Margot’s, Padstow. As gastronomic destinations go, this north coast town is pretty star-struck. But who needs a star when the food does the dazzling for you?

Spellbound by rustic décor, hand-sewn napkins and foraged adornments, the place feels celebratory – as all good banquets should – and the vibe is as bubbly as the rosehip fizz we’re handed on arrival.

“Eating should be a collective experience,” says Barry. “We seat people on communal tables and present some of the food in a sharing style so you have to get along and chat to folk.”

Which is great as the six-course menu is playful, irreverent and begging to be talked about. Get ready...inventive presentation and a quirky take on classics are indicative





**Left:** The impressive wood oven  
**Above:** Andi Richardson and Stephen Knowles hard at work  
**Right:** The three wizards of Wildfire - Stephen Knowles, Andi Richardson and Barry Horne  
**Below:** A steaming pan of pasta



of the trio's surprising style. Sharing platters of pumpkin pie and bagels warms chilly cockles; the crispy mallard with pancakes comes in tongue-in-cheek individual take-away style foil trays; a slow cooked hare flirts with clementine and seduces devilish Chianti pasta.

Behind the menu is the distinct sense of three guys delighting in how they will cook to showcase the food they care about. And, as their quirky box of tricks seems bottomless, three does seem to be the magic number. "We all have a great passion for what we do, and think about food in a very similar way," explains Stephen. "We get on really well and bounce ideas off each other really freely – there are no rules as to what we can and can't do."

Five star food and service at a price that sees a rapid take up of tickets through their Facebook site, means that Wildfire's reach is spreading.

Given the venues are often intimate, when you get the message it's like winning a golden ticket to the boys' own chocolate factory.

Their Willy Wonka-esque passion and verve for the venture is evident in the laughter from the kitchen, and the sense of fun on the table. If there were any doubts as the guys' playfulness then the mid-course conker championship would swiftly quash them.

"We just love every minute of it," Barry enthuses, "we work so well together that the creativity flows and we can really enjoy it, it never seems like hard work. We love the pressure of service and get a great buzz out of doing something that we're all really passionate about and proud of. Mostly we have a lot of fun cooking together. It's all about the love."

Clearly, the lads are enamoured with their project - coming out of the kitchen to share the love with their guests over the cheese course. You can hear them expounding the virtues of their producers and friends including fisherman Lee Carter, the Modern Salad Grower and fellow local chef Grant Goodson. The bewitching front of house - Kirsty Spencer and Sinead Stoneman – equal the kitchen's

enthusiasm, amplifying the enchantment of the evening. Beyond preparing, this coven of crafty chefs' mission is about sharing the foraged, the wild and the wonderful bounty that Cornwall has to offer.

Be under no illusions though: despite the easy-going atmosphere and sense of fun, Wildfire is no flash in the pan, flippant foray into food. These boys are serious about what counts: quality, value for money, and in Andi's words: "constantly exceeding expectations."

With targets such as these – and the skill to deliver them – Wildfire is unlikely to be tamed any time soon. ■

Get fired up for the next banquet at their Facebook page:  
[www.facebook.com/WildfireBanquet](http://www.facebook.com/WildfireBanquet)

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