



If you head down Pretoria's Lynnwood Road, you might be quite surprised... Hang a right after the Harley-Davidson dealership and things will take an entirely unexpected turn

PHOTOGRAPHS **ELSA YOUNG**  
PRODUCTION **ABIGAIL DONNELLY**  
RECIPES **ADRIAAN MAREE**  
TEXT **LYNDA INGHAM-BROWN**

# Natural selection

BREAM, BROCCOLI  
PURÉE, EDAMAME  
BEANS, SHIITAKE  
MUSHROOMS,  
ROAST LIME AND  
TARRAGON OIL



Chef Adriaan Maree of Fermier restaurant harvests herbs and vegetables from the on-site hydroponic greenhouse.

# Chef

Adriaan Maree is a quiet, measured sort of person, and it's this approach that has informed his success at Fermier, his restaurant on Karoo Square, a co-operative creative community situated on a smallholding in the suburbs of Pretoria. It takes guts and a certain amount of craziness to open a restaurant in the first place, never mind building the structure yourself, with no previous building experience. The goal is for the eatery to ultimately be completely organic and self-sufficient, from growing produce for its own use and raising animals, to aspiring to collect rainwater for irrigation and using solar energy to power some of the workings of the restaurant. Its name is apt, too – *fermier* means farmer in French. Adriaan, who was formerly the chef at Roots restaurant at the Forum Homini hotel in The Cradle of Humankind, with stints at Rust en Vrede and Grand Provence in the Cape's winelands, and Michelin-starred Wild Honey and Hibiscus in the UK before that, is self-effacing, saying, "We cook simple food; people seem to like the idea." And do they ever.

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When TASTE visited, the venue had been open for just five weeks. "I thought it would take a while for people to hear about us, and that would buy us a little time, but they just started coming," laughs Adriaan. "We were quite surprised." On the day of our visit, furrows were being dug in the grass in front of the restaurant where vegetables will be grown in future, so guests will be able to see exactly how short the distance from producer to plate really is. Currently, Adriaan sources most of his greens from the on-site hydroponic greenhouse, which is run by horticulturist Nick Fourie of Karoo Fish and Vegetables, and gets what is still in the process of growing from other local, trusted suppliers. "The idea is to create an ecosystem that

can sustain itself," says Adriaan. He and Nick are rearing tilapia to use in the restaurant and the fish's waste is used to fertilise the plants in the hydroponic greenhouse, where everything from green peppers, varieties of salad leaves, granadillas, celery and cauliflower are in various stages of growth. It's as close to a closed loop as possible.

Nearby, there's an enclosure housing chickens and ducks, and one very fat pig, from where Adriaan gets his eggs, and (in the very near future) his pork. "I buy my lamb from a supplier just outside the city," he tells us, "she only sells about 10 lambs a week, so it's quite a small operation.

I've also invested in a few cows on a farm near Senekal in the Free State, whose meat will eventually be used at the restaurant." The lamb arrives on a Wednesday and Adriaan and his sous chef Ockert Brits, who worked with Adriaan at Roots, butcher it themselves. It's this close relationship to his suppliers that sets Adriaan apart and underpins his philosophy of "responsible involvement", where the gap between produce, farm and final product is as small as possible.

The building itself was a collaborative effort between Adriaan and Karoo Square owner John du Raan. The walls are made

**"I thought it would take a while for people to hear about us, and that would buy us a little time, but they just started coming" – ADRIAAN MAREE**



Opposite, clockwise from top left: Chocolate jelly with xxxxxxxx; celery, among other things, is grown in the greenhouse; every part of the vegetables grown, including fennel, is used; Adriaan and Nick Fourie of Karoo Fish and Vegetables are rearing tilapia for the restaurant; Adriaan built the restaurant himself; free-range lamb loin with black garlic, celeriac, onion and baby gem lettuce; fresh tilapia.

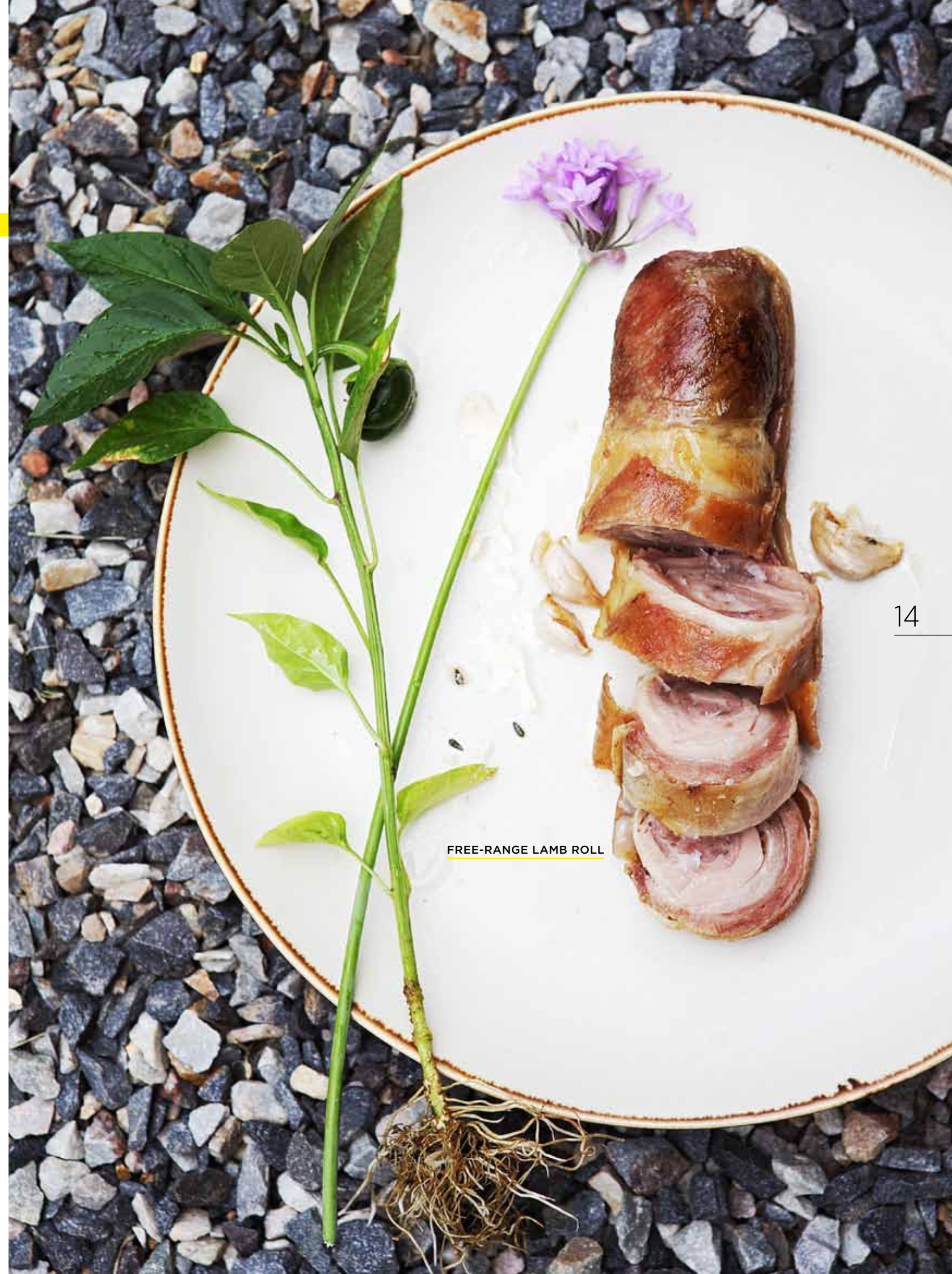
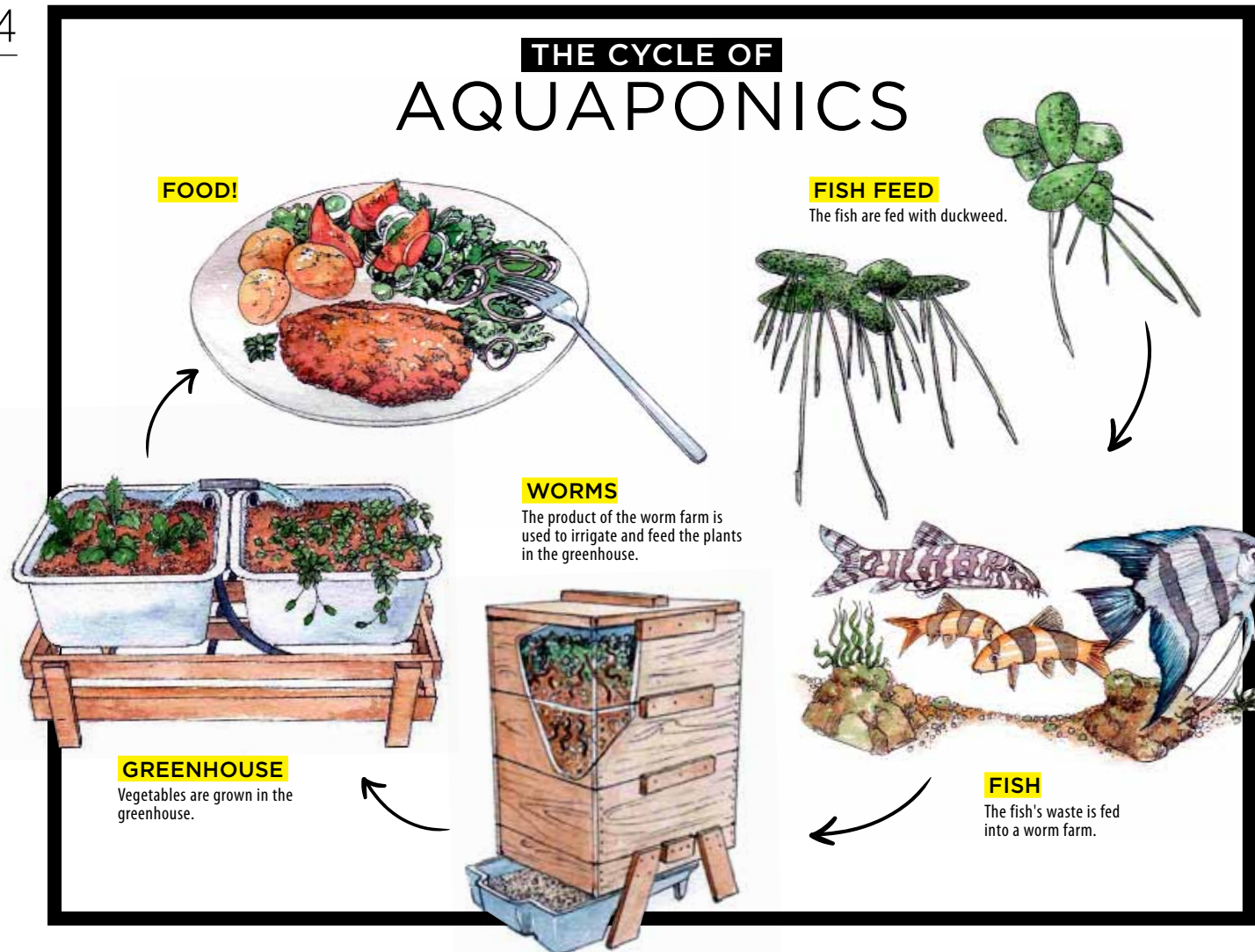
of rammed earth, so the structure appears to have organically “grown” out of the very soil on which it stands. The huge pivot doors are made of reclaimed timber and opened up in summer to allow a breeze to flow through the space. “The Highveld summer evenings are beautiful, so it’s really quite special to open them up to the elements,” says Adriaan. In winter, the restaurant will be warmed via copper pipes built into the floor through which water that has been heated in traditional “donkeys” in the two fireplaces on either end of the restaurant will flow. “I’d really like to put some smokers in the chimneys, and to collect rainwater, but that will take time. And we’d also like to convert sewage to butane gas that we can use for cooking in the kitchen.” The kiaat chairs and tables were made by Dawie Heyns, and the tableware by Elza van Dijk of the Pottery Studio, both of whom have studios on the property. The project really has been a co-operative effort.

**“It takes guts and a certain amount of craziness to open a restaurant in the first place, never mind building the structure yourself”**

When asked about the food, which, after all, is the star of the show, Adriaan is characteristically modest about what he and his team have managed to achieve in such a short space of time. He takes the nose-to-tail philosophy very seriously and hardly anything is allowed to go to waste. The produce available appears in various incarnations on the seven-course tasting menu, for example in duck rillettes with a liver parfait, with the breast being served later with cabbage, beetroot, hazelnuts and coffee. Similarly, lamb loin with black garlic, celeriac, onion and baby gem lettuce is the opening act for a braise in the next course. Fish bones are used to make a bouillabaisse and vegetable trimmings that

would usually go to waste, such as fennel tops, are roasted to intensify their flavour. Baby tomatoes are thinly sliced and dried to extend their lifespan, as are strawberries, so that they can be used to add a pop of flavour wherever necessary. The menu will change often according to seasonality, so diners should expect to be surprised. But, above all, expect food cooked with care and attention, and with the knowledge that the ingredients have been treated with the utmost respect. Which is what it’s all about, after all. **W**

Fermier is currently open for dinner from Tuesday to Saturday at 7 and 7:30 pm. R450 for a seven-course tasting menu. [fermierrestaurant.com](http://fermierrestaurant.com)



ILLUSTRATIONS ADRIAN OWEN

**BREAM, BROCCOLI  
PURÉE, EDAMAME BEANS,  
SHIITAKE MUSHROOMS,  
ROAST LIME AND  
TARRAGON OIL**

Serves 6

**A LITTLE EFFORT**

**GREAT VALUE?**

Preparation: XX minutes

Cooking: XX minutes

shiitake mushrooms 125 g  
ponzu sauce 4 T  
Tenderstem broccoli 200 g  
edamame beans 125 g  
tilapia or African bream fillets 600 g  
olives **GRAMS? BLACK OR GREEN OLIVES?**  
stoned and finely sliced

**For the broccoli purée:**

broccoli stems  
boiling water 2 T  
ice-cold butter 30 g

**For the roast lime purée:**

limes 3  
water 1 cup  
sugar 250 ml <GRAMS>

**For the tarragon oil:**

tarragon 60 g  
vegetable oil ½ cup

**1** Cut the shiitake mushrooms into small cubes and pickle in the ponzu sauce **FOR HOW LONG?**. Remove the broccoli tops and save the stems for the broccoli purée. Remove the husks from the edamame beans. **2** To make the broccoli purée, bring a large pot of salted water to a boil. Slice the reserved broccoli stems very finely and cook in the water until tender. Place the cooked broccoli and 2 T boiling water in a blender and blend at a high speed. Slowly add the butter and blend to form an emulsion. Strain through a very fine sieve into a bowl or a tray over ice. Once cold, remove and set aside. **3** To make the roast lime purée, preheat the oven to 180°C. Prick the skin of the limes with a fork, wrap in foil and roast for 1 hour. Meanwhile, place the water and sugar in a pot over a low heat and cook until the sugar dissolves. Once the limes are tender, remove the foil and place in a blender. Add the sugar syrup and blend until smooth. Strain through a sieve, place



*“Expect food cooked with care and attention, and with the knowledge that the ingredients have been treated with the utmost respect”*

in a small bottle and allow to cool. **4** To make the tarragon oil, blanch the tarragon leaves in boiling water and refresh in cold water. Place in a blender, add the oil and blend until smooth. Strain through a very fine sieve and set aside. **5** Place the broccoli purée in a small saucepan over a low heat, whisk occasionally and season with salt to taste. **6** To cook the fish, preheat a nonstick pan over a medium heat and add a small amount of oil. Place the fish skin side down in the pan. **7** In another warm pan, heat two knobs of butter, the mushrooms and a small amount **HOW MUCH? THE PONZU FROM PICKLING?** of ponzu. Once an emulsion forms, add the edamame beans and broccoli tops and season to taste. **8** To serve, place small drops of roast lime and broccoli purée on each plate. Drizzle the tarragon oil evenly onto the plates and arrange the mushrooms, broccoli tops and edamame beans on the plate and top with the fish. Add the sliced olives.

**RECIPE INFO**

**WINE: Creation Viognier 2015**

**FREE-RANGE LAMB ROLL**

Serves XX

**A LITTLE EFFORT**

**GREAT VALUE?**

Preparation: XX minutes

Cooking: XX minutes

carrots 3  
large onions 2  
celery a bunch  
large leeks 2

red wine 3 cups  
white wine 3 cups  
beef stock 6 litres  
free-range lamb flank 1 kg  
thyme a sprig  
garlic 3 cloves, chopped  
sea salt, to taste  
lemon 1, zested  
basil, to garnish  
wild rocket, to garnish  
wild garlic flowers, to garnish

**1** Preheat the oven to 120°C. Chop the carrots, onions, celery and leeks and cook until golden brown **IN OIL/BUTTER?**. Deglaze the pan with the wine and cook off the alcohol **HOW LONG?**. **2** Add the beef stock and reduce by half, skimming occasionally. Remove from the heat and strain through a very fine sieve. **3** Remove the skin from the lamb – the meat should be rectangular in shape. **4** Season the inside evenly with thyme, garlic, salt and lemon zest. **5** Cut the meat to the width of a piece of clingwrap. Roll up tightly, cover with the clingwrap and knot the ends to seal. **6** Place the meat in a deep oven tray, add the braising liquid, cover with foil and braise in the oven for 8–10 hours. **7** Remove the clingwrap and sear the lamb in oil and butter in a preheated nonstick pan until golden brown, then cut into discs. **8** Reduce some of the braising liquid to use as a sauce for serving. To serve, arrange the lamb on a plate and garnish with basil, wild rocket and wild garlic flowers.

**RECIPE INFO**

**WINE: Waterford Cabernet Sauvignon**

Duck rillettes with liver parfait and dukha. Opposite: An illustration by XXX decorates the restaurant's rammed earth wall.