

Advertisement feature

Gilmour's

Katie Webb enjoys some modern British fare from the master of American cuisine in London

Christopher's, in Covent Garden, is one of my favourite restaurants, so, when I heard the owner, Christopher Gilmour, had recently opened another eatery, in upmarket Chelsea, I was intrigued.

His latest eponymous venture, Gilmour's, nestles in a smart residential street just off London's Fulham Road, and is smaller and more intimate than its established, grander big brother. With just 60 covers, it's like a modest UK to Christopher's confident USA, but with a menu that does for British cuisine what he did with American fare over in WC2 – he celebrates it by cooking it beautifully with a contemporary twist. (Well, he's imported Jeff The Chef from the restaurant at Tate Britain, and he's done it).

Gilmour's definitely benefits from the experience of a respected restaurateur. He's selected knowledgeable, charming staff, and given the place a stylish, welcoming touch with a teal, taupe and chocolate brown colour scheme that blends parquet flooring with rich wood panelling and velvet-stripe banquettes.

Perched on a tactile cowhide barstool for an aperitif of sparkling wine, I found myself stroking the curves of the polished block-wood bar: it's not vast, but it's voluptuous and has a definite air of va-va-voom.

Moving to our table, I tucked into a scrumptious starter of potted shrimps, served with a trio of crisp, crunchy granary toasts, while Stuart opted for a venison salad with roasted plums, curly endive leaves and walnut vinaigrette. He definitely enjoyed it because he didn't say a word until he'd finished.

He then tucked into a 12oz 'Côte de Boeuf' rib-eye steak, which the menu proudly stated was from shorthorn cattle reared on Scotland's Buccleuch estates, and aged for 28 days. Stuart savoured every mouthful before explaining how people go wrong when they cook steak at home (I didn't dare point out that he never does). Thankfully, he was also relishing the Jacob's Creek St Hugo Cabernet Sauvignon 2004 that I'd ordered, and commented how it brought out the delicious smoky, char-grilled flavour of the meat. I listened intently, quietly enjoying the full-bodied, fruity wine with my succulent salmon fillet, served on a bed of braised leeks with a lobster sauce, with a perfect side order of mash. Yum.

And, as Stuart educated me on the exercise required to burn off a portion of the 'tastebud treat' of a treacle tart he was polishing off, I delved into a decadent knickerbocker glory of peaches, raspberries, blueberry jelly, cream and white chocolate ice cream. Words cannot describe this heavenly experience. Christopher Gilmour, I salute you.

Gilmour's, 11 Park Walk, London, SW10. Tel: 0207 349 6800



RESTAURANT REVIEW OF THE WEEK
KATIE WEBB

Gilmour's



Katie recommends
To accompany a meal similar to hers*, Katie suggests: Jacob's Creek Three Vines Rosé, delicious with creamy potted shrimp; Jacob's Creek Reserve Rosé to complement salmon with lobster sauce; Jacob's Creek Sparkling Chardonnay Pinot Noir Brut Cuvée, an ideal choice to accompany treacle tart.

*Suggested wines, not necessarily available at Gilmour's

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REUNITED: The Wheeler family and their Scottish relatives during their get-together at Chilham Castle

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social convention dictated that bringing up a child alone was not an option – giving up her son for adoption was Chrissie's only choice.

Although certainly not wealthy, the Clelands were a respectable and educated family. Wheeler's grandfather, John, was a headmaster and Chrissie, one of eight children, was born in the schoolhouse of Grougar School, Kilmarnock.

When Chrissie was four, her mother died of tuberculosis, leaving Mr Cleland to bring up his sons and daughters alone. Chrissie was greatly influenced by her father and she too became a teacher. She never married but set up home with two of her sisters – Mary, who became the housekeeper, and Jessie, a civil servant.

The family name continued because one of their brothers, Thomas, had two children: Gavin, who died in 1964, and Mabel. While researching Wheeler's family roots, we discovered Mabel MacDonald was still alive.

Recently, Wheeler flew to Scotland with Tessa, Sarah and Jacquetta to meet his 87-year-old cousin, the only living relative from his own generation. After lunch at Edinburgh's Sheraton Hotel, they went to Mabel's flat in the city. There, Wheeler sat on the sofa, enthralled as he watched old film footage of the mother he had never known. The film was shot in 1956 when Chrissie was a 62-year-old spinster and her son was in his first year at Oxford University.

In the footage, an elegant-looking Chrissie greets her brother Thomas with a handshake. Mary and Jessie are also seen welcoming Thomas, his daughter and grandchildren to their home in Kilmarnock. Wearing a brown suit, sensible shoes and glasses, Chrissie walks bolt upright with her hands behind her back. It is exactly the same manner in which Wheeler walks.

This was the first time the tycoon had seen his mother brought to life and he, Tessa and their daughters were deeply moved. In the few photographs that exist of Chrissie, she bears a striking resemblance to her beautiful granddaughter Jacquetta.

Wheeler learned of another extraordinary parallel. Chrissie had been an enthusiastic bridge player, the game he has always loved. 'She was a very keen on bridge, like me,' he says. 'I played once with Omar Sharif and with Lord Lucan quite a lot. He was a member of my bridge club and the Clermont Club, the gambling club where I spent quite a lot of time in those days.'

However, in other respects, mother and son could not have been more different. 'The Cleland family were Scottish Presbyterian, teetotal, non-gambling,' says Mabel. 'Very different to Stuart.' She also told Wheeler that, at the

He's a famous Tory – she was a Communist

end of the Thirties, Chrissie held strong Communist sympathies, which may not have sat well with the views of her son, an impassioned and lifelong Conservative.

But the fact that Chrissie was forced to put her son up for adoption was made all the more poignant by what Mabel told Wheeler next. 'My aunt Chrissie, who was a primary teacher, loved children and had a special way with them,' says Mabel. 'In the early to mid-Twenties my grandfather took his family south to Margate and then built a house in nearby Cliftonville.'

In the spring of 1934, probably in Margate, Stuart was conceived in circumstances that remain a mystery. His mother fled to the Mitchells in London to have the child and he was later given up for adoption – it was the only way she could maintain her respectability.

She returned to Cliftonville, where the three sisters lived until 1956, when they all moved back to Kilmarnock. Mary died aged 80 in 1966, followed by Jessie two years later, aged 74. Chrissie died on November 26, 1969. She was 76.

'We had no idea at all that Chrissie had a son,' says Mabel today. 'It was a complete shock. Chrissie was such a dear soul. I can't imagine her having an affair of any kind but I am not condemning her for that. She was one of the women left behind after the First World War when there were not enough men. I'm sure my father didn't know. If he had known, I'm sure I would have been told.'

'However, I'm delighted to welcome Stuart into our family. He is a charming man. The reunion could have been a disaster but it has been lovely. I'd never heard of him before but my family has been looking him up on the internet.'

Wheeler himself has been greatly touched by the discovery of his mother's family.

'I really liked all my Scottish cousins,' he says, 'and I'm glad to have found out about my mother. I find it very interesting, although I am less emotional about this kind of thing than most people would be. I don't know why. Perhaps I am hiding something from myself deep down.'

'I was moved to watch the video of her and then visit my grandparents' graves and the schoolhouses where my mother grew up. In those days unmarried women didn't have children so she had no alternative but to put me up for adoption. I grew up in a house with five servants, so it was fascinating to see how different it was.'

Since that first meeting, Wheeler's Scottish relatives have spent a weekend at his Grade I listed Jacobean home. The get-together went well.

One mystery remains, however. Chrissie appears to have taken the secret of Wheeler's father to her grave. Instead, using the information he has gathered, he and his family can only hazard a guess.

'It would be nice to know who my father was,' says Wheeler. 'Tessa thinks it could be the headmaster of the school where my mother taught in Margate because she was given a term off work. Mabel also suspects it could have been someone at the school but I believe it could be Margaret Seward's adoptive father, Jack Mitchell, who spent a lot of time with my mother after his wife died and was distraught when she too died.'

In 2002, Wheeler sold IG Index shares worth £7.3 million so he could buy and refurbish Chilham Castle. Tiring of the day-to-day business, and intending to spend more time playing poker and bridge, he later sold his remaining stake in IG Index for £33 million.

Today, he leads a quieter, more comfortable life with his family. Since seeing the vivacious woman in the flickering footage, his world is perhaps, finally, a little more complete.

