

Sunday Independent

Life



The final journey

Elizabeth and Patrick Larkin shared a life of adventures. After 56 years of marriage, they chose to leave this world together

21 November 2021 | Liadán Hynes | Martin Mullholland | Kathryn Thomas | Alex Meehan

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Editor's letter



We often hear that the truth is stranger than fiction, but I think it would be better to observe how the truth is more compelling than anything sprung from the imagination. As a magazine editor, I'm endlessly in search of what we call 'real life features' – those stories about people's lives that move us and inform us and connect us in a way that nothing else can.

In today's magazine, David Orr shares with us the story of his late cousins, Patrick and Elizabeth Larkin. They may have been 'ordinary' people but theirs is an extraordinary story of love and devotion, as beautifully retold by David, beginning on page 10.

Leslie Ann Horgan
Editor

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Cover: Elizabeth and Patrick Larkin photographed at the Matterhorn in 1974.



Introducing

Tish O'Connor Nash

Age: 34.

From: Roscommon, now living in Oldtown, Co Dublin.

Making it happen: "I always knew that I wanted my own homeware business," says Tish O'Connor Nash. "I wanted the challenge." For more than 10 years, she had worked in the furniture industry – both retail and wholesale. And, having watched her mother run a guesthouse, she knew all the extra graft that's involved in being self-employed. In July 2019, she set up her online company, stagerslifestyle.com.

Turning a house into a home: "I studied interior design and I've always been picking up interesting bits and bobs," says Tish. Now she runs the business from a studio on her husband's farm in Oldtown. Among the quirky

treasures, you can find lighting, glassware and tables.

Covid clicks: When lockdown happened, she noticed people became more confident in buying online. "I think it helped my sales and people were happy to support an Irish company."

A look: It irritated her that on some homewares sites, that you see just one item. In her studio, she puts several different pieces together to create a look. Her eclectic goods are on display there in a Christmas pop-up until December 11. ●

Instagram: [@stagerslifestyle](https://www.instagram.com/stagerslifestyle)

Words by: **Ciara Dwyer**

Portrait by: **Mark Stedman**



Stefanie Preissner

“It seems extraordinary that we are still talking about what women can and can’t wear in 2021. Yet highly gendered dress codes are still the norm

Since women first stepped into a sporting arena, there have been Herculean efforts to police what they wear. The rules range from forcing women to hide their bodies (presumably to reinforce a broken idea of refined feminine grace) to the other extreme of exposing the female form (possibly to entice men to engage with the sport and maybe sell tickets).

There are battles on every side playing out across the world. Recently we’ve seen global outrage focused on a fine levied against a Norwegian women’s beach handball team. The team chose to compete in shorts rather than bikini bottoms. It took months of accusations of sexism for the International Handball Federation to update its rules on the prescribed uniform.

It’s hard to believe that in 2021 the following description of a women’s uniform was still actively enforced: “Bikini bottoms with a close fit and cut on an upward angle toward the top of the leg, with bikini sides no more than four inches.” It’s even more bizarre when male handball shorts can be more than four inches as long as they are “not too baggy”.

In Ireland, we have a similar problem with policing gender-specific sportswear. In the case of the Irish Camogie Association, they seem tied to traditional notions of appropriate attire for young women. Camogie players are not allowed to wear shorts. Instead,

there is an obligatory skirt or ‘skort’ which some players have no issue with but others feel is outdated and less efficient for this high-speed field sport.

It’s not just sports either. Highly gendered dress codes seem to be a perpetual frontier in the equality war. Just think back to the grief Hillary Clinton got for wearing trouser suits or the various countries who have outlawed wearing the burka.

I’m not usually shocked when the latest version of these stories bursts through the seams of public discourse, but then Hooters happened. The US chain of restaurants recently updated its uniform to something inspired by *The Emperor’s New Clothes*.

I shared my outrage with millions of people who saw a TikTok video of a Hooters employee modelling her new ‘shorts’. The skimpy new uniform covered so little skin that the employee had to wear a pair of grey leggings to avoid exposing herself on the social media site. It was basically a thong with a thicker waistband.

I’m all for women wearing the skimpiest clothes they want but a key component is ‘wanting’ it. It’s a completely different story when some CEO in a suit sends out this uniform.

Hooters has now said that it will allow its employees to choose which uniform they would prefer to wear after several female staff members took to social media to criticise the new clothing.

When Hooters opened nearly 40 years ago, as the name suggests they were

focused on low-cut tops and busty women to serve hungry customers their deep-fried finger food. It’s hard to believe the place hasn’t been cancelled or called out before now. Left unchecked, they’ve evolved. As tastes have changed, they’ve followed suit to meet demand – they now offer non-dairy milk, salads and bigger booties. But hey, it’s market-driven so it’s all good.

It seems a little extraordinary that we are still talking about what women can and can’t wear in 2021. Although sometimes these regulations do affect men, like in swimming and diving where the male body is often more objectified than the female body, this issue dominates women’s lives in every environment we find ourselves in. When something is that pervasive, it’s not a problem, it’s a culture.

It’s disturbing when restrictive and stringent rules are enforced because ‘it’s how it’s always been’. The argument that gets volleyed to those who complain is ‘we can’t change it, it’s a defining feature’ of the sport, company, office, airline...

Except, of course, it’s not. Uniforms change all the time. Rugby shirts go from loose to tight, basketball shorts rise and fall, gym leotards adopt crystals and glitter. It boggles the mind because endless psychological research shows that people, be they elite athletes or Hooters’ staff, perform better when they feel comfortable and safe. Better performance leads to better outcomes for the company, the team, the student, the waitress, everyone. If only people’s comfort and safety were the goal. ●

Notions & Necessities



NECESSITY

Cosy times

Sweater weather shows no signs of abating. We love the DAY X Fee G collaboration of embellished hoodies and sweaters. **LH** Hoodie, €137, see feeg.ie



NOTION

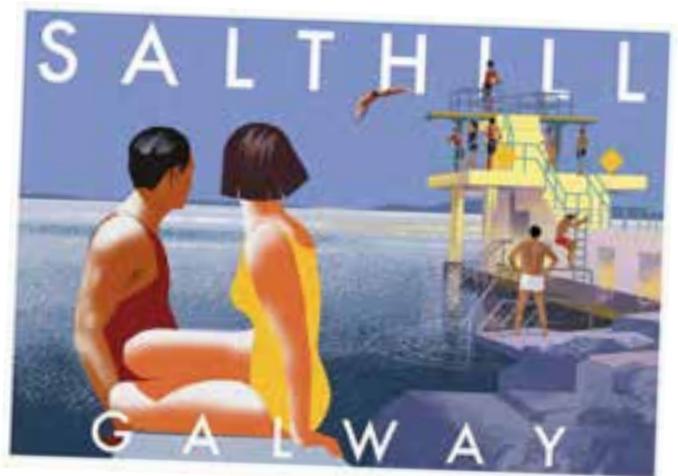
Face forward

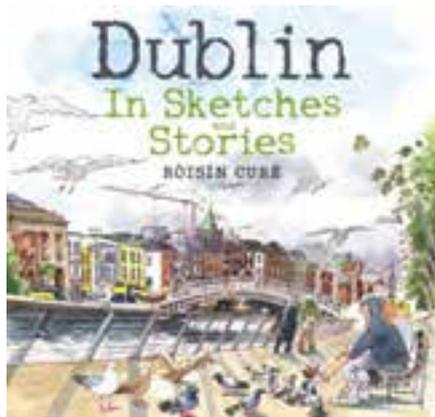
As we enter the season of more make-up, self-tan and late nights, a cleanser that goes that extra mile is essential and the Éminence Monoï Age Corrective Exfoliating Cleanser is just that. Combining, among other ingredients, a little bit of olive-seed scrubbiness, some Tahitian monoi oil for nourishment and a natural retinol alternative, plus an AHA 'cocktail' for refinement, it really ticks all the squeaky-clean boxes. **SC** Éminence Monoï Age Corrective Exfoliating Cleanser, €39, see eminence.ie

NOTION

Picture with a view

For anyone who took a holiday in Ireland this year and would like to mark the occasion, or give someone else a gift to remember, Ireland Posters has again launched its 'buy one get one free' campaign, from its beautiful range of Art Deco-style prints of counties, villages, pubs, birds and lighthouses of Ireland. **LH** Unframed prints from €35, larger framed prints from €75, the offer covers postage to anywhere in the world. See irelandposters.ie





NOTION

City sights

Dublin In Sketches And Stories is a book of watercolours and impressions of the capital city, as captured by Galway-based Róisín Curé. With 125 illustrations in ink and watercolour, the stories she tells are of the things that happen and the people you meet when you stop on a city street to paint. A lovely present idea for the season that rapidly approaches. **SC** *'Dublin In Sketches And Stories'* by Róisín Curé, €24.95, published by Merrion Press

NECESSITY

Border lines

Edited by James Conor Patterson, *The New Frontier: Reflections From The Irish Border* is an anthology of writing exploring the meaning of the partition for the people that inhabit it, with fiction, non-fiction and poetry contributions from writers including Kerri ní Dochartaigh, Jess McKinney, Pat McCabe, Séamas O'Reilly and Lias Saoudi. **LH** *'The New Frontier: Reflections From The Irish Border'*, €21.92, published by New Island



NECESSITY

Christmas crafts

The Ballymaloe Craft Fair runs today and next Saturday and Sunday, November 27 and 28, featuring over 150 stalls over the two weekends, with local, sustainable and seasonal treats and gift ideas. Mrs Claus will be on site for the kids, and there will be a car draw to support their charity partner, St Vincent de Paul South West Region. Attend today and get a discount on a return ticket for next weekend, when there will be a selection of new stalls to peruse. The festival runs indoor, outdoor and in a covered space, and Covid-19 certs of immunity or vaccination will be required. **SC** *Ballymaloe Craft Fair, Ballymaloe Grainstore, Shanagarry. Co Cork, tickets are €6 for adults and children go free, see ballymaloeevents.ie*



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Ciara Kelly

“ Squad goals? Who needs them? Much as I have always longed to be part of a cool clique, in reality it’s not something that would ever suit me

I’m going out on a limb here – but if being a doctor taught me anything about the human condition it’s that people mostly have the same anxieties as each other but they go through life believing themselves to be alone in feeling the way they do – and I admit I always felt a little bit like I was on the outside looking in.

I always wanted to be part of a big, happy gang but never fully felt I was. Side note: the total upside of aging is that these worries we carry all the way from childhood and adolescence get put to bed as you get older and it is a f**king joy. Yes, I took a certain pride in my ability to walk my own line – even as a teen. Yes, there is a certain satisfaction in being a bit different and not always running with the crowd.

Being an exception, not a rule, can be a blessing as much as a curse. But on some level I wanted to drop my guard and just be cheery and comfortable in part of a big crowd of people I saw as *my squad*.

At this point, I’d better apologise to my friends who think I am in their squad – and I am! I’m talking about deep, deep-down feelings that are decades old.

I got to thinking about gangs recently when I was feeling particularly mopey, friendless and like everyone hated me. Another side note: Jenny, the incredible girl who does my nails, told me that when you’re tired, you think everyone hates you and when you’re hungry, you think you hate everyone, and I now think this is the greatest human insight I’ve ever had.

Anyway, I was trying to combat those feelings of isolation, or loneliness, or whatever they are, when I realised that pretty much every day that week I’d met a different pal for a lovely coffee, or walk,

or drink, or whatever. And that far from being friendless, I was actually very lucky to have lots of friends to call upon in times of trouble or indeed times of fun. But generally I meet them in ones or twos rather than in a big group. And it seems to be the group thing I felt was missing, not the friend thing. When it struck me...

I don’t really hang out in big gangs because – and this was a revelation to me – I actually don’t like them! I hate groupthink. I get bored by small talk and generally, in large groups, you aren’t close enough to everyone to avoid it and I always feel I’m slightly moderating myself in a gang in order to maintain some sort of consensus equilibrium that’s needed for the group to operate smoothly. (Or possibly all of that is just my interpretation of group dynamics.)

It was all a bit of a shock. I’d been feeling all my life like I was missing out

somehow on squad goals when in fact the truth was I was actually just being myself because I don’t actually like them.

No longer did I have to feel bad that I wasn’t in a gang of 10 who meet monthly to drink cocktails and gossip. No more did I need to pursue some kind of self-improvement path that might result in me ending up in a cool clique. No, I could actually admit to myself that I hate that stuff and I much prefer to meet my pals in ones, twos and threes and actually chat and laugh with them. I’m just not that sociable. Christ, the relief.

It turns out I’ve been living my life exactly as I wanted to in a way that completely suited me – while feeling bad that I wasn’t somehow different. And if that isn’t the human condition in a nutshell, I don’t know what is. And to paraphrase Oasis, I don’t believe that anybody feels (other than) the way I do, about you now. ●

A second opinion...

I’m not entirely sure why I love this idea but DogTV has launched in the UK – a television network aimed specifically at dogs and their owners, which airs programmes scientifically tested to “alleviate separation anxiety, loneliness and stress in our canine loved ones”, no less!

Apparently it’s been developed after much research into dogs’ physiological and psychological needs and has been formulated in a way that will help stimulate our pooches while also making them relax and sleep better.

I’ve so many thoughts on this. Firstly,

if dogs sleep any better than they already do, it’s unlikely they’ll ever be awake. But secondly, and more importantly, if they can do this for dogs – why don’t they do it for humans? Who among us wouldn’t like to be able to watch TV and feel stimulated while simultaneously less anxious, lonely or stressed? We’d all be addicted.

The main thing I’m secretly wondering though is: if this works for dogs, might it also just work for us anyway? I do share a lot of characteristics with a Labrador... not least the love of biscuits.





The couple's wedding day. From left to right: best man Gay Byrne, groom Patrick, bride Elizabeth, and bridesmaid, Elizabeth's sister, Carine O'Grady

KNOWING THE HOUR

Patrick and Elizabeth Larkin chose to live active, fulfilled and adventurous lives together; life on their own terms. When it came to death, they made the same kind of choice

Words by
David Orr

On a pleasant but chilly evening in March last year, a neighbour of my cousins knocked on the door of their cottage in Dún Laoghaire. He said he was going away for a few days and had a bag of food they might like.

"Thank you, but no," said my cousin Patrick Larkin, standing in his doorway. "We're actually going away ourselves tomorrow."

"Ah really," said the neighbour. "And where are you off to?"

"We're going to see the world," said Patrick.

If the announcement that octogenarian Patrick and his wife Elizabeth were embarking on a world tour seemed surprising, it did not cause alarm. They'd been inveterate travellers all their »

» lives – skiing with friends every winter in Austria, and hiking in northern Italy until well into old age.

True, they'd slowed down a bit of late. Patrick's eyesight was failing and he had fallen, breaking his arm. Elizabeth had also taken a tumble and had undergone operations on her hip. Perhaps the journey was a final hurrah, mused the neighbour. Maybe that was the reason they'd sold their car a couple of weeks earlier.

That night, the neighbour noticed that the lights next door were, unusually, not on. The following morning, he received a handwritten letter in the post. It informed him that his neighbours were taking their own lives and would, by the time the message was read, both be dead.

Shocked, the neighbour hurried out to bang on their front door. No answer. He returned home and rang An Garda Síochána.

The letter was one of four almost identical messages from my cousins. Two retired women, who lived on the other side of the cul-de-sac and had spare keys to the cottage, received one. So too did two Dublin-based relatives: Carine O'Grady, Elizabeth's sister, and Hilary Byrne, Patrick's niece.

A garda soon gained entry to my cousins' cottage and was followed by a doctor who declared both occupants dead. The bodies were removed to St Columcille's Hospital, Loughlinstown where they were formally identified. A death notice in the newspaper said they had died 'peacefully'. Patrick had reached the age of 89 and Elizabeth was 80.

News of their deaths soon reached me at my home in south-western France via a phone call from my sister and a text message from Patrick's niece. I was devastated but not unduly surprised. We on my side of the family – I was a distant cousin of Patrick's on my mother's side – had always suspected this was what they might do if and when they became old and infirm.

If I can't recall them openly talking of suicide, they had certainly made it clear they would



This is something they openly discussed, particularly during their last years. They made no bones about what they planned. Neither felt they'd be able to cope alone

never end up senile and incapacitated in an old people's home.

"This is something they openly discussed," says Carine, "particularly during their last years. They made no bones about what they planned. Neither felt they'd be able to cope alone."

Patrick had been, like his father before him, a pharmacist all his working life. In his more disparaging moments, Patrick – who would have liked to have been an engineer – would describe himself as a glorified pill pusher. It was clear that he and his beloved wife would never lack the means to end their days when they believed their time had come.

To my mind, the possibility of one day being able to take one's leave of the world is an alluring one and I often thought of asking Patrick what particular combination of drugs he would recommend. But, somehow, I'd always lacked the courage to ask him. It would have been a bit of a downer to introduce such a subject into our conversations which mostly centred on our respective foreign adventures.

"Patrick's great fear was that he'd die first," one family member told me recently, "and that there'd be no one to look after Elizabeth. He'd been very down the last few months as his health deteriorated."

It was true. Patrick had seemed out of sorts the last time I'd spoken to him on the phone in January last year, just after the death of his sister, Frances. As Patrick and Elizabeth had gotten older, they'd taken to avoiding the funerals of friends and family – he would not be attending the funeral of his sister. I also exchanged a few words with Elizabeth – the one with whom I usually shared the longest conversations – but she didn't seem her usual chatty self.

Patrick and Elizabeth were among my favourite relatives. From an early age, I knew there was something different, something exotic about them. In their early married life, during the late 1960s and into the 1970s, they lived in a dazzlingly modern house – all glass and wood and steel beams – which had been designed

by an architect friend and built in the back yard of Patrick's mother's house in Drogheda's then rather drab town centre.

I marvelled at its light and open spaces – here was something completely outside the experience of a boy who had grown up in a 1930s bungalow near Malahide. On their walls hung stark landscapes painted by Elizabeth, who had trained at the Slade School of Fine Art in London.

Everything about them seemed glamorous and unconventional. Having apparently met at a yacht club reception, Patrick, who had a pilot's licence, flew the young Elizabeth down the east coast in a small airplane (not something most Irish men can claim to have done on a first date). An alternative version of events, as told by Elizabeth to my wife at a family gathering, has it that she fell in love with Patrick soon after he moved into a house she was then sharing with another man. Had this not proved awkward, asked my wife. "Noooooo," laughed Elizabeth. "This was the 1960s."

Patrick and Elizabeth got married in Donnybrook in 1964. Patrick's best man was Gay Byrne, whose brother, Al, was married to Patrick's sister, Frances. Soon afterwards, the couple set off overland on the hippie trail to Iran, Nepal and Afghanistan.

Back in Ireland, they kept a racing dinghy at the estuary in Mornington, down river from Drogheda, where they spent their weekends sailing and taking part in regattas. In the mid-1970s, they took off to the French Riviera where they bought a yacht on which they spent several years cruising around the Mediterranean. Their boat was christened *Mornington*.

Not everyone felt as I did about Patrick and Elizabeth. She was, at least when first encountered, deemed rude and aloof by several members of my family. It's true, she didn't much go in for chit-chat. One of my aunts tells how Elizabeth, on their first meeting at a lunch hosted by Patrick's mother, looked up from the newspaper she was reading on the sofa and



snapped: “Oh hello”, before returning to her paper. My aunt now says it was probably shyness on the part of the young fiancée and that, subsequently, she came to like and admire Elizabeth.

The other bone of contention for my family was that Patrick and Elizabeth did not have any children. This omission was seen largely as an act of selfishness on Elizabeth’s part. Patrick, it was argued, loved children and would have made “a wonderful father”.

Going through some old boxes in my mother’s house, I recently came across my childhood train set. One of my earliest memories is of Patrick lying beside me on the carpet in Malahide helping me with my Hornby trains. There is also a memory of him slipping a fiver into my teenage hand at the end of a visit.

In later years, I heard a plausible

Patrick and Elizabeth at a family gathering in Dublin, 2016. Beside them is Alexander Orr, one of whose student violin pieces was played at their funeral

explanation for the fact that Elizabeth did not want to have children. She’d grown up in Dublin with a severely disabled brother living at home until his death at the age of 14. It was said that there was a genetic defect in the bloodline which she was terrified of passing on to any offspring.

Carine says: “Having had a brain-damaged brother had a huge effect on us growing up and that was certainly a factor in Elizabeth’s thinking. But it was also that they felt children would somehow be an encumbrance and would have restricted the kind of life they wanted together.”

Patrick and Elizabeth came across as a totally devoted couple who needed nothing – or no one – extraneous to themselves to affirm their bond. If their self-sufficiency seemed eccentric, it was an endearing trait. Among the possessions found in their house after their deaths was a card

from Elizabeth to her husband. ‘Happy Birthday,’ it read. ‘This is the 7,560th day that I have woken up beside you’.

They compartmentalised their lives, or rather life, because they rarely seemed to be apart. One never really got to meet their friends. Had my family been introduced, I’m not sure what they would have made of them. Elizabeth once mentioned that, on a recent trip to London, they’d stayed with Mick Fleetwood, the legendary drummer and co-founder of the rock group Fleetwood Mac.

On the last occasion I saw Elizabeth, at lunch in my mother’s house in Malahide, I admired the mac she was wearing. “Oh, Germaine gave me that,” she said, referring to the iconic feminist author Germaine Greer.

When I asked Carine about these unlikely acquaintances, she told me that Elizabeth had been »

Together forever

» to art college with Sally Fleetwood and had subsequently become great friends with Mick as well. How Elizabeth had come to know Germaine Greer, she couldn't remember but thought this friendship had begun some years after her student days in London.

I would see Patrick and Elizabeth perhaps once a year. As a newspaper foreign correspondent, and latterly as a spokesman for one of the United Nations agencies, I'd been living abroad since the mid-1990s. However, whenever I returned to Ireland, I'd make a point of at least ringing them for a chat, even if it wasn't always possible to get out to join them for a walk along the pier in Dún Laoghaire. Sometimes I'd meet them in Dublin or they'd come out to Malahide for a walk around the estuary.

One time, aged 83, Patrick arrived out for afternoon tea on his racing bike in full Lycra kit (a mere doddle for a man who, around that time, spent a couple of weeks cycling in the Alps). Patrick was a bit of a climber *manqué* and a passionate reader of mountain lore.

I'd first got to know them – as friends rather than as distant cousins – back in 1979 when I spent a gap year from university, teaching English at a school in the French Alps. That summer, accompanied by a university friend – who subsequently became their lawyer – I drove down to visit them on their boat at Saint-Jean-Cap-Ferrat. Sitting on deck, sipping wine in the warmth of the Côte d'Azur, we had somehow clicked, embarking on a friendship which was to last decades.

On their return to Ireland, they'd bought the Dún Laoghaire cottage, then a ruin. They did most of the renovation work themselves, teaching themselves how to lay bricks, plaster walls and put on a new roof – in doing so, they were motivated not just by DIY zeal but also by financial necessity.

Some years later, having saved some money, they were able to acquire the next-door cottage, knocking it through to make a



single property. Their home included a studio where Elizabeth worked as an art restorer, refurbishing old paintings for clients including the National Gallery of Ireland. There was always a work in progress on Elizabeth's easel. Paintings, gifts from more than one well-known Irish artist, hung on the walls.

Did they ever go to see the designer house in which they'd lived in Drogheda, I asked Patrick the last time I saw them in the autumn of 2019.

"We called by on our last visit and would you believe it," he said, bursting into laughter, "it's become a strip club." I would have imagined he'd have been appalled at such a turn of events but he found it hilarious.

Their funeral last year took place just as the first Covid-19 cases in Ireland were being announced. It was, at the request of Patrick and Elizabeth, a humanist rather than a religious celebration. There was lots of music, including Frank Sinatra's paean to world travel, *Come Fly with Me*. Family and friends recounted their favourite Patrick and Elizabeth anecdotes.

A framed photo of Patrick and Elizabeth on the table at the lunch in Dalkey, following the scattering of their ashes at sea in September 2021



Among the possessions found after their deaths was a card from Elizabeth: 'Happy Birthday. This is the 7,560th day that I have woken up beside you'

The stories brought back happy memories and we cried because they were not there to share them with us.

We jump forward to this year. Patrick and Elizabeth's house in Dún Laoghaire has been sold. At the inquest, held in August, the coroner confirmed that their deaths had been caused by fatal drug overdoses.

On a beautiful, sunny Saturday in September, a group of their friends and relatives gathered at the Royal Irish Yacht Club in Dún Laoghaire. From a motor launch, we scattered their ashes in Dublin Bay and afterwards repaired for lunch to Dalkey.

On a terrace overlooking the sea, where we were joined by more friends and relatives from half a dozen countries, we again regaled each other with treasured Patrick and Elizabeth anecdotes. The memories brought laughter and, of course, some tears. We told each other, that's how it is when you miss people but feel lucky to have known them. I loved Patrick and Elizabeth. They changed my life. But that is another story. ●

Small but mighty



Overwhelmed by the scale of the climate crisis? Don't be – each of us has a role to play. Here, the people behind five Irish initiatives detail how their green ideas are slowly making a big change

Words by
Liadán Hynes

Since the publication of the report by the UN's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) – described by the UN Secretary General António Guterres as a “code red for humanity” – in August and the spectacle of world leaders attending the COP26 in recent weeks, we've had a collective, long-overdue,

come-to-Jesus moment about the environment. And with the realisation comes massive anxiety.

We no longer talk about climate change, we talk about the climate catastrophe, or crisis.

It's easy amid all this to become either paralysed by fear, or despondent from a sense of impotence. What can one person do in the face of a problem of such scale? And really, is focusing on

the individual in some way allowing governments and large organisations off the hook? Can the actions of one person really have meaningful impact?

We spoke to people about the homegrown businesses, initiatives, and ways of life they have created to enact change and reduce our harmful impact on the planet. Each story is proof of the influence every one of us can wield. »

Change makers

MEGAN BEST OF NATIVE EVENTS

Native Events, a sustainable-events solution-focused company, was born in 2017 out of frustration, managing director Megan Best explains with a smile. “It started because myself and my business partner were event organisers ourselves for years, and were really struggling to bring in sustainable-event solutions and infrastructure to run events.

“I was the operations manager for the Body & Soul festival for a decade, and trying to implement compost-loo facilities, or solar and renewable energy at the festival, in nearly every incident we needed to bring over equipment from the UK.”

The carbon emissions caused by the transport involved in this largely negated the purpose, she points out. Hence the founding of Native Events.

The company’s approach is based around looking at six areas of high impact, Best explains. “You have energy, which is trying to reduce your energy needs and your energy consumption. The second thing is transport; that’s a really, really tricky thing in this country, because we just simply don’t have the public transport network.

“Trying to convince audiences to travel to events on public transport, especially now on the back of the pandemic, is a huge nut to crack because audience transport can be anywhere up to 60pc of an event’s emissions.”

Food is another high-impact area, with the aim being to move as much as possible to locally produced, in season, plant-based offerings.

“Waste is a huge one in events and cultural organisations, and actually in theatre and film. All of the sets that we build, and all the beautiful ways in which we express ourselves, carry with them a huge amount of materials, and using resources, and transporting things.

“And then once the piece is done, what do you do with these materials? Introducing ideas and principles around circularity to that design phase for those pieces is a really key area to look at.”

Finally there is governance – making sure that it’s embedded across the organisation, that it comes from the top down, bottom up and gets people on board, spreading understanding of why and how we can change.

“I think the pandemic has been quite a wake-up call for a lot of people, because people have been able to get off the constant, ‘I’m too busy, I just need to get on with the things that I’m doing’, and actually take a moment to pause and reflect, and to be reminded of what’s important.”

Spending as much time outdoors as we have done in the past two years has reminded people of the importance of nature. “The tide feels like it’s turning. A year ago or two years ago, I would have felt an awful lot more despondent than I do now.”

As for the power of the individual, and the knowledge that you can make a difference, Best advises: “Say to yourself on a daily basis, ‘what can I do, within the boundaries of the system that I have, how can I embrace change and transformation?’”

nativeevents.ie



NEIL MCCABE OF THE GREENPLAN

In 2008, Neil McCabe, a full-time firefighter and paramedic with Dublin Fire Brigade, was working in Kilbarrack Fire Station. "It was a 40-year-old building that had never been refurbished or had any sort of upgrade." He had the idea of improving it. "I put a cardboard box on a counter, and said to people, 'Put used batteries here.'

"The batteries led to recycling; all of a sudden, everything was recycled. In the first year, we saved upwards of €10,000." Next McCabe moved on to considering what tweaks they could make in the heating system. "We hadn't asked for funding. It was all delivered from savings."

McCabe expanded his horizons, inventing project after project to help the station save money. He began to develop what is now known as The Greenplan, putting together a dedicated procedures-based system. By the end of the third year, they had reduced the running costs of the fire station by €50,000. This model was spread to every fire station around Dublin, becoming part of the business plan of Dublin Fire Brigade.

The Greenplan looks at seven themes; energy, water, waste, biodiversity,



transport, society, and procurement, a model which has been adopted by local authorities throughout Ireland. "In a four-year period, Dublin Fire Brigade had reduced its energy spend by €11m. The total spend to achieve that was €3.6m, that came from energy savings," McCabe says with justifiable pride.

In 2013, McCabe was elected an Irish Ashoka Fellow, the world's leading social entrepreneurs. Having created a free course in The Greenplan and making it available online, the plan has been

adopted by 164,000 towns around the world, and businesses throughout Europe and America. "At this stage, we're into hundreds of thousands of tonnes of emissions that have been saved."

Just how much of his free time does this take up? "I'd say all of it," McCabe laughs. "I've three lovely boys, I put them first on everything, and then the rest of my time goes into The Greenplan, [reforestation project] Grown Forest, and the clothing company called Grown."

For every Grown item created, a tree is planted, and Grown Forest now means people can plant a tree for any occasion, including as Christmas presents (see grownforest.ie). All of McCabe's work in the environmental area is non-profit.

He has been invited in the past to travel with former US president Barack Obama and politician John Kerry, through his work on The Greenplan. "I had no idea when I put a box up on a counter saying 'put batteries here' that it would have such an impact on my life."

McCabe is now an expert adviser to four EU Directives on topics such as air quality and waterways, and has also met with Russian President Vladimir Putin through this work. "I hope I've left my boys a legacy that there's an awful lot one person can do." thegreenplan.ie

ORLA FARRELL OF EASY TREESIE

In 2017, school teacher Orla Farrell was looking for a project that would tie in with other work her school had completed under the An Taisce Green Flag Programme, when she came across a project by a nine-year-old boy in Germany. The idea was that school children would plant one million trees in each country. "We discovered there were a million school children in Ireland. So, we emailed them over in Germany: 'Where do we begin?'" she says.

"They had a programme where you would plant 300 trees, in 105 minutes, in your local public land, park, or wherever you could find. We organised a climate conference on a Saturday with children from five local schools. We had permission, we got sponsors, we went out to the park, and the local authority came along to help. They prepared the ground, and we planted those 300 trees. It worked really well."

The project began to escalate; more schools became involved, Farrell's team began running more Tree Academies, including a virtual event during lockdown. Farrell took early retirement for her teaching to run the project now known as Easy Treesie. "After a couple of years, there was so much excitement about this project that I thought, 'You know what? I'll see if I can get this million-tree project over the line.'"

The pandemic has meant more support for the project. "There was an even greater interest in tree-planting, because people were so close to home, they really appreciated their local parks and whatever walkways they had near them," explains Farrell, who has managed to get various sponsors on board to help costs. "Our motto is 'the right tree in the right place.'"

"We call on people to find space for a suitable tree, plant it and add it to the UN Plant-for-the-Planet world map using the TreeMapper app. If you have no place to plant, you can use the app to sponsor trees for €10 on our project with charity Crann, Tree for Ireland, at easytreesie.com."

To date, Easy Treesie has planted 205,000 trees. "We expect to reach our goal," Farrell says firmly of the one-million target. "I felt a responsibility that we would take an action. It's lighting a candle instead of cursing the darkness, if you like." easytreesie.com





HUGH WELDON AND AHMAD MU'AZZAM OF EVOCCO

Weldon and Mu'azzam met in university in 2012, where they were both studying mechanical engineering. "We were always interested in renewable energies, electro mobility, that kind of thing," Weldon says. He points to 2015, and the signing of the Paris Climate Agreement, as a turning point for the pair.

"We were on Erasmus in Milan, having a wonderful time. The agreement was signed that November, and I remember quite clearly seeing the elation in the crowd; it started as a slow clap, and then everyone was on their feet, crying, and in each other's arms. I remember feeling, wow, something that people had been arguing about since before I was born, this problem is being addressed, and you could go on and think what wonderful things you could do with your life."

Subsequently, Weldon and Mu'azzam came to realise this was not the case, the problem was not being solved. They knew that much of the technologies needed to help climate change already existed, the problem was they had yet to be widely adopted.

"We came to the realisation that not enough people were engaged in the

climate crisis; it was just such a big thing for people to try and comprehend, that no one really knew where to start. So, if we could provide a tool that helped people to start taking climate action with little steps in their daily lives, then that would help

grow the climate movement. It wouldn't just help reduce emissions from their behaviour, it would also show government a need for stronger policy, and it would have a nice ripple effect through society and the economy."

They decided to focus on the area of food, and in late 2020, the pair launched Evocco. "It is a mobile app that empowers consumers to eat within planetary boundaries [the safe operating limits we need to be within to adapt to the climate crisis and avoid climate change]," Mu'azzam explains of the app, which helps people track, improve, and offset the carbon footprint of their food shopping.

Research shows that 65kg a month is the maximum CO2 emission we can each be allowed in what is emitted from the food we consume if we want to reach the targets set by the Paris Climate Agreement. "You can take a photograph of your food shopping

receipt, we give you a score, the climate impact of the products that you just bought, in kilogrammes of CO2, and then we give tips and recommendations to help you improve."

The app's recommendations are mostly around suggesting lower-impact alternative food groups. "When it comes to climate impact, the most important thing is what you buy, not where it comes from, or how it's packaged. The second most important thing then is, is it seasonal – that would cover the local aspect – and then the third thing would be how it's packaged," Weldon says.

"I feel like I have no choice but to be hopeful. If I let myself stray too much on the other side of things, the more you think about it, the more it feels like there's no solutions out there," Mu'azzam says of the climate crisis, adding that he notices an increasing momentum in how compelling the matter is for business, the public, and government.

On the power of the individual, Weldon points out that throughout history, great social changes have happened "on the backs of people who sacrificed and organised and demanded that those changes take place. People organised for something they believe in, and that caused the system to change." *evocco.com*

Ahmad Mu'azzam and, above, Hugh Weldon





Photograph by:
Eoin Campbell

CLOUGHJORDAN ECOVILLAGE

“The foundation of the ecovillage started in 1999,” explains Iva Pocock, who was one of the roughly 40 original members. “There was a group of people, many of them involved in environmental campaigning, I suppose the motivation was to try and do something positive, rather than constantly objecting to things. So, we had this vision of creating an ecovillage, a village which would be sustainable economically, socially and environmentally.”

They set up a company and began looking for land. “We eventually found this farm, a former dairy farm here, adjoining the village of Cloughjordan in Co Tipperary.”

The aim was to build energy-efficient houses; the village now contains 130 units, including houses and apartments.

Most people own their own homes, but there are places for rent as well as a privately run hostel.

“We have an agreed ecological charter, which is a document to guide how we build our houses. We wanted to demonstrate alternative ways of generating energy [the village is run from one central boiler].

“We wanted to have land in order to grow food, in order to grow trees. And we wanted to be able to try and generate jobs and create work; we didn’t want to just be a place where people lived, and went to work elsewhere. Those were the main aims and they continue to be the main aims.”

“The big challenge when you’re doing something that you haven’t done before, you’re effectively pioneers so we basically became ecological developers,” Pocock adds with a smile, “with no real experience. So, it was very much a mission driven by this bigger vision. And maybe a youthful zeal.” thevillage.ie ●

'I NEVER THOUGHT I COULD GET KILLED, IT WAS JUST LIFE'

As Belfast's famous Europa Hotel celebrates its 50th birthday, one of its longest-serving staff members, head concierge Martin Mulholland, remembers the celebrities and dignitaries who've checked in, and how it felt to work in the place once dubbed 'the most bombed hotel in the world'

Words by
Chrissie Russell

Portrait by
William Cherry

In June 1992, Nirvana played a now legendary gig at The King's Hall in Belfast. The next morning, Kurt Cobain was rushed to hospital. The official reason was that he was suffering from a weeping stomach ulcer. The man who called the ambulance was now head concierge of the Europa Hotel, Martin Mulholland.

"The first inkling that things weren't quite right was when the driver, who happened to be a really good friend of mine, pulled up at the front of the hotel and came to me asking for help," says Mulholland today. "I went out to the car and in the back was Kurt Cobain and a very heavily pregnant Courtney Love.

"We helped them out of the car and, as discretely as possible, guided them to their room. I asked him if there was anything I could do for him, but he only asked not to be disturbed. Seeing how fragile he was, I thought to myself there was a chance the show wouldn't go ahead."

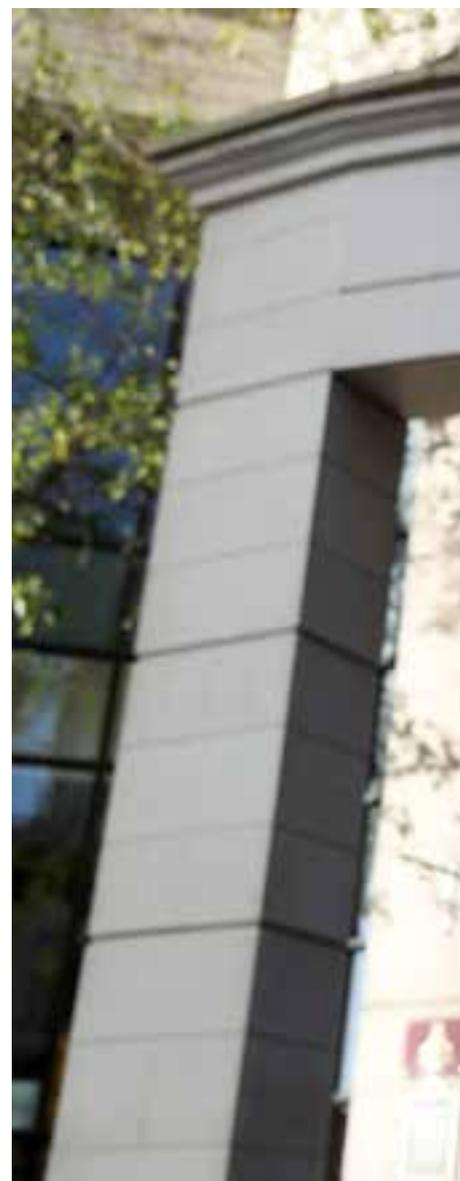
The show did go on, and to

rapturous reception, but the next day Mulholland was summoned again. "The following morning, just as check-out was starting to get busy, we were asked by Nirvana's management to call an ambulance. I didn't ask who it was for, or why they needed it, I think I already knew." He pauses.

"Cobain never returned to the hotel. He went straight to the airport from the hospital. When news of his death broke two short years later, I remember feeling a sort of sad inevitability that such a fragile talent would come to such an end."

Nirvana, Radiohead, U2, Bob Dylan, Brad Pitt, Bill Clinton... "It would be easier to name who didn't stay at the Europa than those who did," grins Mulholland.

This year, the world-famous Belfast hotel celebrates its 50th birthday. When it opened in 1971, the Europa was the only international hotel in Northern Ireland, a stylish enclave where, on hotel's uppermost floor, guests could sip exotic cocktails served



by velvet-clad 'Penthouse Poppets', Belfast's rather more PC version of the *Playboy* bunnies.

Outside at street level, things were less glamorous. As The Troubles escalated, a security fence was erected at the hotel's entrance and "every guest, every single person coming into the hotel, had to go through that security barrier and have their bag checked," recalls Mulholland.

Mulholland is one of the hotel's longest-serving members of staff, starting work in the Europa lobby on September 5, 1983. "I was 17 and had a cousin who worked in the hotel and knew they were looking for some part-time staff so I thought I'd give it a shot for a couple of months. The first time I stood behind the desk it was a wee bit daunting. I was just this little



kid from west Belfast and suddenly I was seeing all these stars and famous people that I'd only seen on television!"

Today, security barriers only go up to keep back screaming fans – like in November 2011 when the Europa played host to the MTV Europe Music Awards after-party – and the companies block booking rooms for long-term stays are major production companies.

The cast and crew of *Game of Thrones* made the Belfast hotel their base throughout filming (indeed, it was Kit Harrington's presence in the hotel's foyer that first alerted fans that all might not be as it seemed with Jon Snow's season five demise). However, back in the 1980s, it was the world's press that called the Europa home.



I was just this little kid from west Belfast and suddenly I was seeing all these stars and famous people that I'd only seen on television!

"Belfast then wasn't really a tourist destination. The guests we had were the press. We had permanent offices for *The Times*, *The Guardian* and, almost permanently resident were CNBC, ITN... All those networks needed to be here. If something happened, they were straight out and on the story."

Sometimes the story came to them. Between 1970 and 1994, the Europa was targeted more than 30 times, earning it the unenviable title of 'the world's most bombed hotel'. And yet, under the steely stewardship of then general manager Harper Brown, the mantra was always: 'We'll never close.'

"It got called the Hardboard Hotel because when the windows were damaged, they'd just get

boarded up. When our kitchens were out of order, Harper would get the chefs to build fires in the loading-bay area and do big pots of soup or stew just to keep the place going."

The GM even brought in a commemorative tie for any guests involved in or evacuated in one of the bombs. "I think Sir Trevor McDonald and Gerald Seymour still have theirs," says the concierge, who remains in touch with many of the press who stayed there at that time.

The questions he gets asked most is: What would make you apply for a job in the most bombed building in the world?

"And I don't really have an answer," says Mulholland frankly. "I never thought of it as a target or that I could get killed, it was just life. When I started, it would have been pretty regularly that you'd get a phone call to switchboard or someone would phone one of the local radio stations and say, 'There's a device in the Europa Hotel' and then we'd instantly go into our procedures of checking out and seeing what was there."

It was the final two attacks on the building that stand out for him as the worst. In 1991 an IRA bomb concealed in a hijacked van parked on neighbouring Glengall St damaged the hotel so badly it took almost two years to renovate.

Then in 1993 came another attack. "We'd just got the hotel back to where it had been and then they put a skip with a 500lb device at the side that really did serious damage."

The destruction to the Europa and the neighbouring Grand Opera House was such that the concierge could stand at his desk in the foyer and see all the way through the decimated walls to the theatre's stage.

"It was soul destroying and it made me angry. In 1993 I'd been here 10 years and I was committed to the place. It was my work and all my friends' work and I'd just had a new baby girl. Our jobs were under threat because they really were talking about closing the hotel down then and turning it into a carpark."

The vision of local »

A place in history



» businessman Sir William Hastings saved it. "Sir William proved himself to be a very insightful man and he took a chance when no one else would. The hotel was a wreck and the peace process was yet to kick in. There was no guarantee that the hotel wasn't going to be targeted again but he took a chance and that was a saviour for the hotel."

Today, the Europa is part of a portfolio of seven luxurious Northern Irish hotels in the Hastings collection. Multi-million investment has seen the four-star, 272-bed hotel increase its capacity and offering, but without losing its charm. The piano bar is still on the first floor, where Mulholland remembers Bono and Shane MacGowan sitting "to all hours of the night". He adds: "There have been a good few times where I've come in for the morning shift to find the party still going!"

Business had been booming. "We were talking about a record year for 2020/2021 and then Covid-19 put the brakes on that." During the closures, the silence of the vacant hotel was eerie, although Mulholland holds no truck with the myth that a ghost

Above: US President Bill Clinton shaking hands with Martin Mulholland in 1998

Right: Soldiers looking over the extensive damage caused to the Europa Hotel, Belfast, following a bomb explosion in 1975

called Veronica wanders the ninth floor.

Since re-opening in May, life is finally starting to return to normal at the hotel. As we chat, breakfast service is in full swing and two American guests are looking a little sheepish at the revelation they cannot dine in their white towelling robes. The ballroom is awash with confetti from a school formal the previous night and the penthouse is set up for a wedding service.

There are exciting times ahead.

There's proposed development at nearby Great Victoria St (which would be the new arrival point for the Dublin train); there's a TV series in the pipeline following the daily lives of those in the hotel, and work is under way on the ninth floor, home of the Titanic and Clinton Suites.

The presidential visit in 1995 was a career-high for Mulholland, but after 38 years of seeing famous faces pass through the lobby, there's not much that causes him to raise an eyebrow when it comes to celebrity caprices or demands, although some do stand out.

"I remember Rod Stewart had to

have KitKats," he laughs. "It was around Easter so we got him KitKat Easter eggs and put them around the room!"

The celebrity stories amuse Mulholland and the occasional perks, such as getting on the guest list to see Radiohead play their secret gig at Belfast's Mandela Hall back in 1997, are gratefully received. However, it's clear that it's the daily interactions with guests that he still enjoys most. His favourite place is the front desk.

"As concierge you're the first person you see as you're coming through and the last you see when you're leaving, so it's important to be there," he explains.

That day an American guest has come up to him with a request. "He placed a small carved wooden box on my desk and said, 'Say hello to my dad'," says Mulholland. It transpires that the guest's father wanted his ashes scattered 'back home' in Belfast and the guest needed help on deciding where.

"We sat down and he told me all about his dad and his last wish and after much discussion and a little history lesson we decided on a spot." He smiles. "Just another day at the concierge desk." ●

Platform

'Bouncing back' comments annoy me



Kathryn Thomas

is a broadcaster, founder of Pure Results fitness retreats and Bump Fit for pregnancy and post-natal fitness. She lives in Dublin with her husband and two daughters

For years, we've been told that when we get pregnant, we should lie on the couch and eat for two and wrap ourselves in cotton wool.

My thinking is that carrying a human and childbirth are not easy tasks for the body, and the stronger you can have your body for doing that, the better.

Recently, at the end of my second pregnancy, I was in Dunnes carrying duvets and duvet covers and a woman came over, "Give it to me. Give it to me." We're all told not to lift and carry in pregnancy, and so it's understandable that when people see you lifting kettlebells

it seems odd to them. But the science says it's about position, what to lift, your position when you lift, how your centre of gravity changes – and you adapt to it. Then, in the third trimester, you exercise, but no lying on the back and no lifting from certain points.

There's still a lot of uncertainty and mixed information about what women should be doing about keeping up fitness in pregnancy. On my first pregnancy, the doctor said I could go back to exercise at eight weeks, but mentally I wasn't there.

We had gone through so much trying and fertility stuff, and I was so anxious. I was scared to jeopardise the chances of going to full term.

I went down a YouTube rabbit hole of pregnancy workouts, and then I went to my good friend and personal trainer Róisín Jones, who has huge expertise in pregnancy and post-natal exercise. She devised a plan and worked with me through the pregnancy and we had the idea of putting it on paper.

Then, very early on in my second pregnancy, I took it out and dusted it off and we took it to the next level by shooting video content for it. Every couple of weeks, from week 12 to 36, we shot a new video and ended up with 96 workouts in total.

It's lovely now to look back at how, when we started, there was no bump and then I'm growing all the time as it goes.

The programme is three workouts a week, but you can do as many or as few as you like. And there were days when I went in there and said to the camera, "If you're not feeling like it today, turn me off, because I don't feel like it either."

I like that the programme takes the guesswork out of what you

READ

A good-humoured, practical handbook for appropriate pregnancy pre- and post-natally is Charlie Barker's *Bumps & Burpees*. Written through her first pregnancy, it covers all three trimesters. She knows her stuff, with 36 workouts suited to pregnancy and beyond.

LISTEN

In March of this year, *The Runner's World UK Podcast* talked to ultra-runner Sophie Power about running during and after pregnancy, the pelvic floor and female fitness. Worth noting that at the time of the interview, Power was returning to running after her third child.

TAKE ACTION

Subscription to Kathryn Thomas's Bump Fit programme is available through pureresults.ie at €129. It comprises unlimited access to all 96 workouts, tailored to the three trimesters and for post-natal workouts. A PDF version of the programme is included. See pureresults.ie

can and can't do. It explains what you shouldn't be doing at certain stages of the pregnancy and what's OK and how to do things properly. It's everything under one roof.

There will always be judgments, of course. Whether we should be exercising or not exercising, whether you should wear high heels, when you go back to work, if you breastfeed. Most often, people have your best interests at heart.

After I had my first baby, Ellie, I got really annoyed with online comments about "Kathryn bouncing back". Some people lose that weight after a baby quicker than others, but I don't know anyone who bounced. And it's about more than weight. I remember Ellie was about five or six months and one day just having this moment like a light switching on, where I thought, "Oh, there I am!" My head felt like me. My body felt like me.

You have to go easy on yourself. Of course exercise isn't for everyone. I know people on 18 weeks' bedrest. And if you're not doing exercise beforehand, then don't start in pregnancy.

I also have a great relationship with my doctor, and no question is a stupid one – and it's important to ask the questions before you start, but you do what's right for you. And remember, you won't be able to please everyone.

Recovery is so individual. The Bump Fit workouts are designed so that they can also be done post-natally. I thought I'd be back to exercise five weeks after my first baby, but it took me nine weeks.

I'd advise no one to rush. The most important thing is that you do what's right for you. ●

In conversation with Sarah Caden

Why I want to be a Miranda

With *Sex And The City* reboot *And Just Like That...* set to air soon, **Kate Demolder** argues that the hero we should root for is not coquettish Carrie but rather the hard-working, straight-talking Ms Hobbes



Out of the four women on *Sex And The City*, Miranda Hobbes has traditionally been the most universally maligned. Brutal, diligent and unromantic, Miranda's life seemed to pivot from one sexless situation to another.

I still remember the time Magda hid her vibrator. "Who is this and what's she doing in my bedroom?" Miranda declared, holding a Virgin Mary statuette in her grasp.

"It is the Virgin Mary," Magda, her housekeeper, replied.

"Where's my other thing?"

"In bathroom," Magda uttered, in tones hushed enough to ensure the Blessed Mother couldn't hear. "Middle drawer, next to hairdryer," she continued. "But no man will marry you if that is by bed. It means you don't need him."

"Magda, what I don't need is another mother," Miranda barked, spittle forming between her lips, a wine-with-lunch energy in her gaze. "I drink coffee and have sex and buy pies and enjoy battery-



*Remember when Carrie likened her own minor quandaries to **The Troubles?** Miranda would never have done that*

operated devices. If you can't deal with that, I will find another housekeeper who can."

Younger me wanted to be Carrie Bradshaw. Obviously. Her main draw was that she was tiny enough to fit in a bag-for-life, Marlboro Lights appearing like redwoods against her petite frame. Her casual work schedule somehow paid for her Upper East Side brownstone apartment. Men spoke to her in bars. She could wear stilettos on a jog. *Vogue* gave her \$4 a word!

However, younger me was also working on a room temperature IQ. My priorities pivoted between Red Hot Chilli Peppers' guitarist John Frusciante and Maybelline's Dream Matte Mousse Foundation. I regretted every word I said aloud, was consistently haunted by my body's ability to sweat, and firm in my belief that a woman should be one thing: Wanted.

I was a girl then, susceptible to the worst kinds of targeted advertising: Have no body hair! Giggle like a toddler! Be a nubile

virgin! But teenage years, thankfully, come and go. With each passing year, you feel less of a need to suppress your desires. You see that it's actually not a big deal if your pubic hair shows around your togs. You stop hiding tampons up your sleeve. You realise that a woman is more than simply a trophy or a soft bed men can lie on until they feel stronger.

And so we come to Miranda Hobbes. It's hard to pinpoint when, exactly, my shift toward her began taking place, but it was somewhere between Monica Lewinsky and Time's Up.

A new world was dawning, female dynamics changing within it. Revisiting *Sex And The City* as a grown-up, I realised that never before had I been privy to a woman regaling such confidence about anything, much less a sex toy. A career woman and single mother shunning coercive femininity and doing so with a ginger bowl cut – how could we ever have overlooked her as the show's true hero?



excessive

uninspiring

Samantha Jones, while undeniably badass, could never have sat in the seat of the protagonist. The citizens' arrests alone would be too much. Similarly, Charlotte York, the prudish Wasp of the group, provides no push for narrative – lest we forget, her most compelling move was getting diarrhoea abroad. Miranda stood head and shoulders above them, yet the story was somehow all about Carrie.

I'm far from the first to comment on Carrie's excessive vanity and flaky underbelly. Her baroque whimsy, often mistaken for adorability, is neither realistic nor withstanding. Just think of her comparing spending \$500 on shoes to Miranda making partner at a law firm...

She continued to drum up deranged status with laborious puns – lest we forget, "You don't move to Napa, you take a Napa" – destructive romantic choices, a grotesque approach to weight gain and an unrelenting love of the

From left, Sarah Jessica Parker, Cynthia Nixon, Kristin Davis and Kim Cattrall as Carrie, Miranda, Charlotte and Samantha respectively in *Sex And The City*. Photograph by: Tom Kingston

sound of her own voice.

Miranda, with all of her faults, was the uncompromising reality check we all needed. She wouldn't have let us do the Special K diet. Little did she care if you drunkenly burned a hole in her slip with a cigarette. She'd also think Eurovision was too political and Jeff Bezos has no business being in space.

"I want to enjoy my success, not apologise for it," she would say, urging you to do the same. Holding your hand as you dry-heave, eight vodkas deep, and telling you when you need to stop Instagram-stalking your ex.

Carrie was the edited version of the women we're told we have to be, a Kardashian Instagram post with a misshapen door frame belying the Photoshop fixes. Miranda, radical in comparison, ate cake out of the bin. She dated entirely out of her comfort zone, pushing for sex-positivity and non-judgmental motherhood.

Her ambivalence towards children was the first of its kind on screen, responding to her own pregnancy with pragmatic illiberalism: "The fat ass, the farting, it's ridiculous! I am unf**kable and I have never been so horny in my entire life!"

She never shied away from the messy, jagged aspects of life. She brushed up against the socially acceptable, pushing forward the need for brutal honesty and then delivering it. She never tried to be something she was not, opting to work with the facts rather than earnestly conjecturing, "I couldn't help but wonder..." at every turn.

Remember when Carrie likened her own minor quandaries to *The Troubles*? Miranda would never have done that. She was too busy rising above nonsense and wielding power at every turn, somewhere between a Pre-Raphaelite Ophelia and a horny Tilda Swinton. Boasting the energy of a kitten raised by bulls, Miranda saw the world for what it is, both celebrating and drop-kicking it at every turn. She was aware that true existence is as transgressive as it is erotic, as she wiped baby poo from her furrowed brow.

Will Miranda step into the hero's role when the *SATC* reboot, *And Just Like That...*, hits our screens next month? It doesn't look likely from the publicity photos, which place Carrie – in hot pink and stilettos – at the front, flanked by a still girlish Charlotte and a now silver-haired Ms Hobbes.

It is the curse of modern society that the less typically glamorous women employ less interest. We see it time and again – in fiction, Paris Geller and Rory Gilmore in *Gilmore Girls*; in real life, Camilla Parker-Bowles and Diana – but it never stops producing a sting. With Miranda and Carrie, comparison is futile and unnecessary. They exist in opposition to one another, feeding the relationship by choosing separate paths. You simultaneously can't believe they're friends and can't get over how much they love each other.

Granted, Carrie was glamorous and entertaining; she romanticised fictional notions of an unromantic factual life. But who buys a magazine instead of dinner? Miranda, on the other hand, lived on Earth. She's the one I'd want to hold me if my heart was throbbing so intensely it could be felt in my teeth. She is the one I'd run to if I needed to be told I was wrong.

As for her life partner Steve – arguably the only marriageable man on the show – he is the softness every Herculean woman needs. Telling you that you look beautiful in dungarees, which in fact make you look like a giant baby, and cradling you in his callused bar-working hands when you didn't get the job... But that's the stuff of another article.

How do I love Miranda? Let me count the ways. She is strong, self-deprecating and unforgiving. But she is also real, caring and beautiful in every way a woman can be. Carrie may have spent her life ensuring that if she were a shoe, she would be a Manolo. But Miranda, for all of her unapologetic bluntness, would be a Birkenstock.

And which of those have you spent the past year-and-a-half wearing? ●



Triona McCarthy

talks gender neutrality, custom skincare and, for anyone longing for a day of pure indulgence, introduces us to Ireland's answer to Sephora

Ill be the first to raise my hand and say my language isn't half gender-neutral enough. This comes with the territory of being exposed to marketing that focuses on two genders and advertises different products for each. As we know, it starts from the earliest age, when children are given their first toys. Thankfully, we are becoming more aware when it comes to gender neutrality and gender identity.

Excluding people often lies in how we present information. I see this all of the time on beauty treatment menus – a specific set for women and then for men, which are few and usually waaay down at the end. Imagine if we did this with food menus? Sounds absurd, right? Pricing based on gender makes very little sense too.

Sophia Hilton, the woman behind **Not Another Salon** in London put it perfectly in a recent Instagram post. She proves that something as simple as changing the words on the list of services can make a huge difference. Instead of using headings such as Ladies and Gents, she suggests using the terms 'barbering or extreme short' and 'all other hair lengths'. Genius, and not a reinvention of the wheel. How can the industry you work in become more gender neutral? You might be surprised how easy it can be. Words have power and how we use them can make everyone feel included. ●

THE TRICK

If you've a receding hairline, or simply want a fuller look when you have your hair pulled back, it's easy! Just use some eyeshadow or a brow product in the same colour to fill in the sparse areas or use a brow pencil to create hair-like strokes – same as when filling in your brows.



THE TREND

Boots on the ground

Every time I take a trip to the States or to mainland Europe, one of my first stop-offs is Sephora. I get such an adrenaline rush as I approach the shop's entrance – surely I'm not alone.

Anyhoo, the great news is that we don't have to travel too far for the same adrenaline hit anymore because **Boots Ireland** has unveiled its newly revamped store in Liffey Valley Shopping Centre. This place is total heaven if you, like me, are partial to a few selfies, never have your phone out of your hand and know that the right lighting makes all the difference.

I was all over the beauty stations that let you charge your phone and test out the products when I unveiled this new store last month. With all of this new space, it'll come as no surprise that the store has upped its beauty offering too, with more than 30 leading brands available such as **Kylie Cosmetics**, **Kylie Skin**, **Fenty Beauty** whose **Cheeks Out Freestyle Cream Bronzer**, €32, is iconic, while **Huda Beauty**, **Drunk Elephant**, **Wishful** and **Dr Jart** are also incredible.

There's your next day off sorted – believe me, you won't be disappointed.

THE TREATMENT

Give yourself a boost

These dark, colder days are making it quite hard for me to leave the house sometimes. Anyone else? Well, hurrah for another device that I can use in the comfort of my own home.

Sheila Curran of **Coogan Bergin Clinic & College of Beauty Therapy** gave me an **ageLOC Boost** device, €346.88, to try out. This gadget created by **Nu Skin** comes with a serum that's pumped on before massaging in. It promises firmer, plumper and bouncier skin – I'm thinking of Charlotte in the new *SATC* reboot *And Just Like That* for inspo. The action alone is quite relaxing, seeing as it requires my full attention and is an opportunity to press pause for a bit. nuskin.com



THE TOOLS

Have you heard that Greta Gerwig is set to direct a Barbie movie in 2022? Well, this news fits nicely with the latest hair-styling launch from **L'Oréal Professionnel Paris**. It's full steam ahead as **Peter Mark** is the exclusive stockist of the **Barbie X SteamPod 3.0**, €275. It marks close to a decade of the SteamPod brand. Find it at Peter Mark salons and online at petermark.ie

THE TALK

Custom fit

A one-size-fits-all approach doesn't apply to clothes, so why would it apply to beauty? Beauty products tailored specifically for the individual are all the rage lately and for good reason. Bespoke skincare products are like my closest friends – they know what's good for me, what will keep me calm instead of causing me to break out and they're usually the ones I would be happy to see every day. However, I hope I don't use my friends and squeeze every last drop out of them, so that's where the comparisons end, I'm afraid. Ha ha!

The positives to custom and bespoke skincare are many, but best of all, you won't have your actual pals nicking your fave products. I might love my friends and I know sharing is caring, but when it comes to MY bespoke beauty, hands off, ya hear? Believe me, you will feel the same after I share this line-up with you.

First up, the German personalised-skincare brand **Skinmade** uses AI (artificial intelligence) to develop skincare products that are made specifically for your skin type. **Akina Beauty Clinic** on Leeson Street, D2, is Skinmade's first registered Irish skin-reading clinic. You can pop in for a reading that takes just five minutes and your personalised products will be developed in Germany and sent back to you in five days. The reading itself is free and a personalised moisturiser, above, is €75. akina.ie

Ooh, I love a good consultation form that I can do from home. Filling one out to discover your **Custom DOSE** by **SkinCeuticals**, below, only takes a few minutes and you'll get it delivered straight to the door, too. This brand knows that skin type doesn't just come down to oily, dry or sensitive. In fact, it addresses the concerns of over 250 skin types to mix active ingredients into a single serum that will best suit you. Get clicking through that online consultation form specially devised by **Nuala Woulfe Beauty Salon**, pronto! nualawoulfe.ie



With regard to pressies, **L'Oréal Professionnel** has a bespoke-gift idea for Christmas sure to make a haircare-obsessed pal very happy. You can drop into a salon and chat to the stylist who will recommend products to suit them. You'll be supporting local salons and ensuring your gifting is top notch all in one. Everyone will want you to be their Secret Santa. Available in L'Oréal salons nationwide.



Style haul

Edited by **Chloe Brennan**

Top looks for going out-out this festive season



Dear Mary: I can't stand my partner's bad breath, spitting and coughing

Mary O'Connor



noise of him always spitting and coughing, I can hear it in other rooms and now his breath gets bad very quickly and I find it off-putting. I am actually considering breaking up with him before I invest any deeper. Any advice appreciated.



A You have already invested quite heavily in this relationship as you've been together for three years. But presumably the problems have only become apparent when you started living together, because being together all day, every day, can bring things to light that would otherwise not have been noticed. This is why it is such a good idea for people to live together before they make the final commitment of marriage, as you are discovering.

Bad breath must be one of the most off-putting traits in any person, even if you are not in a relationship with them. Almost everybody of a certain age has experienced having to stand a good deal away from a person to whom they are speaking because of halitosis.

But things have improved greatly with the advent of dental hygienists, flossing, regular dental check-ups and overall good dental hygiene. You say that your partner has great dental hygiene, yet he suffers from bad breath which leads me to believe that it is all tied up in the after-effects

of the broken nose. As the coughing, spitting and ongoing bad breath are all having such an effect on the relationship that you are considering ending it, then your partner needs to do everything he can to get help.

He needs to get a referral from his GP to an ear, nose and throat consultant to see what can be done to help him. Hopefully, they will be able to suggest something to alleviate his symptoms.

In the unlikely event that the ENT consultant cannot help, then I would suggest seeking a second opinion. It seems to me that in this day and age there surely must be something medically that can be done, at least as far as the bad breath is concerned.

If nothing can help the coughing and spitting then I don't think your mindset is going to improve as regards this, and it may well lead to a parting of the ways.

I recently watched again an old film, *The War of the Roses*, with Kathleen Turner and a very young Michael Douglas playing a married couple. I was

struck by how much small idiosyncrasies, at the outset so charming, can turn into absolutely hateful traits. In the film, as the years progressed, how he laughed and even how he chewed his food were driving her crazy – enough to want a divorce – even though this hadn't bothered her at all at the beginning of their relationship.

You certainly don't want to get to this stage in your relationship, which is why you should do everything you can to get him to seek help, no matter how set in his ways your partner is. And it may well be that if he does go for help, you will appreciate his efforts and you will reconsider ending the relationship. So now it is over to him. ●

You can contact Mary O'Connor anonymously by visiting dearmary.ie or email her at dearmary@independent.ie or write c/o 27-32 Talbot St, Dublin 1. All correspondence will be treated in confidence. Mary O'Connor regrets that she is unable to answer any questions privately.

Q Mary, I am writing this letter as I am at my wits' end. I have been with my partner for three years and we have been living together for half of that time. He is very set in his ways and isn't one for spontaneity or change.

He suffers with bad breath and is always clearing his throat or coughing and spitting. I thought perhaps he may have a food intolerance but he won't get a scope done. He has great dental hygiene and goes to his dentist once a year.

I have suggested diet changes, remedies, looked up articles and I have asked him, gently and firmly, to get it looked into but I'm always told there's no issue. He said it stems from breaking his nose playing rugby a number of years back which affects his breathing and there's nothing more to say about it.

I am going mad from the

Drama to the max

Camille Lucy Ross is a talented actor currently featuring in productions as diverse as *The Treaty* and *Callan's Kicks*. She's also very creative when it comes to decorating her bijou home in Dublin 7

Words by
Mary O'Sullivan

Photography by
Tony Gavin

Actor Camille Lucy Ross has played many unusual parts in her career to date but her current role as Winston Churchill in Fishamble's production of *The Treaty*, which opened at the National Concert Hall last week, must be one up there with the most interesting.

Camille is thrilled to be part of the prestigious Fishamble production and to have been given his character to play.

"The more I read about Churchill, the more I realise he's such a formidable character. A war criminal to some, a war hero to others, but whether you like him or not, you have to agree, he's a remarkable person," she says.

Whatever one thinks of the casting, it would certainly be hard to picture the bald, cigar-smoking giant of a man in Camille's bijou home which is ultra feminine, decorated in a mix of styles including art deco, art nouveau, and colonial, with touches of Mexico/India/Morocco, and a serious preponderance of clashing prints plus a high volume of gold



and pink. It's theatrical and that is what Camille, who also features regularly in *Callan's Kicks*, is all about.

Originally from Bray where her dad, Doug, is a visual artist and her mum, Gay, is a counsellor, she was into drama almost from toddlerhood. "My mother used to call me Cecil B DeMille. A funny

name to give a four-year-old, I know," Camille says with a laugh, adding, "I was a drama kid. I did enjoy it in school and I used to go to Dry Rain Theatre group in Bray after school. I guess I was always class-clowny, I liked attention, making people laugh."

She kept drama classes up through secondary school then



Actor Camille Lucy Ross in the front room of her home in Dublin 7. Camille, a maximalist, has no problem mixing styles, colours and prints – hence the different prints on the curtains, the floor tiles and the tablecloth. She loves gold and in this room it can be found in the lampshade from National Lighting, the mirror, which is from Oxfam, and the fan motif she painted on the front of the desk. She makes her look work by using a background of white walls and sanded floorboards



When I was little, my mum called me Cecil B DeMille. I was always class-clowny, I liked attention, making people laugh

when she was 17, she did a week-long residential drama course in Gormanston which, for her, was something of a sea change. “It was great to be around people who loved acting, the enthusiasm, the openness – that was different. I started exploring the emotional side of characters, which meant understanding

yourself better. You have to understand where a character is coming from, which means drawing on your empathy. Acting became for me a mix of deep, meaningful stuff and also fun. Fun is my number one aim, then feeling and depth.”

After leaving school, she went to UCD where she did a degree in

English and classical studies. She also got involved in the drama society there and did some acting, which helped her to realise where her future lay. “I had an inkling I wanted to be actor but it gave me a chance to grow up a bit and figure that out. Then I did two years full-time with the Gaiety School of Acting and that was such a joyful »

My favourite room

» thing to do, to be in this safe place where you can try anything before you go out into the big bad world and audition.”

As it turned out, Camille says it's a lovely world to work in and she has met nothing but courtesy and warmth. “It is tough because you're constantly looking for work and you have to get used to rejection. There used to be a feeling that you had to be ruthless and bitchy to get to the top, but I don't think that's the case any more. I remember one of my first auditions was for a small part in *The Hobbit*. The casting director John Hubbard was so lovely and while I didn't get the part, he couldn't have been nicer and it's been consistently that way since.”

She's been acting professionally for the last 12 years and loves it. “I've been working consistently enough for a very inconsistent job. I've done 70 to 80pc theatre. It suits my aesthetic, my larger-than-life personality, my over-the-top quality.”

She's also done a fair bit of TV including *Republic of Telly* and *Bridget & Eamon* and the current *Callan Kicks the Years* six-part series where she plays, among others, Kathleen Watkins, Mary Harney and an FF gobshite.

But back to theatre and her part as Winston Churchill in *The Treaty* – she says she's not the only female in the 12-person cast to play a man; there's quite a lot of cross casting and Jane Brennan, for example, is playing De Valera. Camille says she's often played men over the years.

“You had to play men in drama school because there was a preponderance of male roles. I quite like it, I feel it's a hugely liberating thing, I can feel the entitlement,” she says with a laugh.

Camille has also been involved in writing some original drama, including a one-woman play called *Big Bobby, Little Bobby* with several different characters, which she co-wrote with her friend Kelly Shatter.

“It's about that inner-child voice, that perfectionist voice that criticises you. It's a weird, twisted



Above: Camille with her rescue dog Porgy on her sofa – which she got in Ikea and upgraded with velvet covers from Etsy. She commissioned the oval coffee table from Mark Tidy Furniture. The flying birds above the mirror are from a shop in Stoneybatter. She's even decorated the stairs with green treads and orange patterned risers



Right top: This living area leads to the new section of the house with the kitchen on the left and the bathroom on the right. Beyond the kitchen is a sheltered courtyard



Right: The walls in the master bedroom are light pink above the dado rail and a darker pink below it. The dado rail itself is painted green with gold dots. The circle over the bed is just paint – a dark pink outlined in gold

grotesque comedy, very physical, very larger than life," she says. "It was a piece of fiction but we drew on our own experience of being hard on ourselves."

She performed it in Dublin Fringe Festival and the First Fortnight Festival which is about mental health, where they won the First Fortnight award. "It wasn't that we set out to write a mental-health play, we wanted to write something dark and funny and relatable." They also brought it to Brighton Festival and then toured it nationwide. That was four years ago. Then, during the pandemic, Smock Alley asked them to do a film version. "It wasn't perfect, it was a challenge, we tried to merge filmic rules with theatre rules so it wasn't a camera plonked in front of a play. I think you really need to be in a room to engage with theatre but it was worth trying." She's only been back working full-time for the last few months; the year-and-a-half of Covid-19 gave her time to renovate and decorate her house in Dublin 7 which she bought nearly five years ago.

She had lived at home until she was 23 and then moved to Dublin city centre – living in rented apartments in Parnell Street, Clanbrassil Street and George's Street. She loved living in and near the city so she decided that was where she wanted to put down roots and started looking at every apartment and small house from Dublin 1 to Dublin 8. "I definitely veered towards houses with a bit of character. I put offers in on five or six houses before I found this. I got my uncle, a builder, to check it out and he said it was sound so I went for it. It didn't have certain things I really wanted, like a bath, but it was in good condition.

"My mother, who has a great eye, suggested you need to live in a house to get to know it – so I lived in it for two years before I did any work. And it was great to have that time to think about it."

By then she had realised that the yellow-brick, two-up two-down house which dates from 1904, not only needed a new bathroom but

also a modern kitchen, a utility area and a nice courtyard. She says she was very lucky in that she got a part in a very lucrative ad which helped towards the cost of the renovation. "It was an ad for an American company, for an asthma medication of all things, and was shot in Barcelona over a week. My dad is American and I can do a good American twang. It got repeated over a couple of years so I did well out of it," she says, laughing. "People say to me, 'You should get more of those ads', as if I could just request them."

When it came to deciding exactly how to configure the renovation she got an architect to do some drawings. "I was going to just rejig the interior but it turned out we needed to knock walls so I had to get an architect and I project-managed the work. The builders were great, which is just as well as I'm better at colours than plumbing." She moved out in January 2020 while the house was under construction and moved back in last May, when she did the interiors.

When it comes to her interiors style she describes herself as a maximalist. "Grey is my least favourite colour and being in a white minimalist room makes me anxious but when there's lots of visual stimulation, that makes me calm.

"I don't know if it's anxious energy or creative energy but that's what I like. It's a bit like my personal style, which I've developed over 20 years. I figured out my interiors style by basing it on the clothes I wear. I love print dresses. I really enjoy print on print on print. I know you're not supposed to do that but it feels like a challenge to me."

She says she also follows maximalist Instagrammers online.

One of the reasons Camille's decor works so well is that she has kept the walls white – "basic brilliant white" – and the floorboards are stained a natural wood shade; this combination is a great backdrop for the riot of colour that reveals itself the more you sit in her different spaces.

Tile prints are slightly different to the prints on chairs, which are



Camille combines green, pink and a print shower curtain for a tropical effect in her bathroom. "It annoys me that all the taps and handles are gold coloured except the toilet-seat hinge"



I don't like grey and being in a white minimalist room makes me anxious. Lots of visual stimulation – that makes me calm

different again to the prints on items like tablecloths, but on closer study there is an internal logic to each of her choices and it all works. And if it doesn't, Camille is firmly of the opinion that it's not the end of the world.

"Honestly, I think some people take interiors too seriously. I like having fun with my house. If you get tired of something, just throw a bit of paint over it," she volunteers.

She's a great believer too in scouring charity shops, DoneDeal, salvage yards and TK Maxx for bargains so nothing, whether a success or a mistake, is major outlay.

And she does quite a lot herself – not just painting handles gold and the *trompe-l'oeil* circles over her bed but also painting her own pictures to hang on the walls. "I did some during lockdown and sold a few on Instagram," she says.

So between acting, writing and now painting, it looks as if Camille will never be short of a job. ●

Instagram: @camillelucyross

Passion projects

Darren Kennedy



It's easy to get caught up in new trends, but we'll enjoy our homes more if they reflect our personalities, writes our columnist



Rolling Stones wall art, various prices, cuckooland.com

There is no better way to show off your passion than by giving it pride of place in your home.

I've always enjoyed cycling, so I have a gold-painted Martone bike proudly on display in my living room.

I'm not going to lie and say that it was a fully intentional design move on my part. I initially put it there as I had nowhere else safe to store it, but fast-forward several years and it's still in the same spot, proudly perched alongside my bookshelves. It has become a signature personal touch in my living space.

If you're wondering how to put your own personal stamp on your living space, then bridging the gap between the things that you're passionate about and your home décor is a wonderful place to start.

Incorporating your hobbies, talents and skills into your home can create a space that is completely individual.

"Bringing your style and personality into your home will create a more meaningful space, particularly when you incorporate your passions," says Zelia Madigan of homewares store consciousconvert.com. "Album covers from our favourite vinyl are displayed in frames on our living room wall. There are many options for displaying vinyl – from a wall of records to a more utilitarian look that makes for attractive storage."

Seasonal equipment is also ideal for displaying in your home. For instance, if you're an avid skier you can keep your passion alive in the off-season by mounting your skis over a doorway or above a desk. The same goes for surfboards.

For smaller items, grouping together things that reflect your passions is another great way to incorporate them into your décor. This could include tools of the trade such as like a camera collection, skateboards, vintage handbags or any other

collectibles. Think of these arrangements as a form of art.

Do keep the mood, style and function of the room in mind when selecting which pieces to display. Certain objects are just for you and can spark special feelings when you see or touch them. If an object brings you special comfort and evokes feelings of calm, consider placing these by your bedside.

"It is so easy to get caught up in what is on trend and to try to fit new styles into our homes," says Madigan. But, adding the things we already own and love is the quickest way to achieve a personalised, individual home. And you don't have to do a complete redesign.

In many cases, just a small tweak of placement or storage will make a big difference and it's not going to cost anything because you're using items you already own.

Our homes should be a reflection of who we are and what we love, so just have fun with it! ●

FOR NOW



For the Love of Art ceramics, from €16, H&M Home



Snail salt & pepper shaker, €17, aprilandthebear.com

FOR EVER



GPO 'Bermuda' record player, €225, cuckooland.com



'It's OK' silk-twill scarf, €189, [Tidings, tidings.ie](http://Tidings.tidings.ie)



Appetites

Dahl order

Susan Jane White packs a nutritional punch with her mango mung dahl, while **Rachel Allen** shares her top sweet and savoury bread recipes and **Lucinda O'Sullivan** trots off to a five-star lunch in The Shelbourne's Saddle Room

Hour of knead

Nothing says comfort food like bread straight out of the oven, especially now that the days are chillier. Here are three sweet and savoury recipes to try

Rachel Allen



Iadore the changing of the seasons. The joy of each new one brings me back and reminds me just how amazing Mother Nature is, and how she never fails to astound. As the evenings close in at this time of the year and we long for some cosiness, the food that we eat gets more comforting, restorative and warming.

Bring on the soups, curries, casseroles and broths, and some good homely winter baking too.

If you're going to enjoy a big steaming bowl of soup or stew, then you'll need something equally delicious to mop it up. Here's a great gluten-free bread

Photography by
Tony Gavin

recipe, right, from my new cookbook, *Soup Broth Bread*.

These completely delicious savoury scones are perfect enjoyed with a big hearty bowl of something lovely or just on their own with a slathering of butter. The recipe uses Bob's Red Mill Gluten-free All-Purpose Flour.

Bob's Red Mill, an employee-owned company based in Oregon, produces really good flour, with and without gluten. Use another gluten-free flour if you prefer, or regular plain flour.

Another great bread recipe from my *Soup Broth Bread* cookbook is the blue cheese and walnut bread overleaf. It's a yeast bread that takes a few hours of sitting and slowly rising, but it is worth the wait.

If you prefer, you can leave out the blue cheese or replace it with raisins. Roasted chopped hazelnuts and dried cranberries make a lovely alternative to the walnuts and blue cheese too, or chopped rosemary or thyme would also make a great addition.

If it's a lovely sweet bake that you're after, then this simple and homely pear and cinnamon loaf cake, also overleaf, might just be the one for you. Made with juicy ripe pears and sweet warming cinnamon, this is my favourite treat to have with a cup of tea right now.



Blue cheese and walnut bread

Makes 2 loaves or approximately 15 rolls

You will need:

- 325g strong white flour
- 125g strong brown flour
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 300ml lukewarm water
- 1 teaspoon honey or sugar
- 20g fresh yeast or 10g dried yeast
- 5 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
- 150g roughly chopped walnuts
- 200g blue cheese, crumbled in chunks

1 Put the strong white flour and the strong brown flour in a bowl and mix in the salt.

2 Put the lukewarm water a jug, then stir in the honey or the sugar, whichever you're using, to dissolve it. Scatter in the yeast, but do not stir. Leave for 3-4 minutes in a warm place until the yeast starts to fizz slightly. Stir 3 tablespoons of the extra-virgin olive oil into the water. Pour this mixture into the bowl of flour, and mix to a pliable dough.

3 Knead for about 10 minutes, preferably not adding any extra flour to the dough while you are kneading it. It will eventually become smooth and springy. You may need to scrape the scraggly bits of dough from the worktop and your hands and work them into the ball of dough to help bring it together. Alternatively, knead the dough using a stand mixer and the dough hook. It will probably take just 6-8 minutes if you're using a mixer.

4 Put 1 tablespoon of the remaining extra-virgin olive oil into a clean bowl (it can be the same bowl that you used to make the dough) and turn the ball of dough in it to cover the surface with oil and prevent a dry crust forming. Cover the bowl with a tea towel and leave the dough to rise for about 1½ to 2 hours or until it doubles in size.

5 Knock back the dough by kneading it for 3 minutes. (If you'd like to make rolls rather than loaves, go to point 9.) Divide it into 2 balls of dough. Set one aside while you work with the other and

stretch it out into an oval, approximately 25cm in length.

6 Scatter half of the chopped walnuts and chunks of blue cheese over the dough, then press them into the dough. Roll the dough away from you, tucking it in well at the end. Turn the dough over so that the smooth side is facing up. Repeat with the second piece of dough.

7 Place the loaves on a baking tray that you've brushed with a little of the remaining extra-virgin olive oil or put them into oiled loaf tins. Cover them with a tea towel and let the dough rise again, for about 45 minutes, until it has doubled in size. While the dough rises, preheat the oven to 230C, 450F, Gas 8.

8 Brush the loaves with water to soften the crust and bake them for about 40-45 minutes, turning the temperature down to 200C, 400F, Gas 6 after 10 minutes, or until the loaves sound hollow when tapped on the bottom (the cooking time will depend on the size of the loaves). Brush with the remaining extra-virgin olive oil and allow them to cool on wire rack.

9 If you'd prefer to make blue cheese and walnut rolls, then cut the knocked-back dough (point 5) into 50g pieces. Place one piece of dough on the worktop, and cover the others with a tea towel. Use your fingertips to spread out the piece of dough, then scatter with the chopped walnuts and blue cheese chunks. Bring the edges all the way round into the centre, tucking them in as you go, then turn the dough over so that the smooth side is on top. Cup your hand over the dough – which should be on a clean, unfloured worktop – and rotate your hand so that a smooth, round roll forms underneath. Place on an oiled baking tray. Repeat with the other pieces of dough.

10 The rolls can be baked at 230C, 450F, Gas 8 (don't turn the oven down after 10 minutes as you would with the loaves of bread). They'll take approximately 10-15 minutes. ●

Pear and cinnamon loaf cake

Serves 8

You will need:

- 2 eggs
- 175g caster sugar
- ½ teaspoon vanilla extract
- 80g butter
- 75ml milk
- 125g plain flour
- 2 teaspoons baking powder
- ½ teaspoon ground cinnamon
- 2 pears, peeled, cored and sliced
- 25g caster sugar or granulated sugar for sprinkling over the top

1 You'll also need a 2lb loaf tin. Preheat the oven to 200C, 400F, Gas 6. Line the sides and base of the loaf tin with parchment paper.

2 Using an electric whisk, whisk the eggs, the caster sugar and the vanilla extract in a mixing bowl until the mixture is thick and mousse-like (this will take about 5 minutes).

3 Melt the butter in a saucepan with the milk, then pour it onto the egg, sugar and vanilla mixture, whisking all the time.

4 Sift in the plain flour, the powder and the ground cinnamon. Fold them carefully into the batter so that there are no lumps of flour.

5 Pour the mixture into the prepared tin and smooth out the surface.

6 Arrange the pear slices over the batter. They will gradually sink to the bottom – this is meant to happen!

7 Sprinkle the loaf with the 25g of caster sugar or granulated sugar, whichever you're using, and bake in the oven for 10 minutes. Then reduce the oven temperature to 180C, 350F, Gas 4 and bake for a further 30-35 minutes or until the loaf is well risen, golden brown and a skewer inserted in the centre comes out clean.

8 Allow the loaf to sit in the tin for 20 minutes before taking it out to cool. Cut into slices to serve. ●

RACHEL RECOMMENDS

If you like, you can prepare the blue cheese and walnut dough in advance. After it's been kneaded, place it in the oiled bowl and cover it as detailed in the recipe. Store in the fridge overnight where it will rise really slowly. The next day, continue on as per the recipe.

TOP TIP

For the most intense and fresh ground-cinnamon flavour, grind your own cinnamon sticks in batches and use within a couple of months.

Oh dahling

Susan Jane White
The Wholefoodie



This is a delicately fragrant dahl made from peeled and split mung beans. It rocks as a simple everyday meal with rice, yoghurt and poppadoms, or as a side dish to meat.

Green mung beans are widely used in Asia, but here in Ireland we tend to eat them sprouted in salads. When peeled, split open and cooked slow 'n' low, the result is a creamy-coloured and satisfying dahl glowing with nutrition.

Lately we've been adding baby spinach towards the end of cooking, or fresh slices of chilli to give it a flavour rave and nutritional twerk. Mung dahl is a great basic recipe to master and manipulate, depending on your mood. Pistachio and almond? Caraway and fennel? Bacon and maple? Let your taste buddies vote!

MANGO MUNG DAHL

Serves 6-8, freezes well

You will need:

- 500g mung dahl (aka moong dal or peeled split mung beans)
- 2 litres vegetable or chicken stock
- 2 teaspoons freshly grated turmeric or 1 teaspoon ground turmeric
- 220g (frozen) chopped mango
- 3 large brown onions, peeled
- 3 tablespoons coconut oil or butter
- 8 cloves garlic, peeled
- 1 large finger of fresh ginger, peeled
- 2 teaspoons ground cardamom
- 3 teaspoons whole cumin seeds
- ½ teaspoon freshly smashed black peppercorns (adults only)

To top:

- 1 tablespoon butter or coconut oil
- 1 teaspoon mustard seeds
- 1 clove garlic
- Handful of shelled pistachios, roughly chopped

1 Rinse the mung dahl in a sieve under a tap until the water runs clear.

2 Add to your largest pot with the stock, turmeric, mango and bring to a rolling boil. Turn your flame down to a simmer and cook for roughly 1 hour. Cooking time varies depending on the age of the mung you have.

3 While the pot gurgles away, dice your onions and fry over medium heat in coconut oil or butter until caramelised. This will take 10-15 minutes.

4 Towards the end of cooking your onions, grate in your cloves of garlic, followed by the ginger, cardamom and cumin seeds. Fry for a few minutes until the garlic starts to colour slightly, then drop in the black pepper.

5 Tip the lickysticky contents of your frying pan into the pot of simmering dahl, and continue cooking the dahl until soft and creamy. The mango will gently collapse, as will the shape of the mung dahl.

6 Once cooked (taste for creaminess), remove from its heat source, beat with a wooden spoon, season with lots of flaky sea salt and serve in deep bowls. The more traditional mung dahl usually involves frying mustard seeds, a further clove of grated garlic and something crunchy like pistachios in butter or coconut oil in a hot pan until the seeds start to jump and pop. Pour this garlicky butter over the top of the dahl if you fancy, but we don't always bother. ●

The social drinker

Tom Molloy

Christmas is around the corner and all the signs are that there will be a shortage of almost everything from turkeys to iPhones and even Christmas trees, as the pandemic continues to play havoc with supplies.

The reasons? Staff shortages, and a breakdown in the international container shipping business, along with a dearth of lorry drivers. Fear is also a factor. In the UK, worries about Christmas shortages are becoming a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Marks & Spencer has said it expects most customers in Britain to have finished their Christmas shopping by the end of the month because of fears around shortages – and because the pandemic is cutting incomes and therefore encouraging people to spread their spending.

When it comes to alcohol, there are already shortages in the high end of the market. Premium drinks are out of stock in many parts of the world. In the United States, for example, several states are rationing liquor sales. In Pennsylvania, where the government controls off-licence sales, there are limits on Hennessy brandy as well as Buffalo bourbon and Patron tequila. In Virginia, residents can buy only one bottle of alcohol a day. Many other states have similar rules.

The global breakdown in supply lines means that alcohol producers cannot get hold of the sulphites, glass bottles and corks used to produce many drinks.

I've spoken to several retailers in the Irish drinks industry who are worried that supplies of some foreign drinks will be limited here in Ireland for the rest of the year. Some say they have already found it difficult to buy certain drinks that are traditionally imported via the UK. Others have had no problems yet but predict that the traditional Christmas rush will spark shortages of brandy, port and Champagne.

Others report that they are already seeing difficulties with supplies of wines from New Zealand, Australia and Chile.

So start looking around now for your favourite Christmas drinks and accept that you may have to be a little more adventurous when it comes to favourite brands, wines from a particular region, or grapes. ●



Dough it yourself

Bread 41's Eoin Cluskey tells **Alex Meehan** how he is using his loaf to expand his organic bakery business, and why you can't beat real bread

It's not just about what you do, it's about the way you do it." I'm standing in Bread 41, Eoin Cluskey's flagship organic bakery – and now restaurant – on Pearse Street in Dublin, and he is holding forth on his personal food philosophy as he expertly kneads dough. With aprons on and sticky white bread dough on the stainless steel worktops in front of us, a group of us are here to learn how to make bread the old-fashioned way, and it's immediately clear that when it comes to the magic of mixing flour, water, salt and yeast, Cluskey is a master.

"It's about attention to detail, and I don't see a difference between making good bread and preparing and cooking a piece of fish or a whole joint of meat. It's the exact same for bread and for far too long, even in the restaurant industry, bread has been an afterthought," he says.

"But as more people get more into food they want to know

where the bread on their table comes from, and even in high-end Michelin-starred restaurants, there's often a stand-alone bread course. Top chefs are going back to basics and recognising the importance of bread."

The key takeaway from this practical lesson is that if you want a really nice loaf of bread, you need to start with a dough that initially feels too sticky and work it until it becomes elastic and smooth. I'm tempted to add more flour to my mix, but Cluskey stops me. "No, that's perfect. It's just not there yet. This is both food preparation and mental therapy – you have to lean in, use your muscles and just keep folding and kneading. Time and effort are the secret extra ingredients."

This is just one of the many differences between what fans call 'real bread' and the other kind, the kind that has found its way onto breakfast tables and into lunch boxes for the last 100 years. Mass-produced bread is cheap and



convenient, but in terms of the length of time that people have been eating bread, it's a newcomer that's barely been around for a second.

It used to be thought that people have been making bread for about 8,000 years, but a 2018 discovery pushed that date back all the way to over 14,000 years.

Baking is one of the oldest things that human beings know how to do. "The difference between industrial baking and making real bread is that making a decent loaf of bread by hand takes at least 24 hours and preferably around four days, and that time is required to really develop the flavour," says Cluskey.

"By contrast, making a mass-produced loaf of supermarket bread takes 35 minutes from start to finish and it doesn't have much flavour at all.

"When you eat a loaf of real

“*I don't want you to taste some additive or something else put in to mask the flavour, I want you to taste real bread***”**



bread, I want you as a customer to taste the fermentation. I don't want you to taste some additive or something else put in to mask the flavour, I want you to taste real bread and recognise that you're eating one of the oldest foods known to humankind. I want you to put it in your mouth, chew and go 'oh my god, that's delicious.'

Cluskey's passion for his product is infectious. He makes it and eats it every day, and he puts it on his table at home where his wife Katie, a secondary school teacher, gives it to their children Oliver (8) and Sadie (3).

"When real bread is fresh out of the oven, it's perfect. The next day, it still makes amazing toast. The day after that you can use it to make breadcrumbs and cook with it. Real bread goes hard when it's stale, factory-made bread goes green and mouldy."

Lockdown damaged Bread 41, as

it did most Irish businesses, but in some ways it helped to grow appreciation for artisan products and real bread – as plenty of those who spent time baking with their own children can attest. A lot of people got into making their own sourdough and Bread 41 was one of the best places to get a starter. Cluskey gave away sourdough starter kits, giving many people a way in to making their own bread at home.

"We closed for three days at the beginning of lockdown, while we regrouped, and I asked every member of staff what they wanted to do. Everyone wanted to work and so we opened up and worked through it, and it allowed us to grow an amazing company culture where everyone checked in on everyone. It was really heart-warming."

Cluskey also used lockdown to expand Bread 41 into the unit next

Top left: Eoin Cluskey pictured at Bread 41 on Pearse, Street in Dublin

Top right and above right: As well as bread, the organic bakery makes up to 5,000 fresh pastries every day and is open for breakfast and lunch. Photographs by: Gerry Mooney

door on Pearse Street, adding a pastry room, and now, he's opening up the upstairs of the premises as a new restaurant.

"We're working with a wonderful chef, Eoin Morris, who's worked in some great restaurants in the past and this is his first head chef role. I can't wait to see what he can do, and we're here to support him and help him grow and excel.

"The plan is to lean heavily into using more veg, and while we're not anti-meat, the meat we serve needs to be high-quality, high-welfare quality meat. We need to really connect with suppliers and bring in some real traceability and accountability. Overall, seasonality will be key."

The restaurant shares the Bread 41 name and for the time being is only open for breakfast and lunch, as well as brunch on the weekends. Cluskey plans to add a few night services before »

» Christmas and then opening for Friday and Saturday nights in the New Year.

“For now, we’re tying the menu strongly to McNally organic farm, one of our main suppliers. Whatever they have in season, that is what we’ll be putting on plates, along with a bit of pickling and fermenting.

“Right now we’re serving simple dishes, such as kimchi fritters with peanut rayu and a miso hollandaise, and eggs Benedict served in a croissant with fantastic bacon, or a Scotch egg, elevated to a restaurant standard, with wood fired leeks and mushroom ketchup. It’s super tasty.”

Key to many of these dishes, of course, is the bread. Each day, the bakery offers six basic types of bread, all made with organic flour. These are Shackleton 7 seed, Glentie Malt loaf, Wholegrain sourdough, Granary Brown, Oat Porridge and Wicklow Mountain Rye.

The magic of bread, and the thing the accelerated, mass-produced version just can’t compete with, is fermentation. When flour, salt and water are combined with a fermenting agent such as a sourdough starter or just plain old bread yeast, something really interesting happens.

“Fermentation adds air and flavour but it takes time. We slow the process as much as possible to draw it out and that’s what produces the end result.”

When it comes to baking bread, some things can be automated but ultimately getting a good end product requires people to mix the dough, monitor the fermentation, move the dough around and get it in the oven.

“The big players look at this problem and immediately eliminate as many steps from the process as possible, but when you do that, the product suffers. I have a break-up clause with real bread, and that clause is that I’ve promised myself that the day I skip a step in the process, I’m gone. I’m done. I’ll quit.”

Cluskey isn’t kidding. He says what gets him up in the morning is



the thrill of tearing into a hot loaf of bread, steaming and fresh from the oven. It’s a primal thing, and it must be respected.

Bread 41 is a multi-sensory business. Cluskey and his staff bake bread daily, make pastries, teach classes and help others to learn the skills necessary to set up themselves.

“When we first opened our doors in September 2018, we made 60 loaves of bread and 120 pastries and we sold out in about 20 minutes.

“We’ve been playing catch up with demand ever since but on a busy day now, we can produce anything up to 5,000 pastries and many, many loaves of bread.

“People typically want pastries more mid-week on their way to the office, and then they want loaves at the weekend.”

The end game for Bread 41, and Cluskey’s personal dream, is to see freshly baked, real bread available from a craft baker in every town in Ireland. “At one stage there were 120 mills grinding flour across Ireland, but now there’s not even 20. I’d love to see a great

Eoin Cluskey pictured outside Bread41 – he is hoping to expand to Galway, Cork and Belfast. Photograph by: Gerry Mooney

connection between the farmer growing the wheat, the miller grinding it and the baker baking it, then that would be a fine thing. And the winner would be the consumer.

“But it’s difficult to scale what we do and spread it because everything is done by hand, and that’s the point of us. We have 29 or 30 people working with us, starting at 5am each morning and they love what they do.”

Cluskey’s medium-term plans include opening a Bread 41 in Galway, Cork and Belfast, working with people in these areas to make it work.

“My plan is to go there, find a unit, set it up and find someone local who will come to Dublin and train here for six weeks. Then we’ll send a landing team there for six weeks to get it all running smoothly.

“We’ll systemise everything, but the growth plan is also to allow people who work here to step up and take their own piece of the brand. I want to provide career paths for passionate people, not just jobs.” ●



Salt-baked celeriac with Cashel Blue cheese, a raisin purée and toasted hazelnuts

Back in the Saddle

Lucinda O'Sullivan



Feeling the call of the fab five-star Shelbourne hotel, our critic galloped in to town for Sunday lunch at The Saddle Room

Were the Champagne quaffing couple at a table nearby on a Tinder date, we mused, as their frivolous laughter seemed to dry up by the main course. At another table a well-attired 'man about town' type had

forgotten what his mammy taught him, gobbling veg direct from their little copper pots with a serving spoon.

Elsewhere, there was oohing and aahing over 'surprise' birthday desserts, with one recipient proudly boasting that he was 80, while the other 'birthday girl' kept her mouth firmly shut. The hallowed surroundings of five-star hotels are always the stuff of novels, and suffice to say The Saddle Room at The Shelbourne hotel more than fits the bill.

Founded in 1824, it has played its part in history. During the Easter Rising, The Shelbourne was at the centre of the conflict, while in 1922 it played host to the drafting of Ireland's first Constitution, under the chairmanship of Michael Collins. Held in room 112, it's now The Constitution Suite and contains the original table and chairs used on that day.

The most iconic movie stars and world figures have stayed here, from John and Jacqueline Kennedy, Prince Rainier and Princess Grace of Monaco – after whom her favourite suite is named – to Clark Gable, John Wayne and Elizabeth Taylor.

But it's not just international stars, the legendary Horseshoe Bar has long been a favourite among members of Dublin society, including Brendan Behan, Terry Keane, Séamus Heaney, politicians and theatricals galore.

There are many dining areas in the hotel, including The Lord Mayor's Lounge, which serves afternoon tea daily; the No27 bar, with its casual food, and The Terrace, with its mini seafood platters, Champagnes and cocktails galore.

However, the focus of my recent visit was the legendary Saddle Room where, back in the day, roast beef was carved table-side from the trolley. Now, the focus is on fine dining and head chef Garry Hughes has recently introduced a new *table d'hôte* three-course menu at €59, serving dishes such as cured Castletownbere salmon with buttermilk and horseradish; oysters; or Curragh lamb with a Madeira jus. Also available, with supplements, are options such as Dover sole meunière; and Dublin lawyer lobster thermidor.

At this time of year, the thought of Sunday lunch appealed and at €34/€38 for 2/3

courses offered good value in such surroundings. The menu was concise with a trio of starters, and a quartet of mains and desserts. Side orders were also available at €5.50/€7.50.

Waiting for my lunch date to arrive, I ordered an Interstellar (€16) cocktail which was worth it for being Insta-perfect alone – a purple concoction of Grey Goose La Poire vodka, Del Maguey vida mezcal, sauvignon blanc, and sporting a dramatic edible butterfly.

Eschewing cured Castletownbere salmon with pickled fennel, lemon and tapioca cracker, Mary had a fab tranche of pâté de campagne, with Armagnac-soaked prunes, pistachio and toasted sourdough. My elegantly draped wafers of salt-baked celeriac with crumbles of Cashel Blue cheese sweetened by a raisin purée and toasted hazelnuts, were also superb.

Hake was the market fish of the day, while potato and Parmesan gnocchi with Gruyère provided a meat-free option. Mary's daube of Charleville beef with a Bourguignon jus, bacon lardons and a roast garlic potato purée was slow-cooked to melt-in-the-mouth perfection. My turkey, ham and leek pie, in a black skillet, had a puff pastry top and French-style garden peas with bacon lardons on the side. With these we had a side of tasty ruffle fries (€7.50).

We followed up with a delicious warm chocolate and raspberry tart with vanilla ice-cream, and a vanilla crème brûlée with a palmier biscuit.

Apart from a rosé wine at €38, red and whites start at around €50. So, with a glass of Agnusdei Albarino Rias Baixas 2020 (€13); a glass of Domaine Daniel Chotard Sancerre 2018 (€15), bottled water (€8), two espressos (€10), and service, our bill came to €160.50. ●

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The Shelbourne Hotel,
27 St Stephen's Green, Dublin 2.
Tel: (01) 663-4500
shelbournedining.ie*

lucindaosullivan.com

TOP 12

Gangster movies



With Tony Soprano's formative years laid bare in *The Many Saints of Newark*, it's safe to say that, entertaining as it is in its sprawling take on the early years of the man set to become *capo dei capi* of television gangsters, it certainly doesn't threaten the reputations of many other wiseguy films, writes **Roslyn Dee**, who counts down the greatest mobster movies to send a barrage of bullets across our screens

12 THE UNTOUCHABLES
Standard good guys/bad guys movie revolving around the taking down of Al Capone, this is worth the watch for one thing: Sean Connery. As the seen-it-all Irish cop, Jimmy Malone, signed up as sidekick to Kevin Costner's Eliot Ness, it's Connery who breathes life into this Prohibition tale. "They send one of yours to the hospital, you send one of theirs to the morgue," he famously growls. Ridiculous yet compelling Union Station shoot-out notwithstanding, once Malone dies, so does the movie.

11 AMERICAN GANGSTER
Denzel Washington as the smooth but ruthless Harlem drug lord Frank Lucas who finds himself, despite all his power and money, unable to shake off the crumpled but principled Richie Roberts, the New York cop determined to bring him down. A showpiece of a movie – flash houses, flash suits, drinks parties and beautiful women – it's the fallout from Lucas's criminality that rings most true; the moment his adoring mother realises what kind of monster her son has become. Denzel is, well, Denzel, but Russell Crowe as Roberts steals the movie from under the gangster's elegant nose.

10 MILLER'S CROSSING
Gangster movie meets film noir in this dialogue-heavy, complex, slick outing from the Coen Brothers, starring Gabriel Byrne as the too-smart-for-his-own-good Tom Reagan – the whiskey-soaked, battered anti-hero who carries the movie. A great man for the quips – "How'd you get the fat lip?" "Old war wound. Always acts up around morons" – he wisecracks, batters and shoots his way through it all. With a plot

based around a love triangle that constantly twists and turns, this is a stylish Prohibition-era take that swivels away from the usual knee-jerk gangster narrative.

9 CASINO
Transported to 1970s Las Vegas in this Scorsese roller coaster, it's a tale of two worlds with obsessive-compulsive casino manager Ace Rothstein (Robert De Niro) playing frontman for the mob while also demanding that the casino cooks put the same number of blueberries in each and every muffin. Kicking off somewhat explosively at the end of the story, the Ace narrative then backtracks, delivering up childhood friend Nicky (a nasty Joe Pesci) and the quite dazzling Sharon Stone as Ginger McKenna. An atmospheric and voyeuristic look at gambling world gangsterland.

8 THE LONG GOOD FRIDAY
A classic that produced one of cinema's most memorable gangsters in the shape of Bob Hoskins as Harold Shand. Sharp-edged, menacing and shocking in its brutality, the belligerent Harold, having courted the New York Mafia, sets out to build a property empire in 1970s London, only to find it all fall apart. With its cracking pace, brilliant dialogue and terrific performance from Helen Mirren, there's no doubting the star of this gangland romp: it's Shand's show all the way.

7 CITY OF GOD
Full-on life in the ghetto in the Rio favela in Brazil that gives the film its name, this subtitled assault on the senses is part slum blood-letting and part coming-of-age story. A tale of gangster warfare with poverty, endless violence and drug-addled teenage hoodlums all writ large, the story is told with

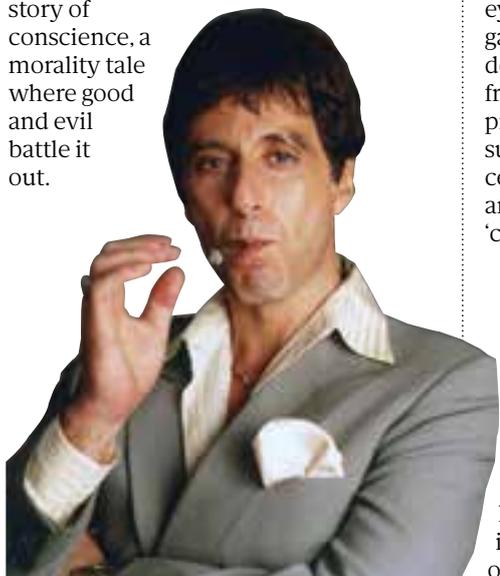


Left: Amerigo Bonasera whispers to Don Corleone, played by Marlon Brando, in *The Godfather*

Below: Al Pacino as lowlife Tony Montana in *Scarface*

extraordinary narrative panache and pace. Stylishly directed and with a thumping soundtrack, it's a disturbing, shocking and yet riveting tale of hopelessness and desperation.

6 THE DEPARTED Essentially a remake of the 2002 Hong Kong film *Internal Affairs*, this presents Jack Nicholson as the barbaric, nihilistic, lecherous Irish gangster boss Frank Costello. In a game of perpetual cat and mouse where nothing is quite what it seems, the film belongs not to Nicholson, but to its two smoke-and-mirrors characters – Leonardo DiCaprio, the undercover cop planted inside the Costello snake pit, and a superb Matt Damon as a Costello hoodlum who has successfully infiltrated the Boston Police Department. At its heart it's a story of conscience, a morality tale where good and evil battle it out.



5 DONNIE BRASCO With a feel to it akin to *Goodfellas*, this is based on the real-life story of FBI agent Joe Pistone who infiltrated a Mafia family as Brasco in the late 1970s. It's a love story too, with a paternal/filial affection that grows and grows between young whippersnapper Brasco – played by Johnny Depp – and the initially sceptical Lefty Ruggiero, an older wiseguy now fast sliding down the 'family' food chain, beautifully played by Al Pacino. Violent, funny and touching, its understated ending will break your heart.

4 GOODFELLAS Not a film charting a particular Mafia plot, rather this Martin Scorsese pièce de résistance is about the Mafia life. Told through the eyes of Ray Liotta, playing real-life gangster Henry Hill, it spans three decades, observing Hill and his cronies from their years of power, through the prison stretches and on into the subsequent years of decline. At its centre is guilt; not about the murders and mayhem, but about betrayal of the 'code'. A cinematic triumph.

3 SCARFACE Has Al Pacino ever been better? It's all brutality and bravado, loud shirts, chainsaws and cocaine in this fast-moving, fast-talking 1980s tour de force from Brian De Palma. As Tony Montana, the lowlife, smartass, kill-you-as-soon-as-look-at-you Cuban immigrant on the make, Pacino blazes off the screen, every glance a threat,

every move a potential murder. The bodies mount, Tony runs out of rope, and a young Michelle Pfeiffer floats around in the background, taking what she can from the highest male bidder. A roller coaster ride that's never going to produce any happy ever afters.

2 THE GODFATHER & THE GODFATHER, PART II Why pit one against the other? They work in tandem, with both now enshrined forever in the highest echelons of the canon of mobster movies. Bursting with character and narrative, they come full of never-to-be-forgotten scenes and razor-sharp dialogue. You'd miss the legendary Brando as Vito in Part II, alright, but it's Pacino as Michael who dominates this Shakespearean tragedy that is the Corleone story. It's the little moments that linger – Michael's embrace of his brother Fredo as he gives the nod to the bodyguard that signs Fredo's death warrant; that split second when the toll-booth operator drops the change and Sonny knows instantly that he's a goner; the glance of the Sicilian henchman just before Michael's young bride turns the ignition in the car. All unforgettable *Godfather* gems.

1 ONCE UPON A TIME IN AMERICA Almost dreamlike in tone – a cinematic mood that's only accentuated by its haunting Ennio Morricone score – this majestic epic sweeps its way through half a century, capturing the nuances of loyalty and loss, brutality and betrayal, corruption and cupidity on New York's Lower East Side during Prohibition and beyond. As Jewish Mafia hoodlum David 'Noodles' Aaronson, Robert De Niro excels as the publicly brutal yet privately tortured gangster. Operatic in both its on-screen intensity and its overall narrative, as the credits start to roll, its enigmatic ending leaves you utterly bereft. A masterpiece and fitting swansong for Sergio Leone. ●



Nobody tells you...

...About friendship red flags. Red flags in relationships are very well documented but what are the signs in a platonic one?

By Sophie White

I was listening to one of my favourite podcasts recently – *Celebrity Memoir Book Club* if you're looking for something fun to sink your ears into – when one of the co-hosts opined that the name Cory was a red flag. She went on to hypothesise that Cory was the name given to babies by mothers who were already aware their baby was going to be a toxic player. “How will I warn the other women?!” comedian and co-host, Claire Parker riffed in the voice of the hypothetical mother. “I know! I’ll call him Cory.”

Red flags in romantic relationships are well documented in movies, books and on TV. The obvious ones are past cheating, constant bad-mouthing and complaining about exes and referring to a previous girlfriend as “crazy”. Seriously, if you hear how “crazy” an ex-girlfriend was, run. It is a damaging, misogynistic stereotype and if she was crazy by the end of their relationship, you can be goddamn sure he was the one driving her crazy.

What we don't receive a lot of guidance on is spotting red flags in platonic friendships. And what did we learn from *Single White Female*? That friendships can be every bit as sinister and as toxic as relationships.

(Sidenote: We also learned that apparently in 1992, it was considered totally normal to specify the race of roommate you required in your “flatmate wanted” ad.)

Anyway, as we have much less media depicting what potential friend to avoid,

I have decided I am the person to supply a comprehensive list of red flags in a new friendship. And why am I so certain that I am qualified to do this? Well, I've been orbited by many people displaying these red flags and I have, on occasion, been burned by them. Let us proceed. Take notes; there will be a quiz.

First up, we have the “All About Them” phenomenon. Every conversation is dominated by their life and issues. If there is any reference made to your stuff, it is invariably a cursory question at the end of the conversation, right before they have to go. It's the platonic evil twin of the unrequited-love thing. One-sided, unsatisfactory and, over time, it really affects your confidence and self-esteem.

For red flag number 2, I am going to put forth the complete opposite problem to red flag number 1. The “All About You” issue. If the friendship is one-sided in the opposite direction, it is just as unnerving and leads me to red flag number 3: people-pleasing.

Being pals with a people-pleaser is never going to end well. If someone is always going along with you, their needs aren't being met, which is, at best, unfair and, at worst, will eventually lead to simmering resentment on their part. I think this red flag can be rectified with a bit of support for your people-pleaser friend.

Red flag number 4, however, is not easily solved; intense jealousy. Jealousy of significant others or even just friends is not good and claustrophobic as hell.

This jealousy can manifest as ongoing efforts on the part of the toxic friend to undermine you or humiliate you among your wider friend group, usually in a weird attempt to ingratiate themselves.

I had a pal whom I introduced to some new friends with a view to merging the friendships – always a tricky thing to achieve. She responded to my generous friend-share – I know, I know, I am a saint, right? – by constantly bringing up embarrassing stories from our younger years. I fled the friendship and would urge you to do the same. Flee, flee! Flee for your peace of mind.

One of the most disturbing signs that your friend is bad news is red flag number 5, boyfriend or girlfriend baiting. In college, I knew a girl who exclusively flirted with the boyfriends of her close friends. This kind of crap is the signal to jump ship; jump FRIENDship.

A red flag straight out of the *Single White Female* playbook is when your friend starts to dress like you. In real life, a little copying seems fairly reasonable, though friend etiquette demands you run any copycat purchases of €100 or more past the person. Buying the same Zara dress is one thing, but copying a high-value item is not on.

Shallow? Maybe. But these are my deal-breakers! Of course, in the movie, Jennifer Jason Leigh took her emulation of Bridget Fonda's look way too far, so if a friend starts looking like an off-brand version of you, it's time to gently disengage. Just don't ghost them or they'll be sure to haunt you. ●

Sunday Independent

Life



Inside
Lucinda O'Sullivan's
100 Best Restaurants
20-page special

McSWEENEY

SIOBHÁN

*Icon? Rebel?
The Derry Girls
star just thinks
she's lucky*



Life

03 April 2022

Editor's letter



Takeaways and food boxes were a lifeline during the locked-down months when I *just couldn't face* making another dinner myself. They were a wan substitute, however, for the delights of eating in an actual restaurant, where the combination of beautiful decor, friendly service and the buzz of a crowd are as important to me as the food.

Life's esteemed food critic, Lucinda O'Sullivan, clearly has a much more discerning palate, but culinary excellence alone doesn't guarantee a spot on her list of the Top 100 Best Restaurants in Ireland, plus Northern Ireland's Top 10, which you can find in a 20-page special beginning on page 23.

It's an interesting list that some may find controversial. I was particularly delighted to see my own Co Waterford favourite, in whose kitchen I worked for a teenage summer, in at No 30.

Leslie Ann Horgan
Editor

ADVERTISING Advertising department, tel: (01) 705-5333.
Cover: Siobhán McSweeney photographed by Lee Malone



Introducing

Seán Dunne

Age: 32.

From: Laois, now based in Dublin.

Feeling the fear: "You're putting yourself out there on a different level," says debut novelist Seán. It seems odd that he's a bit nervous because he works in high-adrenaline live TV – even if he is behind the scenes. Usually he is the voice in the presenter's ear as the producer for Virgin Media's *The Tonight Show*.
Always writing: He has also worked as a print journalist, so he is no stranger to writing. But his latest project was different, as he wanted to create the story. Fiction was his dream.

Lockdown occupation: When Covid-19 started, he decided to just do it. "I'd always talked about writing a book." On daily walks in the Phoenix Park he would dream up his

plots. The result is a young adult novel about a teenage detective, *A D'Arcy Blake Mystery, A Case for the Tech Detectives*. "It's a bit like a modern-day Famous Five. I used to love Enid Blyton, but it's no longer tin cans and walkie-talkies. I needed to get the tone right."

Ambitious: In this Galway-based novel, there is a Syrian refugee, drug smuggling and TikTok. "I'm an over-achiever and I dream big. I'd love to try to do adult fiction too." ●

'A Case for the Tech Detectives' is published by Book Hub Publishing. Available in bookshops

Words by **Ciara Dwyer**
Portrait by **Gerry Mooney**



Stefanie Preissner

“Privacy, to me, is what the environment is to Greta Thunberg – a threatened, delicate thing that needs to be fiercely defended

Going through my mother’s attic in search of my old call-card collection, I came across a 1994 phone book. So huge was it that younger me had used it to prop up one side of a shelving unit that housed my old figurines. When, eventually, I had cleared the shelves of the detritus of my childhood, I thumbed through the old book with a mixture of horror and awe.

As a concept, phone books seem wildly at odds with today’s GDPR laws. Can you imagine if some business executive floated the idea now: “How about we put everyone’s name, address and phone number in a book? Then we print millions of copies and deliver it to every doorstep in the land.”

The dust was making my eyes a bit itchy but I could still see, clear as day, the circles I had put around the people I knew in the book. It’s funny how people would make their own personalised little phone books out of this massive one, actually writing down by hand the details of their most contacted people. I remember being both impressed and disgusted by the people who were referred to as ‘ex-directory’.

There were two types of people who could gain the privacy that is now a privilege but, back then, was worthy of an eye roll. Only guards/teachers and people who had notions above their station were ex-directory.

You can’t scroll online for very long

these days without being warned about the dangers of sharing your details with people. On the Garda website, you can find infographics about phishing, vishing and smishing – various ways people can scam you online by having a little bit of data about you and using it to leverage more information to eventually steal your money.

Some people are confident they could never be scammed. They balk at the idea of social media and sharing private information publicly. Ah, but were you ex-directory, my dear? Probably not.

If the phone book were a thing now, I would definitely want to be ex-directory. I don’t care about people knowing where I like to eat, or what I’m doing with my day – in that way, social media doesn’t bother me. However, I am fiercely protective of my phone number and address.

Privacy is, to me, what the environment is to Greta Thunberg – a threatened, delicate thing I know I will not be able to function without. I have a video doorbell with an intercom, so I can see and speak to whomever is there without having to open the door. I have two phones; one is for work and contact tracing. A PO box means I can get post without people knowing where I live.

I probably sound like I think I’m Barack Obama or Beyoncé – someone so in demand and high profile that they need a security detail to go to the shop. It’s not that at all, it’s just that I am keenly aware of the world’s unpredictability, and it makes me feel fragile. There’s so much

that I cannot control, so I double down on the things I can control. I will go to any lengths to have two places that are a sanctuary of predictability: my home and my phone.

When I get a call from an unknown number, I feel an emotion flash through me. It’s the kind of adrenaline rush you get when you miss a step coming downstairs and nearly fall. A thrilling kind of sickness. What is this terrorism? Who is calling me? What do they want? And the feeling will stay for a while because I will never answer to find out.

The number flashes on the screen and I am swamped with passivity and impotence. I am like a sugar lump in tea, slowly dissolving as the force of the intrusion wears me down. Luckily, my phone rings for less than a minute, so I don’t completely melt. I’ve also deactivated my voicemail, so the worry is gone unless the person texts to explain and then I’ll call back.

The real heroes text before they call. They are the gentry of old who would have sent a town crier ahead of them to announce their arrival. They are wonderful gems of people who understand that to arrive unannounced to a house or a phone is a slap in the face. Unless you’re serving me with a summons or arresting me, it’s common decency to flag your visit.

I found my call cards eventually. Covered in dust, but still in mint condition, never opened. Unsurprising, really – I was never going to use them to call someone, now was I? ●

Notions & Necessities



NOTION

Dress to impress

This season's Magee collection was inspired by the beaches, cliffs and piers of the label's Donegal home. We love this shirt dress in a Liberty of London print. **LH**
Dress, €275, see magee1866.com

NECESSITY

Cloud nine

Highly reactive skin meant that CloudCloth creator Catherine Parker could no longer use chemical or granular exfoliants on her skin. She tried all sort of cloths – some too soft to thoroughly cleanse; some too rough for repeated use. She realised she'd have to create her own cloth. The journey took her back to a cotton mill in her native Lancashire, where the CloudCloth was born. A reusable cloth, it has a smooth side that performs an efficient cleanse with just water, while the textured flip side gently exfoliates. **SC**

CloudCloth pack of three, €16.71, see amazon.co.uk (Note: Items from overseas may incur extra charges)

NECESSITY

Check yourself

More Than A Lump is the new podcast from Breast Cancer Ireland. There are interviews with breast cancer surgeon Professor Arnold Hill; health coach and wellness speaker Georgie Crawford and her mum Siobhán; BCI patient supporter and male breast cancer survivor Dara McDonough, and BCI ambassador, teacher and new mum Emma Cassidy, among others. **LH**

See all the usual podcast platform channels or morethanalump.ie



NOTION

Top to bottom

Irish designer Lucy Nagle has just launched a new range of 100pc cotton joggers and zipper sweaters, available in white, black and stone. **LH**
Zip top, €75; joggers, €75, both Lucy Nagle, see lucynagle.com





NECESSITY

Return journey

For the many who are making up for previous missed big days out in the next few months, Happy Days is a dress-rental company based in Dublin 18 and online. Brands stocked include Rixo, Rotat Birger Christensen, Stine Goya, Needle & Thread and many more, in store and online from sizes six to 22. **LH**
See happy-days.ie

NOTION

Eggs-cellent

They had us at 'extremely chocolatey'. Easter bonnets off to the Marks and Spencer chocolate offering this year, which moulds our favourite confectionery into whatever shape takes your fancy. We favour this affair of thick chocolate cut through with biscuit bits. **SC**
Marks & Spencer Extremely Chocolatey Biscuity-Egg, €12



NOTION

Glass act

It could be that there is no bottle bank near you, or no accessible drop-off point for your empty bottles and jars. Or, just maybe, the world has become so busy again that you just can't make it to the bottle bank. Whatever the reason, glassbag.ie is a new home-collection service that will take all the empty glass items from your doorstep, in a reusable bag they provide, either as a once-off, or once a month on a subscription basis. Each bag holds up to 60 bottles or jars, extra bags can be delivered if you need more, and, for now, the service operates across Dublin, and in parts of Wicklow, Meath, Kildare and Louth. **SC**
From €14 for one bag and one-off collection; €10 per month or €96 annual subscription, see glassbag.ie

NECESSITY

Splash of colour

It's been a while since that first lockdown flurry of DIY and some of the paint jobs done then might be looking a bit weary. Dodge being triggered by the sight of a roller and ladder, and inject a bit of fresh colour into your room with this cheery chair from DFS. Pink animal print, pompoms and a flurry of fringing. Bursts of colour don't get much better than this. **SC**
Chair, €539; scatter cushion, €40, see dfs.ie





Ciara Kelly

“In a time of spiralling costs, I am coming into my own. No one knows how to cut back and make savings like those of us who lived through the 1980s

Cometh the hour, cometh the man/woman. I know there's little to celebrate in the spiralling costs of food, petrol, electricity etc. I know it's alarming that you can spend €60 in the supermarket and seem to leave with barely a few snacks, or €100 on filling the car. I mostly try not to think about it, because most of these costs are unavoidable. We have to eat, get to work, live.

But, of late, I've found a weird thing happening; I've found myself almost seamlessly – and, indeed, comfortably – slipping back into my 1970s/80s upbringing. I'm not someone who objects to being a bit spendy at times, but we are in a new era when it comes to what the basics are now costing, and I am coming into my own.

Like Liam Neeson in *Taken*, it seems I, too, have special skills – and they mostly involve saving money on utilities. I am turning off lights, turning down the heat and closing doors to 'keep the heat in' with enthusiasm. It feels as though I've been in training all my life – well, certainly for the first two decades of it – for this very moment!

In fact, it feels a bit like coming home. I was raised in a house where my parents believed that 16C was a proper room temperature for home-heating purposes and, even at that, that it should never be on for more than an hour at a time. Well, I am now that 1980s' parent reborn.

My heating has been turned down, my immersion is being watched like a hawk, and I am all about putting on an extra jumper and, if needs be, a hat indoors, instead of wastefully heating the house. My children keep

complaining I'm turning off lights every time I leave the room, because, on occasion, they're still in it. "Force of habit," I say. And it's true: I have slotted back into these ways without any difficulty. They feel normal to me, as though those intervening decades, when we turned the heat up so high that we could wear a T-shirt indoors in winter, were actually the oddity.

I was raised in an era when we unplugged everything at night before going to bed – we'd been indoctrinated into believing if we left them plugged in overnight, we would all burn to death in our beds. In fairness, almost everything was flammable back in those days.

It doesn't really feel like that much of a hardship that those days are here again. In fact, during all the conversations about climate change over the past number of years, when government and expert plans revolved

around us all retrofitting our homes at eye-watering expense, I often wonder why no one said, "Why don't we just dress warmly? Burn less fossil fuels by insulating ourselves rather than insulating our houses?" Before you leap on me, I do know that elderly and vulnerable people need to keep warm; I'm talking in general terms here.

We have forgotten – or, in some cases, never learnt – what it is to cut back on heating, bills, fuel or food. I can still hear my mother roaring at us on the evening she'd come home with a Big Shop that was supposed to last the week: "WHO ATE ALL THE HAM?" And there's a reason that the immersion features in so many stand-up routines.

Now, I'm in full-blown Bear Grylls mode. I know that living through the 1980s has given me the edge over soft Gen Z-ers. As we enter the hunger games ahead, I'm well equipped. I'm off to boil a mug of water for my tea. ●

A second opinion...

I've mentioned before in this column that I'm fairly certain I have ADHD. I haven't gone for assessment as I'm not sure what purpose that would serve, but I've had a lifetime of difficulties concentrating on anything that didn't interest me (and even some things that did) to the extent that I can completely tune things out. The 14 years of school reports stating I was distracted, disruptive and generally paid no attention might also be an indicator.

However, I've also realised I do my best work in noisy spaces. I write columns and plan presentations in

hair salons and cafés. I studied for my Leaving Cert and my degrees in front of the TV. I turn the radio up loud when I want to focus on something important.

I'm telling you this because if it works for me, it may work for you – or, more importantly, for your kids. If I'd been stopped doing my homework in front of the telly, I doubt I'd have passed an exam!

Maybe your kids know what's good for them. Maybe your kids who need background noise to concentrate are actually telling you something.

Sustainable living

by Valerie O'Connor

Chocolate that's good for the planet

When life brought a child and the logistics of living in the capital became too challenging, chocolatier Anna Coffey Lynch moved back to Limerick with her Scottish husband and young son.

Following a long stint at the renowned Cocoa Atelier in Dublin, she easily found work at Adare Manor as a pastry chef and then at The Good Room in Adare village where she continued to hone her skills in pastry and chocolate making. During the pandemic, Anna found herself 'stress baking' her worries into brownies and other delicacies – which she then gave to friends and neighbours when she found herself surrounded with goodies.

"I was then getting orders for brownies and cakes and a business was emerging all on its own, and so we set up Braw. The word is a Scottish version of breá, the

Irish word for lovely," says Anna.

The business flourished as people's demands for chocolate in the pandemic surged. Any business that has a chocolate club at its core has to be watched. You can subscribe to get three monthly bars of chocolate in the post – two of its signature bars and a surprise concoction.

Braw works with local brands to create exciting pairings, such as the dark-chocolate Easter egg containing pieces of a coffee biscuit made using rugby legend Keith Earls' Eleven14 coffee.

Braw's hand-painted milk Easter eggs are filled with ethically sourced dried raspberries and pineapple. Made from Luker chocolate, which uses sustainably sourced beans from Columbia and Venezuela, this chocolate is not only delectable but good for the planet.

"So much cocoa now comes from east



Picture by Kirsty Lyons

Africa; many people aren't aware of that, and the quality and ethics may not be as good as other parts of the world," says Anna.

Why not buy one good-quality egg this Easter and make it a Braw? ●

See braw.ie

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'I am Destiny's Child – the shoes on my feet? I bought them'

You know her as the hilarious Sister Michael from *Derry Girls*, but Siobhán McSweeney is currently starring in two prime-time crime dramas on TV. She talks about her 'overnight success' being a long time coming; the lack of clothing options for women over a certain size, and how she won't take back *that* comment about Boris Johnson

Words by
Chrissie Russell

Photography by
Lee Malone

We're about 25 minutes into our interview and I can't hold it in any longer. "I *knew* I was going to enjoy chatting to you," I fan-girl shamelessly during our Zoom call. "I just knew it!"

Siobhán McSweeney lets out a gleeful cackle of laughter. "Normally people don't like me ranting at them before lunch time."

McSweeney has just finished delivering an impassioned monologue (it's far too well articulated to be called a rant) on the sizing inequality in women's fashion. Before that, there was an expletive-ridden insight into the narrow stereotypes in casting, that came via a moment to genuflect at the altar of *The Golden Girls* and *Murder, She Wrote*.

Before that, there was an earnest appraisal of modern feminist discourse, and the bias of 'pretty privilege'. Admittedly, in print, that all looks a bit weighty to be tackling before the second coffee of the day. But, oh my god, she's just so fun and intelligent that it's impossible not to be rapt.

Humour, of course, is what most people closely associate with the 42-year-old actor. Over what will soon be three series of *Derry*

Girls, her portrayal as eye-rolling, acerbic nun Sister Michael has achieved meme-worthy status.

Elsewhere, McSweeney's innate warmth and wit has recently seen her become a natural in presenting roles; more than three million viewers tuned in regularly for Channel 4's *The Great Pottery Throw Down*. And, in her More4 travel series, *Exploring Northern Ireland*, McSweeney charmed audiences with her self-deprecating humour and willingness to throw herself into every opportunity – be it paddleboarding with singletons or dressing as a Viking to row with cosplaying Norsemen.

With laughs so very much a part of the CV to date, her latest roles might therefore come as a surprise to viewers. She's also starring in the darkly comic TV adaptation of Graham Norton's bestselling novel, *Holding*, which recently aired on ITV and comes to Virgin Media viewers from next week. Her role is that of Brid Riordan, the troubled love interest of Sergeant PJ Collins, played by Conleth Hill.

In new crime drama *Redemption* things get even grittier, with McSweeney cast as a sombre detective sergeant. The series, which also airs soon on Virgin Media, stars Paula Malcomson »





» as a Liverpool detective called to Ireland under grim circumstances. McSweeney says she's braced to accept the inevitable, 'Wait, is that Sister Michael?' moment that will happen for many viewers. "I suppose it's a compliment, because it implies that whoever you've played has connected to the viewers so much that they think they know you."

But while she'll forgive audiences for taking a beat to accept her in a vastly different role, she's less forgiving of casting directors that do the same.

"You'd be surprised at how un-open-minded casting directors are. Our audiences, I think, are quite often smarter than our practitioners.

"I mean, obviously, #notallcastingdirectors," she adds diplomatically. "To be honest with you, it's a very underfunded profession so people do not get time to do their job well. There are incredibly passionate, good-hearted, open-hearted, diligent people in the casting industry who are not allowed to do their job that well because of financial and time constraints so, as a result, they have to fall on the old regulars."

In the case of securing that career-making role on *Derry Girls*, she believes, it was because the show's creator, Lisa McGee, and executive producer, Liz Lewin, knew her work already that got her foot in the door. "If I'd handed in my CV, nobody would have seen me, but Lisa and Liz knew my work and knew that I could do it.

"I've fought continuously from day one with every single part I've ever gotten. I think people just often think actors should look a certain way, stories should be told a certain way, and that only certain stories should be told. Like, before *Derry Girls* came out, if you'd pitched that to an awful lot of commissioners, they would have gone, 'Nah, put a few more blokes in it; make it *The Inbetweeners*.'"

She loves that *Holding*, which is directed and produced by Kathy Burke and adapted from Norton's novel by Dominic »

Interview

» Treadwell-Collins and Karen Cogan, steps away from the obvious.

"There's a sort of a 'f**k you' about it and I think audiences are primed for it. I could play the role of Brid with my eyes shut, because I empathise and understand her so completely. But nobody else in the world would have cast me as Brid apart from Kathy Burke, and nobody would have written it apart from Karen Cogan and Dominic Treadwell-Collins."

Why is that? "Brid is a complicated romantic lead and I don't get to play romantic leads. Everyone's all, 'You have to make things shiny for TV' and the easy thing to do would be have Jennifer Lawrence play it, and PJ would be Daniel Craig. But that's not who was in your head, or who touched you when you read the book, and that's not who the characters are either."

Not that she read the book, she admits sheepishly. "I knew we were all drinking Graham's wine but I didn't know we were all reading his books too! Sorry, Graham," she laughs.

McSweeney, who grew up in the small village of Aherla, Co Cork, keenly feels the pressure of representing her native landscape on screen for Irish and UK audiences.

"I'm fking terrified, I really,** really am. As an actor you go in and do your job to the best of your abilities and then you walk away hoping that you've done yourself proud. With this, I feel a deeper connection to the character but also to the place and, as a result, I have all the anxiety of a producer with none of the benefits."

There is, she's aware, with any Irish offering – particularly when aimed at an audience beyond these shores – a danger of tipping into twee 'Oirish' stereotypes in a manner most recently exemplified by the likes of US movie *Wild Mountain Thyme*. "You don't want to add to the canon of bullshit," nods McSweeney, effectively summarising the problem. "The British gaze on Ireland is a complicated one and shite like *Wild Mountain Thyme* doesn't



I've fought continuously from day one with every single part I've ever gotten. I think people just often think actors should look a certain way, stories should be told a certain way, and that only certain stories should be told

exactly help, does it?"

With two prime-time shows on the listings; successful presenting slots ramping up; a critically lauded stint at the Olympia Theatre in Beckett's *Happy Days* last year and the much anticipated finale to *Derry Girls* set to hit screens soon, surely this must be 'pat on the back' time?

"Oh god, no," she baulks. "A pat on the back? No, no, no, I'm still from Cork."

"*Derry Girls* came 15 years into my career so I'm the longest 'overnight success'! Unless people had gone to the theatre a lot and squinted in the back, they wouldn't have known me. I waited a long, long time in the wings so I feel immensely grateful. I don't think it's permanent, I don't think I'm entitled to it and I don't think there's any meritocracy. I just feel grateful for every opportunity I've been given. That sounds pat, but I really do."

Perhaps one of the most interesting aspects to McSweeney is that she's become more outspoken as her star has ascended. Where other people in the precarious world of showbiz might be more circumspect for fear of controversy, alienation of audiences (and, indeed, job offers), McSweeney feels differently.

In recent years, she's been a vocal champion for a multitude of issues, from championing abortion rights in Northern Ireland and opposing the proposal to shut down charges against the British soldiers involved in Bloody Sunday to campaigning for Police Spies Out Of Lives, a support group for women deceived into intimate relationships by undercover police.

"I feel a huge obligation, a moral obligation and it's a very happily taken-on responsibility. I feel my politics haven't changed since this random thing of so-called fame; they've evolved and gotten richer so I have a huge obligation because, otherwise, what's the point?"

McSweeney commands a sizeable Twitter following of more than 114,000 and, with that, there has been ample experience of dealing with online trolls. "I'm





quite robust and I feel very privileged in the way that I am cared deeply for by my support system and I feel secure to a certain extent. That doesn't mean that I don't nip off to the loo and have a cry if someone's mean about me. But it just comes down to a great sense of responsibility, because if people are going to listen to you, then you should say something, and there's a lot to say."

However, she worries that, too often, saying gets in the way of doing. "There's a lot of discourse in feminism and while everyone is getting all whipped-up over it, meanwhile the gender pension gap is getting bigger, the pay gap is getting bigger, our healthcare, we're letting our trans sisters and our trans brothers down, all this f**king discourse and nothing's getting done. It's a distraction." She lets out a loud, infuriated sigh.

Then – completely proving McSweeney's point that we're all complex individuals capable of fervour and frivolity – in the next moment, we're gushing over the absolute joy that is her photoshoot accompanying this interview.

"That was such a fun day," beams McSweeney, who wears designs by sustainable design duo Vin + Omi in the shoot. "I'm obsessed with them. They are so playful, so intelligent, but also punk. They look at me and they don't do a Trinnie and Susannah – may they rot in hell. They look at me and go, 'Can we make this shorter on her so that we can see her dimples above her knees?'"

I've a personal stake in the topic of fashion for fuller figures but I'm in two minds as to whether I want to discuss it with McSweeney. I wonder if, even when we're celebrating body positivity or inclusivity in fashion, is the very fact that we're discussing women in terms of their bodies, reductive?

But McSweeney wants to talk, particularly when it comes to the lack of options for women over a certain size. "It's not about, 'ooooh my curves' or 'mmmmh you can't handle this' – it's to do with showing very, very blatantly how the patriarchy colludes with our economic »

Interview

» system to make more than half the population feel shit about themselves,” she says heatedly.

“I’m incredibly lucky. I am Destiny’s Child – the shoes on my feet? I bought them. I am going into stores with a wallet asking: ‘Why can’t I wear your f**king clothes?’ I’m not being ‘body positive’, I’m not being a ‘girl boss’, I’m going: ‘Why can’t I wear your clothes?’ Don’t tell me you’ll take six to eight months to make me some bespoke piece of shite, I want to go into a shop like another woman and buy your f**king clothes.

“There is nothing wrong with my body. I’m not celebrating it and I’m not denigrating it. It’s neutral. This flesh cage carries me around and it’s done very well – and it would look f**king amazing in your frocks.”

The unparliamentary language tends to get ramped up when Sweeney is passionate about a topic, which perhaps explains her infamous labelling of British Prime Minister Boris Johnson as a c**t in an interview last year. She has since reflected on the wisdom of that. “I live, most of the time, in London and I am offended repeatedly by that man. I was thinking the other day: Am I adding to a certain level of meanness out there by using that word?” She pauses. “I concluded no, no I’m not, because that’s what he is.”

There’s a certain humour to the fact that she is, as we speak, wearing a necklace from the Vagina Museum in London emblazoned with the offending word. “It’s one of my favourite necklaces, it brings me great joy.” She chuckles mischievously.

“I’ll often forget I’m wearing it when I’m out and then see people’s faces. But I don’t wear it to cause offence and I don’t use the word to cause offence, unless offence is meant. And I meant offence to that man.”

Our connection turns patchy and McSweeney blames her proximity to the BT Tower in London. She has been based in the city for over 15 years. In November 2019, she lost virtually everything when her flat burned down. The



fire started when a block adaptor plug fell less than 2mm out of the socket. Fortunately, she wasn’t home at the time.

“When I went in, everything was either burnt or covered in this noxious, almost oily, substance from the soot and water.”

Now, apart from a few bits of furniture, everything else she rescued sits in a pink suitcase in the corner of her room.

“That suitcase hasn’t been opened since the fire. I’m too scared to throw it out because I don’t know what’s in there and I’m too scared to open it for fear it’ll be burned. It’s just sitting there taking up a significant amount of space in my room, like some sort of spectre at the feast.”

The fire came after a difficult few years which saw the deaths of her father in 2018 and, nine months later, her aunt – “Betsy of the Champagne trifle”. Then came the pandemic when, because of bad asthma, McSweeney was placed on the ‘clinically extremely vulnerable’ list. At her most anxious, she even talked to her brother about how repatriate her body home to Cork.

“I feel like the last five years has been insane for me. A lot of personal stuff and a lot of work

Above: Siobhán McSweeney in character as Bríd Riordan in the television adaptation of *Holding*. Graham Norton’s bestselling novel. Picture by Conor Horgan

stuff, a lot of ‘life’ in my life.” Today, she reveals, is the first day in maybe eight months where she isn’t double-jobbing, although she is heading to physio, still not fully recovered after breaking her leg while filming *Holding* in Cork last August.

For one final question, I ask how she would best describe herself. Others, I tell her, used the word ‘icon’; I’m inclined towards ‘rebel’.

“I genuinely think I’m lucky,” she replies after the longest silence in our epic chat. “I am the culmination of every McSweeney and O’Neill woman in my bloodline. I’m the best they got, and I’m a sort of evolutionary cul-de-sac as well, because I don’t think I’m going to have children. So I’m lucky. Even with asthma, if I’d lived a generation ago, I’d be dead. If I was older and caught coronavirus, I’d be dead. If I was my grandmother’s age at the start of the Free State, I’d be dead. So I’m lucky.”

There’s that mischievous laugh again. “I’m a lucky c**t”. ●

THE TEAM

Photography:

Lee Malone

Clothing: Vin + Omi, vinandomi.com

Hair and make-up:

Jade Farmiloe, using Charlotte Tilbury

‘Holding’ will air on Virgin Media More, exclusive to Virgin Media TV subscribers, on April 12 at 9pm. ‘Redemption’ will air weekly on Monday nights on Virgin Media One from Monday, April 18



The Batman star Robert Pattinson has admitted to telling lies in interviews, and as a teenager, to impress his peers. We take a look at all the different categories of untruths, such as 'white' and 'whopper'; the reasons why people tell fibs, and ask the question: is lying always bad?

Words by
Emily Hourican

Graphic by
Shane McIntyre

So Robert Pattinson lies in interviews. Or so he says. Which may, of course, be a lie. Because he confessed, in a recent interview with *GQ*, to lying a lot throughout his life. *The Batman* star claims that as a teenager he pretended to import and sell drugs, to impress kids older than him.

He had some very elaborate cosplay to give substance to his lies – floppy discs that he prised apart and filled with white powder, then sprayed with

detergent to give them a 'chemical-y' smell.

In this story, Pattinson falls into the most common category of liar – those who lie to make themselves seem better; to impress others. Other categories include lying for reward; to appease others; to avoid punishment; to get attention and to get sympathy. Men, apparently, both lie more than women, and consider themselves to be better – more convincing – liars than women.

Worryingly, the better someone thinks they are at lying, the more lies they tell...

Interestingly, most communication – even nowadays when we worry about living in a 'post-truth age' – is honest. The majority of lies told are apparently told by a small number of prolific liars. And the vast majority of lies are 'white', told as a 'joke' or in order to avoid something. Only very few, around 2pc according to one study, are told maliciously, to hurt someone else. »

Liar liar

» So when is a lie not a lie? When it's a version of the truth: 'I can't/won't do this thing I've been asked to do; what does it matter the reason – but here is a face-saving fabrication we can all choose to believe in...'

First, a brief history of my own lying. I definitely lied as a kid. Not an enormous amount, but enough. Obviously, there were the common or garden lies: "No, I didn't eat the chocolates/steal the money/push my little brother." Those were lies to get me out of trouble. Any kid would tell them. In fact, psychologists consider the ability to lie in very small children to be a sign of intelligence.

But there were other lies, too.

One that sticks in my mind – aged nine or 10, a new school, my first day. I had a new pencil case and on it was a picture of a pony, a beautiful palomino running through a green field. I picked it because I loved horses. Obsessed over them, as only a 10-year-old girl can. "Is that your pony?" one of the girls in my new class asked. "Yes." It came out before I even thought about it. I still feel like she handed me that lie.

It almost didn't feel like a lie. I wanted it to be true, so badly. And in fact – in my feeble defence – we had just moved into a new house, and at the very bottom of the garden there were stables. Ancient stables, mind you, filled with cobwebs and old bits of lawnmowers. But still... We had stables. It didn't seem impossible, suddenly, that I could have a pony.

Of course, the lie immediately got out of hand. "She has a pony," the girl told all the other girls. I was the centre of an admiring group. They wanted to know all about my pony. I told them, but my heart was sinking rapidly.

A few weeks later, some of the girls came to my house after school. They immediately wanted to see the pony. I showed them the stables. It was a good start. "But where's the pony?" I had no doubt invented a sickly name for the imaginary pony at this stage – Star, or Twinkle, or something equally awful. I muttered something about the pony being at the vet. It wasn't good enough.



My dad owned a plane and was incredibly rich. I was adopted. I had asthma. Anything to make myself sound more interesting, I suppose. I used to steal money, too, so had to lie to cover that up. I am sorry to say that it all came very naturally to me, and never caused me to feel any guilt at all

Later, I watched in horror as one of the girls asked my mother outright: "Does Emily have a pony?" My mother, being my mother, answered instantly. "No." And that was it. The lie was exposed. I remember feeling mortified, but also relieved. That wretched pony had made my life impossibly difficult; I was glad it was gone.

As far as I recall, there were no real repercussions to my lie. The girls in my class seemed to take the whole thing in their stride – 'you made up a pony, you're an idiot', and that was that. Much later, I wondered did the upheaval of moving destabilise me, causing some small trauma that manifested in lying? Or did a brand-new school just prove an irresistible opportunity to be more like the person I wanted to be: A girl with a pony?

A friend admits that her younger self "often used to talk to taxi drivers about my made-up boyfriend. I'm not sure whether it was out of a sense of safety – pretending that there was a *man* expecting me home – or just indulging in the idea that I could have a boyfriend when I was, in fact, chronically single. Either way, it came so easily, I shocked myself."

Another friend's response, when I asked if she had ever told lies, was: "Do you have all week?" She was, she says, "a pathological liar for my entire childhood. I lied to get out of trouble, I lied to gain advantage, I lied to show off... and unfortunately my loose relationship with the truth may be somehow genetic because one of my children is a little fibber too."

"I can't even tell you how many lies I told," she continues. "My dad owned a plane and was incredibly rich. I was adopted. I had asthma – that went on for years, and got quite stressful. Anything to make myself sound more interesting, I suppose. I used to steal money, too, so had to lie to cover that up. I am sorry to say that it all came very naturally to me, and never caused me to feel any guilt at all."

This is maybe the key thing here – she felt no guilt. Lying caused her no discomfort at all. In fact, she only stopped lying because she

eventually told a whopper so "baffling and stressful" that it put her off. That one involved a christening, a priest, a fictitious address, and unfolded under the horrified eyes of her husband, who believes lies are the devil's work.

So what does she make of her carry-on now? "I do think some people are inherent liars. It comes very easy, they perceive it to be totally harmless." She emphasises that very often, these people – herself and her child included – are also "fiercely loyal and trustworthy and not two-faced". Things I know to be true of her. So somehow, telling lies doesn't interfere with their moral code, but rather exists outside it.

Other people, when prompted by me, admitted to an array of lies. One friend was told by her father that she was part Native American. He taught her words that he said were Cherokee, and the two of them had the rudiments of a secret language together. Even when she knew it wasn't true, she kept the lie going. Because she liked the sense of herself as exotic, interesting, different.

Another friend, after lamenting, "so many lies, where to start..." says that she told a teacher that Pierce Brosnan was her uncle. "I just said it in class nonchalantly. I'm not even sure why I did it."

Others again talked about lying to avoid trouble, to impress people, to seem interesting, to be kind.

One described her lie about being adopted as "almost like acting. I wanted to feel what it would be like to be adopted, and so I said I was." There is definitely a point at which intense wish-fulfilment (the only child who says she has a family of half-siblings in a different country) and make-believe (I have magic powers) enter the territory of lying, but in a way that is blurred and diaphanous.

I have known children with very intense imaginations who truly struggled to understand which bits of the stories they told were true, and which weren't.

Everyone I spoke to made the distinction between 'harmless lies' and 'lie-lies'; by which,



Actor Robert Pattinson has admitted to lying in interviews

presumably, they mean the kind of lie involved in a Ponzi scheme, a lie intended to defraud or profit from other people. Those who told white lies were just as appalled at the idea of lying to someone else's detriment, as the ones who never told any lies.

But is there any actual difference? What is the deal with lying, psychologically speaking? And are there different types of liars?

"Lying becomes like a security blanket, or a cloak," says psychotherapist and author Stella O'Malley. "It's about keeping yourself invulnerable, protecting yourself with a shield."

She draws a distinction between the straightforward, expedient lies that get us what we want – "no, I didn't lose the keys" – and the lies that are "random, pointless. Those are protective, and come from a fear of people getting to know the real you." Presumably, my pony lie falls into that category. I wanted those girls to know a different me – a me who had a pony and was therefore 'better'

Lies can also come from a desire for control. For those who feel out of control in their lives, lying confers a godlike sense of being able to order the world as they want it. They are soothing themselves

than the real me, who didn't.

However, she also points out that lying represents different things to different people, using the analogy of drink – some of us drink to be merry, some drink to forget, some drink for confidence. "Compulsive lying into adulthood is generally a sign of psychological distress; a coping mechanism for people who feel the need to defend themselves. It's often a sign of a personality disorder and involves the creation of a false sense of reality. These people kid themselves that the rest of us believe their lies, and often, out of politeness, we kid them that we believe the lies too."

Gamblers are liars – stuck in the magical-thinking phase of their development; like a child, they tell themselves, it'll be true if I say it is.

"Lies can also come from a desire for control," says O'Malley. "For those who feel out of control in their lives, lying confers a godlike sense of being able to order the world as they want it. They are soothing themselves with their lies, and administering

a shot of power, when they need to feel powerful."

Lying in young children, up to around the age of four is, she agrees, a sign of higher ordered thinking – meaning the ability to form concepts, make connections, see the big picture, think creatively; this usually develops in children around age four-and-a-half.

"Up to seven, they are in the magical-thinking phase, and that's innocent. I wouldn't crash in on that. It's beautiful. After the age of maybe seven or eight, it becomes socially complicated."

This is the point at which a gentle confrontation – "that's not true, is it?" – becomes advisable. "If my kid was lying at that age, I'd be thinking, you don't think you're good enough, and you feel you need to add something. You feel inadequate in some way. I would say to them, 'You're good enough as you are.'"

Then we come to those who, in answer to my question – "what lies do you tell, and why?" – respond with horror. "I never lie," said one. "I'm incapable of lying," boasted another. "I can't lie to save my life," said yet another. "Even little white lies. I can't stand the guilt and inevitably end up telling someone else that I've just told a white lie."

So what about these people, the ones who can't lie? "There's a rigidity there," O'Malley says. "An inability to bend to social expectations that would suggest they are unyielding in other ways too. In psychology, we believe that it's people who are flexible who fare best. One shouldn't feel imprisoned by anything." Including, it seems, one's own sense of morality.

As it happens, a few minutes after we talk, one of the friends who previously told me, 'I can't lie', came back and said, "I've been laughing all afternoon as a multitude of very small white lies tripped off my tongue – about the internet being down so I couldn't submit a child's piano exam on time; that I had to go to another Zoom call to get off the one I was on... Maybe we actually all do it so much we don't even notice!" ●



Light in the dark

Amid the horrors of war in Ukraine, ordinary people are stepping up to help. Here, an Irish actor who turned a holiday in Poland into a trip to aid refugees shares her experiences

Words by
**Sinéad V
Monaghan**

It was originally meant to be a girls' trip for a few days. In January, a friend and I had booked flights to Krakow, Poland. We were planning to spend a few days sightseeing and doing a bit of shopping. However, everything changed on February 24 when Vladimir Putin's forces invaded neighbouring Ukraine.

Watching the horrors of what was going on there on TV, it no longer felt right to go on a holiday. Seeing people fleeing their country was heartbreaking, so I decided to keep the flights and go to volunteer to help Ukrainian refugees arriving into the city.

I'd done a skydive to raise funds for Unicef, but I had never done any volunteer work before. Initially, I thought about bringing over a 20kg suitcase full of clothes and supplies to donate, but I realised I could make the money go further in Poland. I set up a GoFundMe page and spread the word. I set a target of €500 and, at the time of writing, I've raised €6,600 through the site and direct donations.

On March 9, I set out for Poland. I was a little nervous about going, but I'd travelled on my own before and was determined to help. I contacted the Irish Embassy in Warsaw and left my details with them before travelling.

While queuing to board the plane in Dublin Airport, I met Michael. After eavesdropping on his conversation and hearing that he was a member of the Foreign Legion on his way to Kyiv, I told him my plan.

He then introduced me to Peter, who was going out to join a group called Volunteer for Ukraine. Like me, Peter had no volunteering experience, but he'd already made one or two contacts in Poland, and would go on to make many more. He is one of the best organisers I've ever encountered, and I'm proud to now call him my friend.

The two of us teamed up and we met other volunteers once we arrived in Krakow. Among them was Andy from the UK, who was helping refugees find somewhere to stay in Krakow. It's almost impossible to find accommodation

for refugees at weekends while tourists are visiting – something anyone considering holidays in the region should bear in mind.

On the first day there, we found out that refugees were arriving at the central train station by the hour, so we went there. It was extremely sad to see women and children all around the station, staying in one spot with everything they owned; their phone chargers connected to the walls. All these women and children getting off a train with as little as two plastic bags. There were very few men around, as most had to stay behind to fight in Ukraine. I could sense the fear: 'Who can we trust?'

We decided to donate directly to those families. We met a Polish volunteer, who could speak Ukrainian and a little Russian, who asked: 'What do you need, and can I help in any other way?' We bought every item they needed in bulk.

After speaking to one mother briefly, she gave me a big hug in thanks. The need I felt to protect these women and children was overpowering; their vulnerability was so obvious. But I had to keep my emotions under control – getting upset doesn't help, but being productive does.

The local Scouts had an area where they were collecting food, toiletries, etc. I asked if they needed baby food or nappies. No, they had enough nappies but needed feminine-hygiene products. I found that you have to ask, 'What do you need us to buy?'



rather than assuming, as each day those needs change.

The second day at the station was Saturday, and there were noticeably more volunteers in yellow jackets from Krakow and around the world. They were working to get families to safe accommodation. We spoke with two sisters and their teenage niece and nephew. They had little English, but we could understand each other. I asked how long they had been travelling, and they said: "Two days; it's hard." We looked at each other and took a deep breath. No words needed. I told them we were Irish. "You came from Ireland to help Ukraine?" one of them asked. "Yes," I replied. Again, a deep breath, and then we smiled.

It was harder to get them housed because they had a dog that they adore with them – many places won't allow pets. Thankfully, somewhere was found for them to stay that night.

Another 1,000 refugees were due to arrive, so we went to do another big shop. In the car on the way back, I felt angry. Angry at people coming to the city for a holiday. Angry I couldn't do more. Even when they're doing their very best, so many of the volunteers feel helpless. That feeling of wanting to do more doesn't leave. It still hasn't.

We had been to the Red Cross centre, which is in a different part of the city, and left our details. When we went back on another day, they welcomed us to help. Big plastic bags filled with donated clothes had to be put in order of

From left: A Polish firefighter helps people who have fled the war in Ukraine at the central train station in Krakow; Ukrainian refugees wait to board trains to other European cities at the station; volunteers give food to refugees boarding a humanitarian train from Krakow to Berlin; Irish actor and drama coach Sinéad V Monaghan volunteering with the Red Cross in Krakow

sizes – adults, babies, toddlers, etc. The volunteers there had a great system, but they really need more support, too.

We were only there five minutes when a woman and her teenage daughter, Anastasia, came in looking for accommodation. The mother had no English, but she showed me her daughter playing the piano on her phone. It was hard not to get upset in these moments of truth. We used some of our funds to help them pay a deposit on an apartment near to a school that Anastasia will be going to.

A mother who volunteers at the Red Cross showed me a picture of her son in Ukraine, hunkered down and ready to fight. Using Google Translate, I asked if she was proud of him. "Yes," she nodded and we hugged. It was very emotional. In the darkness, I met so many amazing people along the way – both refugees and volunteers.

On my last day, Peter was travelling to the border to collect a group from Lviv and bring them to a safe place outside Krakow where they had family waiting. It was an eight-hour trip. The train was delayed due to a bombing on the line. There was all sorts of chaos and delays but, eventually, Peter managed to find them – a grandmother, mother, her 14-year-old daughter and their cat.

The girl was the only one who spoke English but she was too shell-shocked to say a word. Peter got them safely to their new home.

Richard, a prosecutor from

Washington, was staying at my accommodation. He had flown to Poland to set up a system for Ukrainians who have a connection to the US to meet with immigration lawyers working pro bono or for a low fee.

I extended my trip by a day, but I'm back in Ireland now. I'm getting daily messages from a wonderful Polish volunteer, Kuba. He's at the border, providing food, shelter and first-aid kits for refugees crossing into Poland. A bomb went off just 20km away from where he is. One message read: 'Currently preparing first-aid kits and MRE portions [ready-to-eat meals] for Ukrainian boys – really boys – going back to fight.' That's the reality.

Imagine having to flee your country with nothing but two plastic bags, and relying on strangers to help you and your young or elderly relatives. Leaving your brother, boyfriend, husband, and male relatives behind at war. Most of them not trained as soldiers; many of them just teenage boys.

It was heartbreaking to see so many refugees, but being productive and doing what I could kept me strong and focused. I rang my friends before leaving, and hearing their voices I could relax a little and let the emotion in. I didn't want to leave; I can do more. And I'm now planning to go back. ●

Sinéad is raising funds at gofundme.com/f/krakow-volunteer. To donate to Unicef, see [unicef.org](https://www.unicef.org) or tel: (01) 878-3000

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The need I felt to protect these women and children was overpowering; their vulnerability was so obvious

Platform

'Refugees can contribute to the community'



Ellie Kisyombe

is the co-founder of Our Table, which aims to end direct provision in Ireland while providing culinary training for employment. She is also the founder of Ellie's Kitchen sauces

In 2015 I was living in direct provision with my children and I was a volunteer with the Irish Refugee Council when I met chef and fellow activist Michelle Darmody.

We started Our Table in 2016 with the idea of getting women in direct provision out there making noise in the community.

We believed the best way to start a conversation was through food, because food is a unique bond among people.

In 2015 we hosted our first pop-up cafe in the Project Arts Centre in Temple Bar, Dublin. What we do is we give people an opportunity to develop their culinary ability in a professional

setting, which will give them a better chance of getting work in the restaurant or hospitality sector.

The first pop-up was very successful and afterwards many of the people who worked for us went on to gain employment in the food and hospitality sector. It went really well and we were able to set up in other areas and get involved in other community events and festivals.

At that point I was still waiting to be legalised in Ireland. In total, I spent 10 years in direct provision.

Then Darina Allen invited me to go to Ballymaloe to do the internship there. After three days, she gave me the chance to do the whole [12-week certificate] cookery course, which was an incredible thing to happen. You know how expensive it is. I look back sometimes and think: 'Where did this come from?' It was a natural thing, and maybe it was something that needed to happen, but I can't even begin to process it now.

It was incredible. To have been able to do the whole cookery course there gave me such confidence. I really found myself.

I also really wanted to become legalised and set up a business. I thought that was important for me – and for the people coming up behind me. However, I wasn't sure I could do that and give time to Our Table.

In 2018 we continued with pop-ups and collaborations with festivals. Then Christ Church Cathedral came along and said they wanted to help the project. In 2018, we set up a cafe there.

It has been one of our most successful projects and I was also named as one of the Dublin City Council Culture Company's 'Local Heroes' that year.

In 2019 I got my legal status,

READ

Run for Your Life by Jane Mitchell tells of Azari, who leaves behind violence in her home country for refuge in Ireland. The story tells of the bleakness of direct provision, and how Azari finds hope in running with her new Irish friend. Endorsed by Amnesty International.

LISTEN

On the Newstalk podcast platform, find Ellie on *The Hard Shoulder* in February, marking a year since the Government's White Paper on Ending Direct Provision. With host Kieran Cuddihy and activist Bulelani Mfaco, they discuss what has changed in 12 months.

TAKE ACTION

To find out more about Our Table, its events and its endeavours to find a permanent cafe location, see ourtable.ie or [@ourtabledublin](https://www.instagram.com/ourtabledublin). For information on events, catering services and Ellie's sauces, ranging from hot to extra extra hot, see ellieskitchenhome.edition.com

and that gave me an opportunity to expand. Unfortunately, as the direct-provision situation improved, we went into the pandemic.

I was in a situation where I had to decide if I should set up my own company, if that was the right thing to do.

I felt I didn't want to wake up one day and not have tried. So I decided that if I was to set up a business that gave a percentage to Our Table, then I would be able to employ more people and have a staff that could take home a salary.

Ellie's Kitchen Home Edition currently makes three hot sauces. Food is in my history and my family were food gurus in Malawi. It's good for me to carry this on.

I want to leave a legacy and be in this world for a long time. This is how I embody that. The struggle should not go away, but be remembered.

Our Table has helped to shape how we are now seen as people. That has come slowly over 10 years.

There has been so much improvement in direct provision and I'm hoping that in another 10 years there will be more.

Look at what's happening now – a refugee can come here from anywhere.

Our Table helped that; we helped show that to be a refugee is not to have a victim attitude, but to have an energy and to be active in a community and contribute.

People can come here from Ukraine and Our Table will give support and encouragement and inspiration.

I want people to come and say, 'maybe some day I can be like Ellie Kisyombe'. ●

In conversation with Sarah Caden



Lucinda O'Sullivan's **100** Best Restaurants

From crab beyond compare at **Quay West** in Donegal to tantalising Turkish-influenced dishes at **Dede** in Cork and from the wood-fired wonders of **Lignum** in Galway to the sensual flavours and artistry of Dublin's **Chapter One by Mickael Viljanen**, our restaurant critic chooses the top tables in the land that have delighted, impressed and wowed her to deliver an exceptional food experience in every way, every time
Plus: Northern Ireland's 10 Best Restaurants

Crème de la crème

Trophies, fancy plating or hip credentials are not enough to earn a spot on my list, says **Lucinda O'Sullivan**, who, in curating her culinary champions, has considered all the ingredients needed for the very *best* dining experience



How do you allocate places on a 100 Best Restaurants list? It's not easy, particularly when nowadays there are far more than 100 great places to choose from on our little island. Let me start by saying that every restaurant on the list is a cracker!

I was pondering on all of this when I was recently invited to visit Noma in Copenhagen – rated the No 1 Restaurant in the world by The World's 50 Best Restaurants. I've sat on most of the recognised judging panels in Ireland, as well as internationally, including The World's 50 Best, and the UK's Great Taste Awards, and I've learned one thing for sure: you're never going to please everyone.

I don't judge restaurants merely by the artwork on a plate, or whether or not they've won a rubber tyre award. I'm not particularly into sitting in overly precious, hushed rooms in silent worship, cooing over foraged fiddlehead ferns. For me, it has to

be more than that, it's the whole package – atmosphere, attitude, good food, service, and how they serve their customers and community through thick and thin – that warrants them a place on my 100 Best Restaurants list.

We have so many good restaurants all over the country nowadays. The competition between chefs is huge, which has benefitted the customers and, in many cases, there's very little, if any, difference in quality between restaurants in their own genre.

I'm not easily seduced just by the latest hip or hot spots, and accordingly, my list also features many longstanding restaurants. Why? Because they're fantastic at what they do, which is precisely why they've stood the test of time.

And so, without further ado, here are my selections for Ireland's 100 Best Restaurants, followed by my top 10 in Northern Ireland.

I only wish I could have done 200!

Lucinda



1 CHAPTER ONE BY MICKAEL VILJANEN DUBLIN I

The joining forces in the long-standing Chapter One on Parnell Square of Ross Lewis and Mickael Viljanen, with Viljanen taking over the stove, has proved to be a match made in heaven. Together they have conceived a sleek, elegant restaurant reaching stratospheric heights on all fronts, garnering them two Michelin stars this year. The precision and culinary vision of Viljanen delivers on a series of sensual flavours and artistry, each with its own composition of textures, colour, circles, rectangles, squares, foam, mousse, silky, cold, hot... But, what's also wonderful is the relaxed formal feel and Dublin sense of humour as the waiter passing with the drinks trolley asked us: "Duty free?"



Main: Mickael Viljanen of Chapter One by MV. Picture by Nina Val. Right, from top, Mount Juliet Estate; dishes at Lignum; the chefs team at Cashel Palace Hotel



Where else would you get it? chapteronerestaurant.com

2 THE LADY HELEN CO KILKENNY

The exquisitely refined one-star Lady Helen room at the Mount Juliet Estate in Thomastown is a joy. I've stayed at Mount Juliet many times down the years and remember occasions when Tiger Woods was quietly fishing the River Nore, and the visit of the late Albert Roux to cook a special dinner featuring the Queen Mother's favourite soufflé as the grand flourish. However, the cuisine nowadays is at a different level, with, on my visit last month, John Kelly's tasting menus delivering on tantalising, ethereally elegant, contemporary dishes. Foie gras had Franco-Japanese influences, with dashi, walnut, pear and treacle brioche; turbot was with celeriac, lovage, pickled gooseberries and

chicken jus; while Tipperary organic veal had asparagus, morels and wild garlic. mountjuliet.ie

3 LIGNUM CO GALWAY

Danny Africano built his stunning, purpose-built Lignum restaurant on the grounds of his family home in the somewhat remote village of Bullaun, east Galway, known locally as Loughrea 4 due to the big houses in the area. I first reviewed it on its opening night in 2019, and was blown away, to use the popular colloquialism. A Damien Hirst-style glass cabinet with hanging birds, lambs' legs and other victuals is the first thing that hits you before you pass the big wood-fired kitchen leading into a large, atmospheric and airy room with bare wooden tables and exposed beams overlooking the gardens. The menu changes



The setting couldn't be any more dramatic for this exquisite Palladian manor in the heart of Cashel town

constantly, but I particularly remember the raw seasoned shrimp in a hay-smoked bisque. Lignum has been a star in waiting. lignum.ie

4 CASHEL PALACE HOTEL CO TIPPERARY

With the stunning backdrop of the Rock of Cashel, the setting couldn't be any more dramatic for this exquisite Palladian manor, once the bishop's palace in the heart of Cashel town. Subsequently, it operated as a hotel for many years, but sadly closed in 2015. Two years later, along came Coolmore Stud magnate John Magnier, who, happily for all, ploughed in the necessary millions to revitalise and re-launch it. General manager Adriaan Bartels and executive chef Stephen Hayes have been in situ for the past couple of years, overseeing and preparing for

100 Best Restaurants

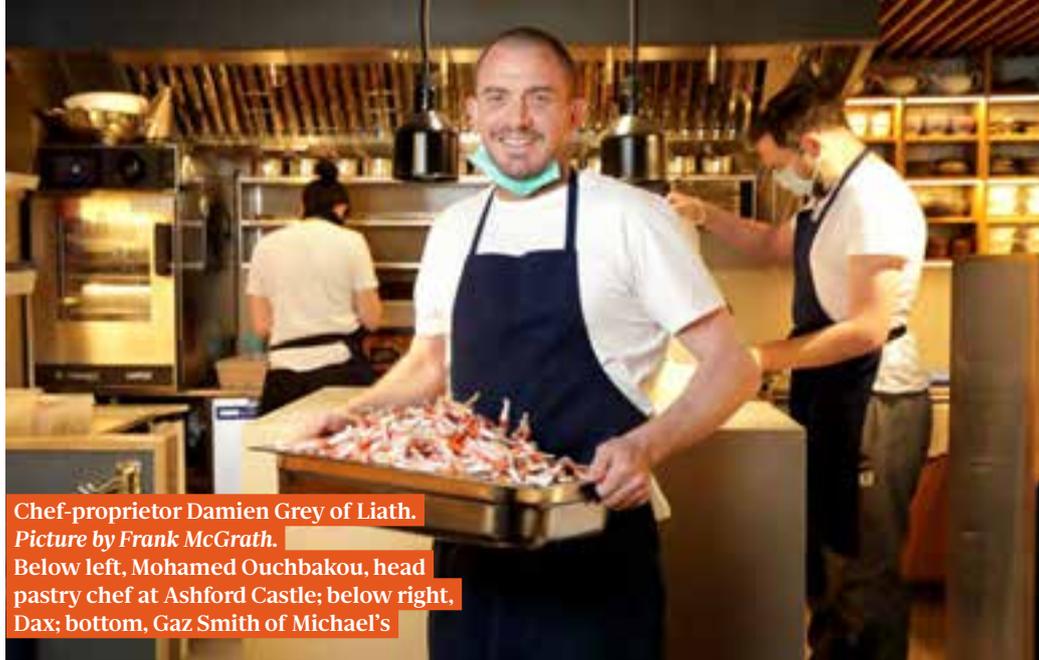
» the big day, which came last month. Served in The Bishop's Buttery, Hayes's food is just about as classy as I had anticipated in such a setting. Seared foie gras was with rhubarb, pain d'épices, Amaretto, pistachio and Pedro Ximenez. Beef tartare was with a cured egg – no, not a curate's egg – crispy shallot and pickled mushroom. Castletownbere crab was tweaked with caviar, while seared scallops had lardo di Colonnata, but oh, the black sole Grenobloise with caper, lemon, brown shrimp and beurre noisette was simply sublime.
cashelpalacehotel.ie

5 MICHAEL'S OF MOUNT MERRION CO DUBLIN

No one could have imagined, when gregarious chef Gareth 'Gaz' Smith rode up the roads of Mount Merrion to take over a quiet, inoffensive, Italian-style neighbourhood restaurant that with enormous shellfish platters and endless Twitter banter he would turn the place into the phenomenon it is today, famous for its fish and fun. A second restaurant ensued, plus a best-selling cookery book, *And for mains*, and the indefatigable Gaz is now about to open a large restaurant and food store in the former Clodagh's Kitchen in Blackrock Shopping Centre. Oh, those lobster balls.
michaels.ie

6 LIATH CO DUBLIN

Damien Grey's superb Liath at the Blackrock Market has been elevated to two Michelin stars this year to further add to its glisters. This bijou restaurant is where showman Grey conducts the long, narrow room from his raised, hi-tech, sleek, bedsit-sized kitchen where you don't have room to swing a cat but miracles somehow arrive on the table. I challenge you to go to Liath and not come out mesmerised and in high spirits. Think charcoal dumplings, year-old dried ceps with ginger, chilli and walnut jus over which is poured mushroom tea, or catsup as they used call it when I was a kid.
liathrestaurant.com



Chef-proprietor Damien Grey of Liath.

Picture by Frank McGrath.

Below left, Mohamed Ouchbakou, head pastry chef at Ashford Castle; below right, Dax; bottom, Gaz Smith of Michael's



The indefatigable Gaz Smith is now about to open a large restaurant in the Blackrock Shopping Centre



7 GEORGE V AT ASHFORD CASTLE CO MAYO

On the lifting of Covid restrictions, Ashford Castle tweeted diners in its George V dining room waving white napkins to the strains of Verdi's drinking song from *La Traviata*. It was such perfectly fin de siècle exuberance in this glorious room beneath oceans of crystal chandeliers, where crowned heads have sat, including the eponymous George V. The wonderful Robert Bowe and Martin Gibbons command the room with aplomb, while executive chef Philippe Farineau, whose motto is "French heart, Irish produce", and head chef Barry Lynch deliver Dooncastle oysters, scallops, mushroom agnolotti, and Achill black-faced lamb in a classic French style.
ashfordcastle.com

8 DAX DUBLIN 2

Named for his home town in south-west France,

Olivier Meissonave's Dax Restaurant in a Georgian basement on Upper Pembroke Street is a Mecca for Francophiles. The head chef is the superb Graham Neville, who has been awarded Best Chef in Ireland and Best Chef in Dublin. It should have had at least one Michelin star years ago. Think of warm foie gras with preserved and fresh citrus fruits with spiced bread, plus a fine wine list that will have oenophiles in tears of joy.
dax.ie

9 RESTAURANT PATRICK GUILBAUD DUBLIN 2

With a Breton Cognac background, Patrick Guilbaud was enticed to Ireland by businessman Barton Kilcoyne to open his restaurant in 1981. It was initially just off Baggot Street before moving to the Merrion Hotel, where it has held two Michelin Stars since 1996. It's everything one expects of a luxurious, well-oiled, high-end restaurant, tastefully glamorous with faultless food and service



Chef Jordan Bailey of Aimsir and his wife, general manager Majken Bech-Bailey. Picture by Fran Veale

from the long-term team and partners chef Guillaume Lebrun and manager Stéphane Robin. restaurantpatrickguilbaud.ie

10 AIMSIR CO KILDARE

When I reviewed Aimsir in the Village at Lyons in 2019, the knockout 18-course tasting menu was €105 and came with a seamless performance worthy of mime artists, with each supporting player, tweezers in hand, moving silently in sequence and harmony as Jordan Bailey conducted proceedings. I advised people to get there quick before the stars arrived and the prices trebled. Well, two stars arrived tout de suite, but the prices have only doubled. So, before the third star... aimsir.ie

11 VOLPE NERA CO DUBLIN

Barry Sun Jian is an extraordinarily talented Chinese chef who arrived in Ireland 20 years ago aged 19 to improve his English. He took part-time restaurant work and a



Clockwise from above, Stéphane Robin, manager of Patrick Guilbaud; Neven Maguire of MacNean House; and Rasam



talent was born. He progressed from being kitchen porter in Dylan McGrath's former Mint restaurant to the kitchens of Patrick Guilbaud's and L'Ecrivain, going on to become head chef in Etto, which saw him winning RAI chef of the year 2018. He opened Volpe Nera in Blackrock just before Covid, and his inspirational Italian-style food has wowed everyone since. From Brandy Bay oysters to veal carpaccio, cipollini onions, anchovy and pecorino. Altogether stunning. volpenera.ie

12 RASAM CO DUBLIN

Nisheeth Tak was at the forefront of the lighter modern Indian food revolution here some 20 years ago, and he's still ahead of the posse. You won't get better Indian food or service in Mumbai's famous Taj Hotel, where Nisheeth once worked and where everyone from Jacqueline Kennedy to the Prince of Wales to Hillary Clinton has stayed. Nisheeth has created a wonderful vibe and atmosphere in Rasam, in Glashule, with nothing ever being too much trouble. No wonder it's the favourite restaurant of personalities such as Chris de Burgh, Pat Kenny, Miriam O'Callaghan, countless actors, journalists, sports stars and government ministers. Even Nigella Lawson gave it the thumbs up. I'm a sucker for the haldi jhinga – jumbo prawns marinated mint, turmeric and chilli and cooked in the tandoor oven. rasam.ie

13 MACNEAN HOUSE CO CAVAN

Neven Maguire is perhaps our best-loved chef, never off our TV screens, entertaining and educating us with his travels. With considerable vision, he developed the family business, creating a superb destination restaurant and stylish guesthouse in the small village of Blacklion. It always reminds me of being in the Dordogne, and should have had a Michelin star years ago. Sadly, Michelin never travelled widely in Ireland and certainly doesn't seem to have found the north-west. ➤

100 Best Restaurants

» The superb tasting menu includes dishes such as seared scallops, shellfish tortellini and pak choi and Thai broth.
nevenmaguire.com

14 OSTERIA LUCIO DUBLIN 2

Having stepped back from the kitchen at Chapter One, Ross Lewis's hands-on involvement with his second restaurant, Osteria Lucio, under the Malting Tower and bridge at Grand Canal Quay, has resulted in it becoming one of the best restaurants in the capital, nay, the country. Lewis has long had a love affair with Italy, and this is top-notch Italian fare in a sophisticated setting with a buzzy atmosphere attracting high fliers and the glamour brigade. Try the gambero al forno bathed in spiced garlic butter and crostini with 'nduja. See and be seen at Osteria Lucio, it's hot, hot, hot.
osterialucio.com

15 RINUCCINI CO KILKENNY

In a wonderful Georgian house in the shadow of Kilkenny Castle, for over 30 years the Cavaliere family have been delivering exquisite high-end Italian food in an atmosphere that almost has you believing you've discovered somewhere special in Rome. Chef Antonio's ravioli is as fine as silk, his fresh Kilmore Quay black sole on the bone grilled to that nanosecond of perfection and finished with white wine, lemon, garlic, extra virgin olive oil and fresh parsley.
rinuccini.com

16 CAMPAGNE CO KILKENNY

Foie gras 'crème caramel' with fig chutney, caramelised walnuts and golden raisins is just one of the stalwarts of Garrett Byrne's French-inspired Kilkenny kitchen that will leave you drooling. The atmosphere is sophisticated, professional and welcoming and Byrne has never been pretentious about his Michelin star. Worth the detour, as they say. Do ask to see the Speedos.
campagne.ie



Ahmet Dede of the Customs House Baltimore. Picture by Claire Keogh. Below left, chef Antonio Cavaliere of Rinuccini; below right, Campagne



“
Peter Everett hit the ground running, raising the culinary bar in the Crystal County. His food is faultless and extraordinarily good value

17 DEDE CO CORK

Turkish chef Ahmet Dede only discovered his true culinary heart when he came to Ireland. Following his calling and developing this talent, he worked at the likes of Chapter One, Patrick Guilbaud's, The Greenhouse and Maaemo in Norway before moving to the former Mews restaurant in Baltimore, which won a Michelin star during his tenure. That may have closed, but Dede has gone from strength to strength with his eponymous restaurant at the Customs House Baltimore, which now has a Michelin star of its own, and where it's all about cooking fantastic local produce in a way that combines his Turkish heritage with contemporary Irish cuisine. The tasting menu changes, but think barbecued langoustine, fermented butter milk crumpet, crème fraîche, langoustine emulsion with sorrel and isot pepper.
customshousebaltimore.com

18 EVERETT'S CO WATERFORD

When Peter Everett returned to his native Waterford in 2018 to open his bijou restaurant in the historic former Wine Vaults, he hit the ground running, raising the culinary bar in the Crystal County. Everett had spent many years in Dublin working in Chapter One and subsequently at Restaurant Forty One with Graham Neville in the former Residence on St Stephen's Green. His food is faultless and extraordinarily good value. Think ethereal Castletownbere crab with fennel, cucumber and grapefruit. Michelin found this gem this year and awarded a Bib Gourmand.
everetts.ie

19 BEACHES AT KELLY'S HOTEL CO WEXFORD

The main restaurant of Kelly's Hotel at Rosslare Strand is quite extraordinary. Adorned with wonderful paintings by Irish artists from Kelly's renowned art collection, Beaches is always dressed in its best attire of white



Peploe's owner Barry Canny. Picture by Kyran O'Brien. Above left, Peter Everett of Everett's. Above right, staff at Library Street

napery and gleaming flatware, with exemplary friendly service by the amazing staff. Recurring generations of visiting families are always made to feel special by Bill Kelly and his daughter, Laura, who, like Bill's father before him, visit each table every night and again at breakfast. The kitchen under executive chef Eugene Callaghan is always spot on, from the foie gras and duck terrine with toasted brioche and orchard relish to the Kilmore seafood platter and baked halibut with Jerusalem artichoke, pea and smoked bacon broth. Bill's wife, Isabelle, is French, and wines are imported directly from her family's vineyard, offering terrific value and an immense variety. kellys.ie

20 CHESTNUT CO CORK

I remember battling my way through Storm Callum in October 2018 to visit Rob Krawczyk and Elaine Fleming's then new restaurant in Ballydehob, in what had been a cute little old pub. It was an exquisite experience of

Peploe's is a tour de force of excellent French-style food, comfort and great wines. It's classy and it's timeless

foraged and local foods superbly executed in an unpretentious fashion in a delightfully intimate setting. Now one-star Michelin, Krawczyk has a penchant for creating charcuterie, an art he learned at an early age from his father. The formula is still a multiple course, no choice tasting menu. restaurantchestnutwestcork.ie

21 LIBRARY STREET DUBLIN 2

About as hot as it gets right now, Kevin Burke came to the fore when he opened Library Street in what had been the former Allta off South Frederick Street, where he had been in the kitchen ab initio. It's a room he loves, having got engaged and married there as well. Backed by the Singapore-based investors Stanley Quek and Peng Loh, who also own Sheen Falls, Castlemartyr Resort and Trinity Townhouse, Burke and his fine culinary touch are really going places. Think chargrilled porcupine bank langoustines, roast saddle of lamb, kalamata

olive and Jerusalem artichoke. Another Michelin gaffe this year – they should have dropped off a one-star here. librarystreet.ie

22 THE OAK ROOM ADARE MANOR CO LIMERICK

The former home of the Earls of Dunraven trotted along for many years as a manor-style hotel until local billionaire JP McManus transformed it into a world-class destination worthy of the super-rich. To do that, he needed a top-notch restaurant, and, happily, no one was put out to grass, for in 2019 chef Michael Tweedie at The Oak Room brought home a one-star Michelin winner. With two tasting menus available, think Oscietra caviar, duck liver with Sauternes, turbot with Champagne sauce. adaremanor.com

23 PEPLOE'S DUBLIN 2

Barry Canny's plush bistro at the heart of the 'Golden Mile' on St Stephen's Green is a tour de force of excellent French-style food, comfort and great wines. It's classy and it's timeless. Take a look at the guest book of the iconic Jammet Restaurant of yore on display, featuring many famous names – Peploe's own guest book is probably every bit as impressive by now. The all-day menu features scampi of Dublin Bay prawns with tartare sauce, mango and chilli relish, while fillet of JJ Young's beef is paired with spiced aubergine puree, croquette of braised beef, pomme rosti, red pepper and black olive split jus. peploes.com

24 CHINA SICHUAN DUBLIN 18

Opened by Kevin Hui's parents, the China Sichuan celebrated 50 years in business last year. Smart, sophisticated, serving exquisite high-level fine dining cuisine and attracting a regular clientele that includes captains of industry and rock stars, the China Sichuan in Sandford is without question not only the best Chinese restaurant in Ireland, it's one of the best ➤

100 Best Restaurants

» restaurants here full stop. The golden fried soft-shell crab is divine, as is the steamed whole black sole with ginger and scallion, not to mention the fresh Irish lobster with ginger and scallion.
china-sichuan.ie

25 SUESEY STREET DUBLIN 2

Long before Covid hit and outdoor dining became de rigueur, the stylishly plush Suesey Street already had the best terrace in the city. A hidden gem in the Georgian Quarter, and with the irrepressible TV host John Healy leading the team as GM, it's always buzzy and has fantastic food too. Think seared foie gras with pear, almonds and toasted brioche, or soup de poissons aux fruit de mer, while cote de boeuf to share might have mushroom cassalette, fries and peppercorn sauce.
sueseystreet.ie

26 MIKEY RYAN'S CO TIPPERARY

Hitting the ground running on Cashel's main street in 2017 after a major refurbishment, this historical 19th century pub now has a light-filled dining extension and large terraced walled garden. Owned by John Magnier of Coolmore Stud (along with the recently opened Cashel Palace), the food is chic contemporary casual in a sophisticated setting. Have a drink in the horsebox and follow up with pan-fried Atlantic halibut, caramelised onion puree, wild mushrooms, Puy lentils and beurre rouge.
mikekyryans.ie

27 ALDRIDGE LODGE CO WEXFORD

Don't think of rocking up to Billy Whitty and Joanne Harding's delightful Aldridge Lodge on a whim because this place is so good it gets booked out months ahead and reservations are essential. But don't let that deter you. It's set in the picturesque village of Duncannon, and making the effort will be well worth your while. They also have three bedrooms. Billy's dad is a lobster fisherman, so a nod's as good as a



Aldridge Lodge. Below left, Potager; below right, Pullman at Glenlo Abbey



wink. Think too of dry-aged striploin steak with field mushroom, truffle, whiskey and black peppercorn.
aldridgelodge.com

28 POTAGER CO DUBLIN

Terry McCoy's long-standing Red Bank Restaurant in Skerries was taken over by Cathal Leonard in 2019 and became Potager. Leonard came with a good pedigree, having been a former Chapter One head chef and, with a fresh eye, he created a cool, modern and quite serene space. His food is faultless, light and perfectly judged, and he has a wonderful eye for colour and presentation. His set multi-course dinner menu will include perhaps crab with tapioca, dill and lemon, while guinea fowl might be with parsley root and sprouts. Don't miss out on the extra petits fours.
potager.ie

29 PULLMAN AT GLENLO ABBEY CO GALWAY

Set in two historical Orient Express dining carriages, one



White Horses, with its very cool 'cross between Cannes and the Hamptons' vibe, serves the best Dublin Bay prawns in garlic butter

of which was used in the movie of *Murder On The Orient Express*, you might not leave the grounds of the five-star Glenlo Abbey, but it's still a unique and romantic dining journey. Think scallops with Goatsbridge roe, pancetta, wood sorrel and cauliflower Inishmore. I've taken the 'journey' twice and just can't wait to go back.
glenloabbeyhotel.ie

30 WHITE HORSES ARDMORE CO WATERFORD

Seafood, sunshine and sand are what most people want in the summer. Ardmore, being one of the most beautiful seaside villages in Ireland, has it all. Here, White Horses, with its very cool 'cross between Cannes and the Hamptons' vibe, serves simply the best Dublin Bay prawns in garlic butter, lobster salads, sizeable sole on the bone, succulent steaks and famous desserts that have famous men mesmerised. "A little of each, Sir." Glorious al fresco dining too in the garden.
FB: @WhitehorsesArdmore



Indian restaurant Ananda. Picture by Steve Humphreys. Below left, 1826 Adare; below right, Barrows Keep



1826 ADARE CO LIMERICK

What struck me about Wade Murphy's food when he was head chef in Doonbeg back in the pre-Trump days was his incredible lightness of touch. He and his wife, Elaine, bring this and so much more to their chic thatched cottage restaurant in the heart of Adare, Co Limerick. There are 'light eats' – perhaps share a few – and 'eats' such as Young Buck cheese, pear, chicory, pickled walnut and honeycomb; Inch House black pudding terrine, hock croquette, beer mustard or perhaps Korean fried chicken with pickled radish and chili glaze.
1826adare.ie

ANANDA DUBLIN 16

The flagship of Asheesh Dewan's Jaipur Group, Ananda, with its dramatic cream silk waterlily hanging shades, is a bastion of great Indian food. In a large sweeping colourful penthouse setting at the top of Dundrum Town Centre, kick



BARROWS KEEP CO KILKENNY

When you know Stephen McArdle is at the stove, you know you're in for good food. He has an eye for detail, serving only top-quality produce. There are no shortcuts with the man. Add sommelier Morgan VanderKamer to the scenario and you have an alliance made in culinary heaven. I've had McArdle's food many times down the years – in Dublin when he had The Arch Bistro in Churchtown, followed by Stanley's in St Andrew Street, so I knew the journey to his new base in Thomastown, Co Kilkenny, would be worth it. Set in the former Hudson's, on the road leading to the back gates of Mount Juliet, it's now an uber-cool space. The menu changes, but foie gras mi-cuit might be with brioche, apple and vanilla, while Duncan-non crab is with Goatsbridge trout caviar and the beef is only historic. The pair are shortly to open the new UNioN Wine Bar in the old Munster Bar beside the Theatre Royal on The Mall in Waterford.
barrowskeep.com

BASTIBLE DUBLIN 8

Paris has the whirlwind Periph' Nord circling the city, Dublin has the South and North Circular Roads, but don't worry, they're very tame in comparison. As rents went up, restaurants moved outwards from the city centre, including Barry Fitzgerald and Claire Marie Thomas with their hip Bastible on the South Circular at Leonard's Corner, which has just received a Michelin star. Not quite a first for D8, as Locks did gain and lose one under previous managements. There's a Nordic whiff here style-wise, although the eponymous bastible is a flat-bottomed pot used in old Ireland for making soda bread. Perhaps they use it here for their sourdough, which features on their tasting menu, as do dishes such as chestnut soup, smoked eel and roasted kelp.
bastible.ie

BIG FAN BAO DUBLIN 2

It's 60s retro Hong Kong diner meets San Francisco's Chinatown on Dublin's Aungier Street, and the punters love it. A lacquered-look Chinese red ceiling has neon ➤

NOTE:
Numbers 31-100 of Lucinda O'Sullivan's 100 Best Restaurants are not ranked but are instead listed here in alphabetical order



When you know Stephen McArdle is at the stove, you know you're in for good food. There are no shortcuts with the man

off with a cocktail first while you take in the menu of adventurous regional dishes from the subcontinent such as Goan halibut with samphire fritters and timur patio prawns in a lemon leaf bouillabaisse or maybe a Southern Coastal Thali complete meal of prawns, fish, chicken, potatoes, rice and bread. Seared Kilkeel scallops are there too, as is a terrific tandoor-cooked smoked Barbary duck breast with confit leg terrine, passion fruit and balsamic fig.
anandarestaurant.ie

ANDERSON'S BOATHOUSE CO DONEGAL

Garry and Mairead Anderson opened their restaurant in Killybegs, Co Donegal, following the success of their seafood shack on the old pier. They're a dynamic duo. Garry knows his fish from his fowl, having worked previously for Gordon Ramsay in Claridge's, London. Try the seafood chowder, which won Best Chowder in Ireland in 2019 and 2020.
andersonsboathouserestaurant.com

100 Best Restaurants

» lighting above simple brown plywood panelled walls, terrazzo flooring and counter front, smoky glass tables, a couple of high-tops and a gold fringed curtain. There's a buzzy vibe added to by the staff, who are on the ball. The menu is of the tick-the-box variety, with 27 small plates including Boss Bao's (steamed filled buns), Jiaozi (dumplings) and Xiao Chi (various street food dishes). Have The Black Dragon with a squid ink bun with Irish lobster tail and cucumber jellyfish salad.

bigfan.ie

BRESSON CO DUBLIN

An upmarket French-style restaurant in the SoCoDu suburb of Monkstown owned by well-known chef Temple Garner with Peter Byrne as head chef. Byrne knows his onions, having trained in Chapter One and having been chosen by Gordon Ramsay for his restaurant at the then Ritz-Carlton Powerscourt. The food is always excellent, not pretentious, just good classic French food. The Coquilles Saint-Jacques – gratinated Kilkeel scallops, chaudree of smoked haddock, Alsace bacon and brown shrimp, pomme Duchesse, buttered leeks and Gruyère cheese are ace – I'd happily have them every week.

bresson.ie

CHANDPUR CO DONEGAL

Rana and Susan Miah's colourful, warm and welcoming Chandpur Indian restaurant in Donegal town is the place to go if, like me, you're a fan of authentic Indian cuisine. The menu abounds with all the favourites and then some. Born in Chandpur, Bangladesh, Rana was taught to cook at an early age by his mother, so he features one of her favourite dishes, Indian railway curry, now cooked with the best of Donegal lamb and Irish potatoes. The customers love it.

chandpurdonegal.com

CHART HOUSE CO KERRY

Celebrating 22 years in business in May, Jim McCarthy's Chart House



Main: Jim McCarthy of the Chart House in Dingle, Co Kerry.
Picture by Domnick Walsh.
Below, left to right: Big Fan Bao's lobster tofu; dining al fresco at Coal; and Fish & Bean's oysters



is a stalwart of good food and hospitality in Dingle. The best of local and seasonal produce is served in style, including Angie Mack's organic goat's cheese mousse set off with beets roasted, smoked and pureed, beetroot sorbet and orange oil. The local Annascaul black pudding with pear and lime chutney is wrapped in filo and oven-baked with kaffir lime jus. Kerry lamb is famously good, and at the Chart House it's a superb roast rack with dauphinoise potatoes, balsamic fig chutney and amber ale jus.

thecharhousedingle.com

COAL CO DUBLIN

Colm Corcoran and Barbara Bond's Coal is a stellar family-run restaurant in SoCoDu where head chef Colm offers terrific food to suit everyone, as well as great cocktails and an extensive wine list including Champagnes. The restaurant name is a nod to both the Blackrock of their location and the coals they cook on, which lend that special flavour to their steaks and other chargrilled dishes. It's a



It's a glorious place to be, in a setting that's rich with an eclectic collection of paintings and sculptures, enjoying food at its best and watching the buzz of the many regular customers who flock there each week

favourite with the medics from nearby Blackrock Clinic. There's also a two- and three-course neighbourhood menu, which is great value for days when you just don't want to cook. Why would you when Colm will do it for you? coalblackrock.ie

CUSH CO CORK

Overlooking Ballycotton Harbour in east Cork, the former dinky Pier 16 was transformed two years ago by local billionaire Pearse Flynn into a sleek restaurant with rooms, with former Campagne Kilkenny chef Dan Guerin. Guerin has risen to the bar with seafood that leaps from the fishing boats 50 metres away and the finest of local viands and vegetables. Think black sole and turbot ravioli, courgette chutney, smoked pancetta, verjus bonne femme or maybe roast dry-aged sirloin and glazed short rib of beef, Roscoff onion, organic spinach and Madeira jus.

cush.ie

DOOLEY'S CO KERRY

Sitting on the deck at Dooley's



Waterfront Bar and Restaurant in majestic Waterville, Co Kerry, cracking some lobster claws while looking out over the Atlantic is one of the best experiences you can have. David and Katie Farrell are seasoned restaurateurs, David having worked in the high-end US Smith & Wollensky's steakhouses, and Katie having started the U2 favourite The Blue Bull in Sneem when she was just 23. They also have The Scarriff Inn at Caherdaniel, but Dooley's is their most recent restaurant, specialising in steak and seafood. They know how to give you a warm welcome to the Kingdom and a great Kerry dining experience.
dooleyswaterville.com

EALA BHÁN CO SLIGO

Anthony Gray has done an awful lot for putting the Sligo food scene on the map. He has two excellent restaurants there – the casual Hooked and the slightly more formal Eala Bhán. The decor at Eala Bhán has a cool urban brasserie feel and the new head chef is Rafal Chimiak, who delivers on excellent viands and seafood.

Think of wonderful Mullaghmore lobster tail poached and flambeed in Cognac or perhaps a cracking fillet steak with all the fixings.
Insta: @ealabhan

FARMGATE CO CORK

Máróg and Sally O'Brien's Farmgate Restaurant and Country Store in Middleton, east Cork, will be celebrating 40 years in business next year. Way ahead of her time but with a great artistic eye, the original hipster Máróg opened in what had been a rustic galvanised tyre shed. It's a glorious place to be, in a setting that's rich with an



Etaoin Holahan and chef Larry Fogg at Fennelly's of Callan.
Picture by Dylan Vaughan

Restaurant owner Anthony Gray at Eala Bhán restaurant in Sligo.
Picture by James Connolly

eclectic collection of paintings and sculptures, enjoying food at its best and watching the buzz of the many regular customers who flock there each week. Keeping it simple is the philosophy, and the local seafood here is beyond perfection. Warm salad of pan-seared scallops might have Frank Murphy's black pudding, while their famous Farmgate traditional roast free-range duck is with sage and onion stuffing and apple sauce with roasties.
farmgate.ie

FENNELLY'S OF CALLAN CO KILKENNY

What sisters Etaoin and Aoife Holahan did here was absolutely inspirational. They turned an old former pub in Callan, Co Kilkenny, into one of the hippest spots in the country, with not only great food but an amazing rustic yard fantastic musical gigs and other artistic events are held. Chef Larry Fogg is now serving up Buddha bowls; Cajun pork belly stew; spinach and moong dal curry; pork sandwiches; burnt Basque cheesecake; almond Bakewells; tarte au chocolat with vanilla and black pepper ice-cream,
fennellysofcallan.wixsite.com

FISH & BEAN CO SLIGO

When it comes to seafood, you won't find any better man behind the stove than Dave Mullan, who has worked in some prestigious restaurants. Last year, Dave's fans were delighted when he and his wife, Aine, opened Fish & Bean Cafe in the stunning location of Sligo Yacht Club, overlooking the Atlantic at Rosses Point, with great outdoor seating. Simplicity is the real sophistication, and it wasn't long before the word spread about Dave's monkfish curry with scallops, mussels and turmeric rice, his seared scallops with smoked bacon granola, not to mention his crispy squid or Coney Island oysters naked or tempura. There's lobster and crab ravioli, hake burger with dillisk aioli and fillet of halibut with leek fondue. There's wine, beer and spirits too. Where do I stop?
fishandbean.ie

100 Best Restaurants

» FISHY FISHY CO CORK

A landmark in Cork's famous foodie town, Fishy Fishy in Kinsale has been delighting diners with its fab, fresh, high-end fishy fare for decades under the masterful eye of chef patron Martin Shanahan and his wife, Marie. It's set over two floors and has a lovely outdoor area for al fresco eating. Martin's background as a fishmonger plays a major role in their success, and he takes pride in knowing exactly who has caught his seafood that morning, ensuring that only the premium catch makes it to his menus. Go for the lobster, of course.
fishyfishy.ie

GARNISH CO CORK

Known as Hurricane Attwell for being a whirlwind in the kitchen, chef Eddie Attwell has worked in two-star Michelin restaurants and represented Northern Ireland on the BBC's *Great British Menu* on two occasions. Moving to West Cork, he has for the past couple of years been wowing people with his food at Garnish Restaurant in the legendary Eccles Hotel overlooking Bantry Bay. Think of starting with fritto misto with fennel jam, confit lemon and dill mayo or salt cod brandade with sliced fennel. Shoulder of lamb is slow-cooked, served with bulgur wheat, curry yoghurt, tomato and raisin chutney. Delicious.
eccleshotel.com

GUINEA PIG CO DUBLIN

Founded in 1957 and visited by movie stars from John Wayne to Grace Kelly to Maureen O'Hara to Pierce Brosnan as well as locals including like Bono, the famous Guinea Pig in Dalkey is now secure in the hands of French chef Jerome Fernandes, who delivers on the best of French classics and seafood. Superb Dublin Bay prawns sauteed by Jerome with garlic and fresh herbs, finished with a Cognac or Pastis flambé or jambon persillé de Dijon. The sole on the bone is to die for, as is the local Dalkey lobster.
guineapigrestaurant.ie



Forget jingly Chinese music and slosly stir-fries – Hang Dai on Dublin's Camden Street is an ocean of glam cocktails and a splash of sassiness

HANG DAI DUBLIN 2

Forget jingly Chinese music and slosly stir-fries – Karl Whelan and Will Dempsey's Hang Dai on Dublin's Camden Street is an ocean of glam cocktails and a splash of sassiness. Atmospheric and an utterly absorbing experience, it's like sitting in a Shanghai Metro car with the cast from a Bond movie sipping martinis and Singapore slings in the background. Duck is the star of the show at Hang Dai, cooked to succulent perfection on an open wood-burning oven.
hangdaichinese.com

HENRY'S BISTRO & WINE BAR CO CLARE

With a background that includes Dromoland Castle and Castlemartyr Resort, Dermot Fetton knows a thing or two about good food and service. His Henry's Bistro in the centre of Ennis is all about progressive modern Irish cooking with the emphasis on local produce. Think sauteed mushrooms on brioche with Parmesan

cream and maybe scampi, dressed salad and hand-cut fries.
henrysrestaurantandwinebar.ie

KINGDOM 1795 CO KERRY

I first had Damien Ring's hip fare when he was at Screebe House in Connemara with his partner Suzi O'Gorman, who does a terrific job front of house. The couple are now at Kingdom 1795 in Killorglin, Co Kerry, playing a blinder with their superb three-course menu. Think dressed crab, kohlrabi, watercress horseradish followed by maybe turbot, oyster mushroom, onions and chicken butter. Get thee to the Kingdom.
kingdom1795.com

LA COTE & THE CHEEKY COD CO WEXFORD

Paul and Edwina Hynes's quayside seafood restaurant brought a little bit of the south of France to Wexford, delighting patrons with a fine dining experience that's both affordable and relaxed. Last year, they added their 'little brother', The Cheeky



Clockwise from main, Fishy Fishy; Las Tapas de Lola; Hang Dai; and Jerome Fernandes of Guinea Pig

Picture by Daragh Mac Sweeney/Provision



Cod, a shack parked on the quay and doing fish and chips to go. So take your pick – terrific fish on La Cote’s tasting menu or more terrific fish at the shack.

lacote.ie

LAS TAPAS DE LOLA DUBLIN 2

Dubliner Vanessa Murphy and her Spanish partner Anna Cabrera own one of Dublin’s most popular restaurants, Las Tapas de Lola, on vibrant Wexford Street, featuring a pretty front covered terrace area and a lovely urban Spanish style tiled interior. With authentic Spanish tapas, wines, beers and sangria, you can be as authentically nose to tail as you wish, from pig’s cheeks to sauteed lambs kidneys, liver to oxtail, Spanish black pudding to sausages, plus paella and tortilla, and you’ll find them all here at prices that won’t burn a hole in your pocket.

lastapasdelola.com

LE COMPTOIR DUBLIN 4

Tipperary man Ronan Ryan is one

of the best-known and liked restaurateurs in Dublin. Down the years, he has known what attracts cafe society to his table, from his legendary Town Bar & Grill, where every second table was occupied by politicians, journalists, celebs and a few chancers too. His latest French-style premium cafe restaurant in Donnybrook has likewise been delighting D4’s cafe society with casually chic food and that all important vibe from morning through evening.

comptoircafe.ie

LIGHTHOUSE BISTRO CO CORK

I would travel the length and breadth of the country for decent Dublin Bay prawns, either as scampi or as a prawn cocktail, and the best of both specimens are to be found in the Lighthouse Bistro at the Garryvoe Hotel in east Cork, expertly presented by head chef Kevin O’Sullivan. There’s nothing like the flavour of these plump crustaceans lightly battered and deep-fried, served with celeriac remoulade and fries or coated



I would travel the length and breadth of the country for decent Dublin Bay prawns, either as scampi or as a prawn cocktail, and the best of both specimens are to be found in the Lighthouse Bistro

with a Marie Rose sauce and served on crisp gem lettuce. They also do a perfect sole on the bone, not to mention their fantastically generous fish and chips in a crispy beer batter with skinny fries, mushy peas and tartare sauce. Always busy, always buzzy, great friendly staff and fun, but do book ahead. Lovely terrace in summer too.

garryvoehotel.com

LOCKS DUBLIN 8

A book could probably be written about the people who have come and gone through Locks since it first opened some 35 years ago – not just the eclectic cafe society patrons but the colourful managements and chefs as well. Locks has always maintained its certain stylish cache in a glorious setting overlooking the swans on the Grand Canal above Portobello. Under the present team of Connor O’Dowd and Paul McNamara with head chef Andy Roche, the food is stunning. Castletownbere scallop is with squash, sea lettuce, langoustine and scallop roe bisque, while Hannan’s Delmonico for two comes with smoked crispy mash, truffle emulsion, 24-month Comte, caramelised onion and bone marrow bearnaise.

locksrestaurant.ie

MAE DUBLIN 4

The dynamo that is Grainne O’Keefe opened her new restaurant, named for her grandmother, on the first floor of the long-standing French Paradox on Shelbourne Road, which has always been popular with the D4 set. It’s a clever alignment of talents, with the FP being exclusive supplier of their directly imported wines. Grainne has a great eye for detail, with dishes such as Cais Na Tire agnolotti, butternut squash, shiitake and hazelnut, and Iberico pork, anchovy, date, confit potato. With Rod and Penny Stewart nearby as new neighbours, they might well be ‘sailing’ up for supper.

maerestaurant.ie



Locks overlooks the Grand Canal above Portobello in Dublin. Picture by Fergal Phillips

100 Best Restaurants

» MAMO CO DUBLIN

Former Chapter One and Thornton's chef Killian Durkin, with his wife Jess D'Arcy, who is former Etto, opened Mamo restaurant on the seafront in Howth, Co Dublin, and quickly had the locals descending from the Hill. Their 'cod chip' should have its own copyright, along with their rendition of slow-cooked shoulder of Comeragh Mountain lamb. Mamo definitely belongs on anyone's top 100. It's very small and very much in demand, so be sure to book your spot if you don't want to be disappointed.

mamorestaurant.ie

MAN FRIDAY CO CORK

Stunningly located on a hillside overlooking Kinsale Harbour, Man Friday was originally opened in the 1960s by the legendary Peter Barry, who "got things going in Kinsale". It was a wow back then and it's a bigger wow now under the baton of Daniel Horgan, who has worked with the best of them, including Ottolenghi and Petersham Nurseries. Split over four levels, with superb outdoor terraces, seafood is huge here, including stupendous hot platters, scampi, sole on the bone and their famous fish pie. Carnivores are sated by the great range of steaks, plus duck Armagnac, pork belly and so much more.

manfridaykinsale.ie

MARCO PIERRE WHITE DUBLIN 2

I've always loved the glamorous retro Soho style of MPW's Dawson Street restaurant. The original enfant terrible of the restaurant scene, who achieved three-star Michelin level by the time he was 32 – and gave them all back – recently celebrated his 60th birthday, and his Dublin restaurants (the second is in Donnybrook), in collaboration with the Fitzers Group, are as popular as ever. Think classic prawn cocktail or a fab chicken liver parfait with raisins, Madeira jelly and toasted brioche, followed maybe by sole on the bone or a cracking centre-cut fillet steak, jus gras and triple cooked chips.

marcopierrewhite.ie



NIGHTMARKET DUBLIN 6

Jutarat Suwankeeree grew up helping her grandparents on their stall at the night markets of Chiang Mai. Now she and her husband Conor Sexton have become the hosts for those who want truly authentic Thai food. On two floors in Ranelagh, Dublin, it's a real experience, with great cocktails too. Yum Poo Nim – crispy soft-shell crab – is a must, as is Cha Plu leaves topped with ginger, shallots, dried shrimps, roast peanut, roast coconut, lime, chilli, fish sauce, palm sugar and dried shrimp sauce. Follow that, as they say.

nightmarket.ie

NO 35 KENMARE CO KERRY

At the end of a day's touring and holidaying, we all look forward to a good meal and a nice bottle of wine. On Kenmare's Main Street is No 35, Dermot Brennan's cracking stone-walled restaurant in a casual setting with great atmosphere. Focusing on the best

Below, from top,
Man Friday; Marco
Pierre White; and
langoustine bisque
Panorama Bistro at
the Montenotte Hotel



of what's local and seasonal, Dermot also raises their own rare-breed Saddleback pigs for their delicious free-range pork. Tony Schwarz is the head chef and knows a thing or two about good food. Try his duck terrine with plum chutney and maybe the halibut with celery, cider, and Granny Smiths.

no35kenmare.com

OAK ROOM CO CAVAN

With a background that includes Dromoland Castle and Kevin Thornton's eponymous restaurant, as well as being a former Eurotoque Young Chef of the Year, Norbert Neylon hit the ground running 20 years ago in Cavan with his terrific restaurant. He's joined now by Keith Hutton as head chef. The Oak Room offers tremendous food and fun at excellent prices. Confit pork cheek with pickled mustard seeds is with a scallop and apple puree, while wild halibut might be paired with cauliflower, salted lemon and prawn bisque.

theoakroom.ie

PANORAMA BISTRO & TERRACE CORK CITY

With an unrivalled view out over Cork city, the Panorama Bistro & Terrace at The Montenotte Hotel certainly hits the spot, be it morning, lunch or dinner, seven days a week. The cooking from chef Tabrez Shaikh is assured and adds an eclectic twist to many dishes, such as langoustine bisque with a punchy twist of smoked paprika oil. Have a pre- or after-drink in The Glasshouse Bar in the grounds, accessed over a glass bridge from the terrace – it's a wow.

themontenottehotel.com

PEARL BRASSERIE DUBLIN 2

Sebastien Masi and Kirsten Batt's Pearl Brasserie has been serving modern French food in an atmospheric basement for over 20 years now and it just keeps getting better. Opposite Government Buildings and next door to the Merrion Hotel, it wouldn't be unheard of for a prominent politician or two to indulge their



Chef Sunil Ghai
with goat curry at
Pickle on Dublin's
Lower Camden Street.
Picture by Frank McGrath

penchant for good food in a discreet glass booth. The pan-fried duck foie gras with ginger and apple compote is superb, as is the crab meat with fennel and apple in a tomato gazpacho, not to mention the duck magret Rossini with slow cooked leg croquette, foie gras and truffle sauce.

pearl-brasserie.com

PICKLE DUBLIN 2

There isn't a culinary accolade in this country that Sunil Ghai hasn't achieved, including Best Chef in Ireland. His fab Pickle Restaurant on Dublin's Lower Camden Street focuses on North Indian regional cooking with amazing aromas and spices. Sunil will create a tasting menu on request or you can go a la carte with wonderful dishes such as Jungle Maans – a traditional hunter's family preparation of wild boar cooked with shallots, ginger, sundried red chillies and black pepper. Book your passage to this Indian experience.

picklerestaurant.com

PICHET DUBLIN 2

Pichet, on Dublin's Trinity Street, opened in 2009, having been the subject of a TV programme documenting the trials of Nick Munier and Stephen Gibson as they set up a restaurant at the former dinky Moira Hotel. A dream team for the cameras, Munier had been maitre d' on Marco Pierre White's *Hell's Kitchen* and Gibson had a culinary pedigree that included Fauchon, the iconic Parisian food store. With glitz and glamour adorning every Gitanes-blue chair, Pichet was the hottest ticket in town. Munier sold out a few years later and now, more than a decade on, the chairs are tan and it's still a wonderful modern take on a French bistro. Try the cod, Gruyere potato crust, Bourguignon, Alsace bacon, Jerusalem artichoke.

pichet.ie

POTA CO GALWAY

Diarmuid Ó Mathúna opened his terrific bi-lingual cafe in a beautiful thatched building last summer in

Baile na hAbhann, next to TG4, in the Connemara Gaeltacht. Ballymaloe-trained Diarmuid describes himself as a blow-in from Cork who grew up in a small rural pub, so hospitality is in his blood. With loads of outdoor space, not to mention the nearby beaches for picnicking, think of ace local produce such as Connemara lamb tagine, or maybe eggs Benedict with Feeney's pulled bacon collar, hollandaise and sourdough toast; crispy sourdough baguettes might have roast free-range chicken, Aran Islands goat cheese or Kylemore Farmhouse cheese, with leaves and beetroot from Beechlaw Organic Farm. Don't miss the POTA chowder with fresh fish from Ros an Mhíl, Kelly's shellfish and Dillisk brown soda. Half-portions are available for children.
potacafe.com

QUAY WEST CO DONEGAL

Debbie O'Reilly and Jo Daly, who is president of the Donegal Women in Business Network, run a terrific and friendly restaurant opposite the Donegal Pier in Donegal town, championing the best of local produce. Zesty crab and courgette linguine has Burtonport's finest hand-picked white crab meat, while Byrne's natural oak smoked Killybegs haddock is complemented with Algaran Dillisk Seaweed. Sit upstairs for a great view of Donegal Bay.
quaywestdonegal.ie

RARE CO CORK

Set in the exclusive heart of the Blue Haven hotel, the new Rare Restaurant brings a totally different cuisine and cocktail experience to Kinsale. The head chef here is Meeran Gani Manzoor, who works his magic serenely on stage behind a sleek glass screen. Think John Dory with a bouillabaisse, or lavender duck breast with fondant potato, orange glacey and asparagus. The octopus corndog is amazing, as is the mango and meringue dessert with coffee cream, poached pear, roasted barley caramel and butter biscuit.

bluehavenkinsale.com

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There isn't a culinary accolade in this country that Sunil Ghai hasn't achieved, including Best Chef in Ireland. His fab Pickle Restaurant focuses on North Indian regional cooking

100 Best Restaurants

» ROLY'S BISTRO DUBLIN 4

It was hot in the early 1990s and now, with its new terrace and revamped art deco-style restaurant, Roly's Bistro in Ballsbridge is hotter than ever. It's always packed, with a buzz of "Who's who at the zoo", it suits multi-generations and you never get a bad meal from Paul Cartwright's kitchen. They also do the best Dublin Bay prawns in the city – prawn cocktail, scampi, Franco-American Neuberger style – and their legendary Kerry lamb pie, which has been on the menu since day one and was a favourite of the late Terry Keane. rolysbistro.ie

RUSHEENDUFF RESTAURANT CO GALWAY

Tim O'Sullivan has been the executive chef at Renvyle House Hotel in Connemara for many years. One of the most respected chefs in the country, there's a lightness of touch in all of his cooking, but he's quite extraordinary when it comes to seafood and shellfish – of which there's an abundance coming from the waters of the Atlantic right outside the door. Sitting in the beautiful arts and crafts style Rusheenduff, enjoying carpaccio of scallops or golden crusted crab cakes, followed by rack of Connemara lamb while someone tinkles the ivories of Count John McCormack's travelling Steinway piano in the background is a very special experience. renvyle.com

SASH LIMERICK CITY

In the most elegant setting of the exquisite No1 Pery Square, a beautiful boutique hotel in the city's Georgian Quarter, Sash Restaurant, named for its historic sash windows, is a haven of good food and local produce showcased in the finest of fashions. Seared prawns might be with fennel, black garlic and dillisk, while breast of Thornhill duck will have the confit leg with roasted beets and beet jus, while you must also leave room for glorious desserts including date and cardamom

pudding with salted caramel brown bread ice-cream or a divine hazelnut bavarois with nougatine, praline and coffee cremeux. oneperysquare.com

SNAFFLES RESTAURANT CO MONAGHAN

The Leslie family has been in residence at Castle Leslie since the 1660s, and the current holder of the family torch is the fab Sammy Leslie, who has done her lineage proud, lovingly restoring this magnificent house and estate and opening it to the public. Located on 1,000 acres of undulating countryside, dotted with woodland and glittering lakes, there's just so much to do here, and one of the principal attractions is its 2 AA Rosette award-winning Snaffles Restaurant. Spacious and welcoming with a striking wall of contemporary glass to tantalise the eye, the food is excellent, and they have an extensive gin menu featuring more than 100 varieties from all over the world. Try the pan-seared king scallops, prawn boudin, caramelised cauliflower puree, sea urchin powder, sea herbs and prawn oil. castleleslie.com

SOLAS TAPAS RESTAURANT CO KERRY

Nicky Foley takes tapas to a level we don't see anywhere else in Ireland. With a background that included Richard Corrigan's famous London restaurant Bentley's, this fantastic chef came home to Ireland a few years ago, eventually



Spacious and welcoming with a striking wall of contemporary glass to tantalise the eye, the food is excellent, and they have an extensive gin menu featuring more than 100 varieties



Sammy Leslie of Castle Leslie. Above, a seafood tower at SOLE; top, Sash

setting up in Dingle where he knocked the socks off both locals and visitors with his small and not so small plates. Octopus carpaccio with garden herb salad, soy, mirin and yuzu aioli is beyond stunning, while Cahillane's Kerry lamb rack, seaweed and mint tapenade with miso spiced aubergine will have you sucking the bones for hours. What's more, you'll also have great fun. solastapas.com

SOLE DUBLIN 2

I love seafood shacks and fish and chippers, but I also love the rather grand high-end cosmopolitan seafood restaurants you find in Madrid, Paris and London and which were in Dublin in the old days, such as the legendary Red Bank and the Lord Edward's former seafood restaurant. Padraic O'Kane and Larry Murrin spotted this gap when they opened their fabulous SOLE on South William Street, where giant Norwegian king crabs loom out from a glass case, while Dover sole on the bone with lemon butter is perfectly cooked with a firmness to the flesh, and where plump scallop shells filled to their pretty frilled edges would have James Joyce lusting as he did over Nora Barnacle's "big full proud bosom". sole.ie

SQUARE DUNDALK CO LOUTH

When Conor Mee of the Courthouse Restaurant in Carrickmacross opened Square in Dundalk, he earmarked Eurotoque Young Chef of the Year 2017 Conor Halpenny as head chef. Everything about Square is simple and stark with the focus being placed solely on the quality of your meal, and believe me, they know what they're doing. Think scallops, smoked pancetta, cauliflower and hazelnuts, or sirloin steak, roasted onions and beef fat chips. squarerestaurant.ie

THE BALLYMORE INN CO KILDARE

It's hard to believe it has been 31 years since The Eagle in Clerkenwell, London, first opened

its doors, coining the word “gastropub” as it brought the public a new way of dining. The idea was restaurant-standard food served in casual pub surroundings. Of course it took off, and one of the first great gastropubs and restaurants was Georgina and Barry O’Sullivan’s Ballymore Inn in Ballymore Eustace, not only keeping up with, but staying ahead of the times with their excellent food. Think chargrilled Slaney lamb cutlets with spicy Indian dahl, yogurt and mint topping.
ballymoreinn.com

THE BEACH HOUSE CO WATERFORD

Having started originally in Blackrock Market and opened two fish restaurants in Dublin, including the Fish Shop in Smithfield which they still have, Peter Hogan and his wife Jumoke Akintola ditched Dublin for Peter’s home turf, the seaside town of Tramore, establishing their ace Beach House Restaurant on Turkey Road. Boatstrand brown shrimps are with mayo, sorrel and crusty bread; oysters with rhubarb and fennel; clams with beurre blanc. They also offer rooms.
beachhousetramore.ie

THE COVE CO CORK

Tucked away in the very heart of Fota Island Resort is a culinary gem that is beginning to be really noticed. The Cove, a bijou specialty fine dining restaurant, is a little oasis both serene and luxurious where you’re completely away from the world. Head chef Maris Urbanovics delivers on an extraordinarily beautiful tasting menu showcasing influences from his Latvian homeland and has just won Chef of the Year at the recent Hotel & Catering Gold Medal Awards. Think baked Rossmore oyster with turbot fin, purple potato, wild horseradish leaf and sandwort with perhaps a mini flower pot of delicious three-months-preserved muffin-topped potato bread with a quenelle of seaweed butter and a clam shell holding oak smoked sea salt.
fotaisland.ie

“*Being five-star, there’s crisp white napery, and colourful cosy rugs in case it gets chilly, but it’s still a real garden haven, complete with a fountain, a great escape from the city*”

THE GARDEN TERRACE DUBLIN 4

I ran into Mel Gibson in the lobby of the five-star InterContinental Hotel in Ballsbridge as I was dashing out to their wonderfully elegant garden terrace to enjoy a delicious seafood tower. It’s that sort of place – full of famous faces. Being five-star, there’s crisp white napery, and colourful cosy rugs in case it gets chilly, but it’s still a real garden haven, complete with a fountain, a great escape from the city for enjoying the best of executive chef Alberto Rossi’s ‘casual’ all-day Lobby Lounge dining menu. This covers everything from oysters to prawn cocktails to properly elegant clubhouse sandwiches and fillet steaks. GM Nicky Logue runs a great ship here. High standards, formal, but great fun, the perfect combination.
intercontinentaldublin.ie

THE GLASS CURTAIN CORK CITY

Chef Brian Murray’s stylish restaurant opened in late 2019 in the old Thompson’s Bakery on MacCurtain Street, where a mile of their legendary Swiss roll had been produced every day. Murray operates with a huge Japanese Robata grill, serving cracking contemporary eclectic small and large plates that are right on the nose of our times. Scallop crudo is with oyster cream and dashi gel, while turbot is roasted on the bone and served with tempura oyster and lobster coulis. There’s a five-course tasting menu also.
theglasscurtain.ie



The Cove at Fota Island Resort. Above, Garden Terrace at the InterContinental; top, the Ballymore Inn

THE MAIGUE RESTAURANT CO LIMERICK

Everyone from Princess Anne to Princess Grace to Michel Roux has crossed the doorstep of the beautiful Dunraven Arms Hotel in pretty Adare. An original coaching inn built in 1792, it’s a bastion of charm and exquisite hospitality. Dining in The Maigne restaurant on superb contemporary classic food using the best of Irish produce is a real experience. Think roast breast of Clonakilty chicken, baked beetroot and black pudding, hay-smoked onions, jus roti or, the real star of the show, the roast prime rib of aged Irish beef “carved to your liking” at the table by the tux-attired maitre d’ and served with homemade horseradish sauce and red wine jus. They also carve an overnight-cooked ham each morning at breakfast. Standards, style and class abound here.
dunravenhotel.com

THE OLD COUCH CAFE CO WATERFORD

Having been at The Lodge at Ashford Castle, Damira Levacic and Przemyslaw Muszynski moved to Waterford to set up their terrific Old Couch Cafe. They offer the somewhat unusual combination of serving extraordinarily beautiful modern afternoon teas during the week, and at weekends an exciting 10-course tasting menu. With dishes reflecting their native Polish and Croatian cuisines using local produce, exquisite presentations include Woodstown oysters with sea buckthorn and green peppercorn granita with elderflower mignonette, while Ridgeway olive-fed wagyu beef fillet is with king oyster mushroom, red wine poached shallot, Hennessy peppercorn sauce and duck-fat roasted potatoes.
oldcouchcafe.com

THE OLDE GLEN CO DONEGAL

The Olde Glen Bar in Carrigart hit the “must visit” list, with all the eager Insta foodies whirling up to Donegal when Ciaran Sweeney, former head chef of Forest & Marcy, returned to his native county and took up the role of

100 Best Restaurants

» head chef. Dublin's loss was Donegal's gain. There's a hip bread and snack followed by the likes of wild mushroom tartlet, confit egg yolk, smoked onion sabayon. Keep an eye out nearby also for their brilliant little Bia Box converted horse trailer serving great sambos in the local village.
oldeglen.ie

THE OLDE POST INN CO CAVAN

People travel from all over the country to dine, or dine and stay, at Gearoid and Tara Lynch's outrageously pretty Olde Post in Cloverhill. With a track record that includes Thornton's, Le Coq Hardi, London's Pied a Terre and Lea Linster in Luxembourg, Gearoid's culinary pedigree is impeccable. As he is coeliac himself, it's the perfect spot for anyone who not only wants a supreme dining experience but also a gluten-free one. Think Andarl farm pork belly, seared scallop, apple and Calvados sauce. Gearoid has also just opened The Duck Inn Gastropub at The Imperial Bar in Cavan.
theoldepostinn.com

THE RIVER CLUB & GRILL ROOM CORK CITY

Located in the River Lee Hotel with a fab and colourful riverside terrace overlooking the rushing waters of the Lee, and a sleek bar doing great cocktails, there's a touch of Madrid meets New York here. The Grill Room itself is smart, classy and clubby, with swirling leather banquettes, contemporary paintings and that all-important buzz. The Robata grilled Hereford fillet and sirloin steaks are excellent, as are the Dublin Bay prawn and crayfish cocktail and the grilled sole on the bone.
theriverclubcork.ie

THE SADDLE ROOM DUBLIN 2

The clientele in the hallowed environs of five-star hotel restaurants are always the stuff of novels, and there's nowhere better for people-watching than the Saddle Room of the Shelbourne



Restaurateur Elaine Murphy of The Winding Stair. Below, dessert at Olde Post Inn; bottom, River Club and Grill Room



“People travel from all over the country to dine, or dine and stay, at Gearoid and Tara Lynch's outrageously pretty Olde Post in Cloverhill. Co Cavan

Hotel, which has stood proudly overlooking St Stephen's Green for almost 200 years. In the old days, the big attraction was roast beef carved from the trolley, but now it's more fine-dining with contemporary takes on the classics. On a recent visit, we had daube of Charleville beef with a Bourguignon jus, bacon lardons and roast garlic. They also do a terrific Dublin Lawyer Lobster Thermidor and Dover sole Meunier. The Constitution Room upstairs, with its green silk walls, is perfect for private functions. Here you can see the chair Michael Collins sat on 100 years ago – it's actually quite emotional – and where executive chef Garry Hughes creates an exquisite personalised menu for guests.
theshelbourne.com

THE WINDING STAIR DUBLIN 1

Overlooking the Ha'penny Bridge and the Liffey in the historic heart of the capital, The Winding Stair Bookshop and Cafe was named partly for the Yeats poem, and of course in honour of its winding staircase. Elaine Murphy brought her expertise into the picture in 2006 and turned it into the dining icon it is today. Nowadays, they've got a great roof terrace that unites The Winding Stair and sister restaurant The Woollen Mills. High ceilings, stripped floors, bentwood chairs, wooden tables and great food including a terrific WS fish plate of home-smoked fish and

shellfish as well as a 10-ounce rump steak with Gaelic escargots, baked bone marrow, chips and wild mushrooms. Dublin at its best.
winding-stair.com

THYME CO WESTMEATH

Situated right in the heart of Athlone, this brainchild of chef John Coffey and his wife Tara opened its doors in 2007 with the goal of showcasing the fabulous producers of the Midlands region in a relaxed, easy-going atmosphere. Over the years they've gone from strength to strength doing just that. With next-level fare and a great atmosphere to match, it's no surprise the accolades have come rolling in.
thymrestaurant.ie

TODDIE'S RESTAURANT & BULMAN BAR CO CORK

A perfect oasis by the short pier at Summercove in Kinsale, the Bulman Bar just screams summer holidays with a bustling, friendly atmosphere and ace bar food featuring lots of fresh local fish. Upstairs, things get kicked up a notch at the fabulous Toddie's Restaurant, named for one of Ireland's legendary urbane hoteliers, the late Toddie O'Sullivan, who managed Dublin's Gresham Hotel in the 1960s. Chef patron Pearse O'Sullivan, grandson of the eponymous Toddie, and his wife, Mary, are part of the backbone of Ireland's gourmet capital, and for good reason. I would drive down for Pearse's lobster risotto alone.
thebulman.ie

TOWN HALL BISTRO CO CLARE

Located in what was formerly Ennis Town Hall, bedecked with a backdrop of beautiful original art, this is a classy joint in a cool setting and part of the Old Ground Hotel. Think of superb lunches and brilliant afternoon teas as well as dinner, where you might find grilled halibut with crab meat, stuffed Portobello mushroom and a tomato and lemon beurre blanc or herb-

crusted loin of Clare lamb with rosti, ratatouille and a port, juniper berry and redcurrant jus. oldgroundhotelennis.com

UNO MAS DUBLIN 2

The second restaurant of Liz Matthews and Simon Barrett, they got it just right here, as they did with the mothership, Etto, on Merrion Row. It has the feel of a chic, understated urban spot in Madrid and has a devoted, discerning clientele who all want to bag the table in the window. Have a glass or two of La Callejuela manzanilla sherry and nibble on salted almonds, Cecina croquetas, chorizo, padron peppers or maybe squid a la plancha. Alternative starters and mains include carabinero-prawn rice, beef tartare, Manchego agnolotti and maybe roast monkfish on the bone – all good with a bottle of amber wine. unomas.ie

VARIETY JONES DUBLIN 8

The first solo venture a couple of years ago by Greystones brothers, chef Keelan Higgs and Aaron, who's front of house. It's set in a former tattoo parlour on Thomas Street, and the pair endured "hours of sleepless nights and backbreaking labour" to get it going but were rewarded very quickly by the visit of the tyre man, who awarded them a star. A narrow shop-front and a long narrow room lead to the open kitchen at the back, where a six-course chef's choice sharing menu is constructed. Think foie gras and chicken liver parfait followed by grilled halibut, kale, mussel sauce, hasselback potatoes, creme fraiche, trout roe. Do take sommelier Vanda Ivancic's advice; she comes up with some gems. Rumour has it a second D8 restaurant is to come. varietyjones.ie

WILDE'S AT THE LODGE CO MAYO

Overlooking Lough Corrib and part of the Ashford Castle estate, this former hunting lodge is where classically trained chef Jonathan Keane, who is a great supporter of



Uno Mas. Below, Variety Jones; bottom, Wilde at the Westbury

local food and the annual Cong Food Festival, delivers on innovative contemporary dishes. "Local food with imagination" is how he puts it. So, think maybe of wild turbot on the bone, sauce Veronique, chicken skin crisp, pomme puree or pan-roast hake, bouillabaisse, fennel, sauce rouille, baguette crisp. thelodgeac.com

WILDE AT THE WESTBURY DUBLIN 2

The plush five-star Westbury Hotel, just off Grafton Street, is one of the great meeting places. They do light lunches in the gallery, and Balfe's Bar & Brasserie is a casual spot for all-day dining, but, for the headier heights of the high end, Wilde at the Westbury is the star attraction. Offering an amazing interior decor that echoes 1930s art-deco glamour, plus the addition of a fabulous covered garden terrace and cocktail bar, don your most glamorous duds and indulge in the extensive chic, contemporary-classic food, such as Dover sole meuniere and maybe have a cocktail or three. wilde.ie

WILDFLOWER DUBLIN 2

Unlike his previous restaurant, which was in a pimped-out container in London's Camden Market, chef Adrian Martin's ambitious new restaurant is in a Georgian townhouse in Dublin 2, elaborately renovated and kitted



Wilde at the Westbury is a star attraction. Offering an amazing interior decor that echoes 1930s art-deco glamour, plus the addition of a fabulous covered garden terrace

out with lavish gilded gold and brocade Buck House-style sofas and chairs. The aptly named Good Room serves a three-course menu while the snazzy former stripped-back basement kitchen is doing a lavish tasting menu at weekends. The food is superb, with beautiful olive breads on a bed of hay, hand-dived scallop ceviche with meadowsweet and Oscietra caviar, while glazed Thornhill duck is with foie gras, onion miso, fermented greengage and Grand Veneur sauce. wildflowerrestaurant.ie

WILD & NATIVE CO WEXFORD

Fergal and Jodie Dempsey's Wild & Native Seafood Restaurant & Wine Bar is on Strand Road in Rosslare, and they pride themselves on 'low food miles', striving to ensure that their menus are local and fresh and provide customers with the kind of foods their ancestors would have eaten – hence the name. The F-word is the thing here, with chef Fergal being a big fan of foraging for all kinds of natural delights to treat his patrons. The restaurant is bright and modern with a pretty, welcoming decor capturing that fresh, airy feeling of being by the beach. Next time you're in the sunny south-east, be sure to forage for a table at Wild & Native. wildandnative.ie

WOODRUFF DUBLIN 18

"Eat Right! Feel Amazing!" is the slogan at the terrific Woodruff in Stepaside, where the menus are all about provenance, seasonality and sustainability. Offering a weekly changing and carefully crafted menu bursting with local ethically sourced ingredients and plenty of foraged bits too, the friendly service, relaxed air and superb food have certainly earned Woodruff a spot in my top 100. Think snacks of periwinkles, pickled razor clams, fermented black bean and chili followed by Koji aged hanger, gambas, tomatillo salsa verde and beef dripping crumb. woodruff.ie

Lucinda's top 10 in Northern Ireland

1 OX BELFAST
Having met in Paris while working in the crème de la crème of restaurants, including the three-star Taillevent and Alain Passard's three-star L'Arpège, chef Stephen Toman and sommelier manager Alain Kerloch knocked the socks off locals when they opened their own place in Belfast. The six-course tasting menu includes offerings such as celeriac, parsley, Périgord truffle and lardo, or maybe scallop, Arbois, oyster mush and gnocchi.
oxbelfast.com

2 EIPIC BELFAST
Chef Michael Deane has held a Michelin star for 13 years and has seven restaurants. EIPIC, featuring chef Alex Greene, has had its own Michelin star for six years. As well as evening tasting menus, they do a good value two- and three-course lunch, sometimes the best way to try a Michelin restaurant.
michaeldeane.co.uk

3 STOCK KITCHEN BELFAST
I've always loved Danny Millar's food, and his latest brasserie, Stock Kitchen & Bar in St George's Market, is terrific. There's whole market fish on the bone, maybe sole, maybe turbot, with a roasted fish bone sauce. Kick off a seafood feast with Killough oysters, shallot and Armagh apple dressing, scallops or the Market Fish and Shellfish soup with Ballyhornan crab toastie and garlic aioli. Plenty for carnivores too, including Peter Hannan's cote de boeuf, red wine roast shallots and proper chips.
stockbelfast.com

4 THE MUDDLERS CLUB BELFAST
Gareth McCaughey's restaurant has been a big hit since it opened in 2015 and now has a Michelin star. A seasonal tasting menu is the format here, and might include



scallop with Iberico ham and white bean or salt-aged beef, short rib and bone marrow. Veggies needn't worry as there's a delicious menu for them too.
themuddlersclubbelfast.com

5 28 AT THE HOLLOW CO FERMANAGH
Husband and wife team Glen Wheeler and Zara McHugh had previously been head chef and front of house at Neven Maguire's MacNean House and Restaurant before opening their own restaurant in Enniskillen three years ago, and subsequently relocating last year to their current premises. Glen's background includes stints at Gordon Ramsay's Royal Hospital Road in London, Alinea in Chicago and Noma in Copenhagen.
Insta: 28atthehollow

6 WINE & BRINE - CRAIGAVON CO ARMAGH
After almost 20 years in London, where he worked for Pierre Koffmann at La Tante Claire and at Richard Corrigan's restaurants, Chris McGowan, along with his wife, Davina, returned home in 2015 to open Wine & Brine in Moira. Chris's tasting menu might include pig's head doughnut, smoked eel, followed by foie gras, fig Madeira and walnut, while dry-aged beef might be with braised cheek, artichoke, black garlic and beer pickled onions.
wineandbrine.co.uk

7 THE CATALINA AT LOUGH ERNE CO FERMANAGH
Executive chef Noel McMeel delivers the goods here in a stunning setting, overlooking Lough Erne in Enniskillen. The restaurant is plush and the food and service top-notch. Kilkeel scallops are paired with an Irish oyster, elderberry and smoked turf vinegar, while roasted halibut is with leek and smoked red pepper and Goatsbridge trout roe.
loughmereresort.com

8 DUMPLING LIBRARY BELFAST
The Dumpling Library in the Cathedral Quarter is an offshoot of the House of Zen Chinese restaurant. The menu focuses on exquisite small Asian dishes and I could sit there all day picking and choosing. Try the hoisin duck bao buns; Korean spring rolls; and soft-shell crab salad with lychee and pomelo. Great cocktails too.
dumplinglibrary.co.uk

9 BROWNS IN TOWN DERRY CITY
Ian Orr is chef patron of Browns Bonds Hill Collection, which includes the fabulous Ardtara Country House in Maghera, Eighteen Ninety Four in Portstewart, Browns Bonds Hill and Browns in Town in Derry. Browns in Town is the more casual option. Think local seafood chowder or pan-seared scallops with a black pudding bon bon and cauliflower puree followed by sugar pit pork with toffee apple puree and sprouting broccoli.
brownsintown.com

10 WATERMILL LODGE CO FERMANAGH
The fact it looks like one of the half-timbered thatched houses of Normandy makes sense when you learn the kitchen of the Watermill Lodge and Restaurant at Kilmore Quay is under French chef Pascal Brissaud. The setting and ambiance on the shores of Lough Erne are an experience in themselves. Think pan-fried sea bass, carrot and celery fricassee, beurre blanc vanilla sauce or pan-fried 10-ounce, 27-day matured Hereford beef sirloin.
watermillrestaurantfermanagh.com



From top, Ox; a dish from Dumpling Library; and Michael Deane's Eipic, all in Belfast

The setting, overlooking Lough Erne in Enniskillen, is stunning, the restaurant plush, the food top-notch



Triona McCarthy

Our columnist has her say about commenting on how other people look; tries out the latest TikTok trends, and has all the best budget buys for you

Props to *Bridgerton* and *Derry Girls* star Nicola Coughlan for highlighting a behaviour that needs to be called out – asking questions and sending comments to people about their bodies.

A couple of months ago, the star took to Instagram to send her massive following a sincere message. She wrote: “If you have an opinion about my body please, please don’t share it with me.”

In the past, she also brought up something that makes her very uncomfortable – interviews in which she’s asked about her body. “It’s so reductive to women when we’re making great strides for diversity in the arts, but questions like that just pull us backwards.”

Well said, Nicola. Our true bias becomes clear when we decide to congratulate someone on how their body looks – just like beauty, bias is in the eye of the beholder. We all need to remember this, even if we think what we say or write is a compliment.

Body image and how we see ourselves is an extremely personal thing – and although many of us choose to share our lives on social media, it doesn’t give someone the right to be inappropriate in the comments or DMs. ●



THE TALK

Bargain beauties

In a world where price hikes are a hot topic of conversation, budget beauty buys are bound to prick up some ears.

Luckily, bargain beauty no longer means the old make-up palettes found in a basket at the pharmacy counter. Plenty of brands are cottoning on to our need to save money. This means the quality is in no way sacrificed, even if the prices are lower. Win!

So, I’ve rounded up a few of my faves that are all under €30 and will last a long time, too. You are welcome!

The Inkey List Salicylic Acid Cleanser, below, €12.70, *millies.ie*; Brown Thomas, might seem like a bit of a mouthful, but this skincare brand explains things clearly so you’ll know if this cleanser will suit your needs. The beta hydroxy acid in this cleanser helps to remove make-up and dirt and unclog pores.

Unclogged pores minimise excess oils, so it’s a super choice for acne sufferers. Simply put it on in the morning and/or evening, then rinse thoroughly with water and follow with your favourite serum.

When I fancy a little at-home luxury, masks



are the first thing that pop to my mind. **Caudalie Vinergetic C+ Instant Detox Mask**, €27.10, *millies.ie*; AllCare pharmacies, harnesses the power of grapes to purify and rejuvenate the skin. This formula works to draw out impurities and toxins for a brighter and more luminous complexion.

A budget skincare set may sound implausible but that’s where **The Ordinary The Balance Set**, above, €28, Boots; Brown Thomas; *cloud10beauty.com*, comes in. It contains four super skincare products. A cleanser, a mask, a serum and a moisturiser all join forces in this little bit of affordable luxury that will serve skin well. It would make a great gift, too.

Finally, if you must cut back on products, don’t forgo a serum as they are key to every skincare routine. Aveeno’s new range of face care uses the goodness of nature and the power of science to keep your skin looking healthy. **Aveeno Calm + Restore Triple Oat Serum**, above right, €15.99, available nationwide, instantly smoothes and fortifies the skin’s moisture barrier.



THE TOOLS

My daughter Mini is like my TikTok researcher – she’s seven going on 17 and is obsessed with beauty fads. We saw a TikToker raving about **Pantene Overnight Beauty Reset BH Active Serum**, left, €25.99, available nationwide. We had to try it, as she has very long, badly behaved hair, while mine is damaged. We both put it on at bedtime and woke up with super silky hair.

SPONSORED

SORBET ALL DAY

Sherbet and citrus shades bring a cool edge to looks for both work and play in Penneys' new spring summer collection. Just sprinkle on some accessories and you're ready to slay!





OPPOSITE PAGE:
Lilac blazer, €28;
lilac trouser, €18;
mint shirt, €16;
coral bag, €12;
white sunglasses,
€4; gold jewellery,
from €2

ABOVE:
Pink gingham
bucket hat, €6;
green gingham dress,
€16; pink denim bag,
€6; orange denim
bag, €6

RIGHT:
Pink blazer, €28;
pink trouser, €18;
orange shirt, €16;
blue sandals, €6;
lime bag, €10

LEFT:
Green waistcoat,
€25; pink gingham
bag, €10; gold
jewellery, from €2





ABOVE:
 Coral cropped blazer, €25;
 coral trousers, €18,
 purple sunglasses, €3;
 lilac hi-top trainers, €16;
 gold jewellery, from €2

RIGHT:
 Pink bouclé blazer,
 €30; pink bouclé skort,
 €16; pink shirt, €16;
 pink bucket hat, €4;
 lime bucket hat, €4;
 lime mules, €16

All items are available from selected Penneys stores nationwide

Photographed by
 Eilish McCormick
Assisted by Chris O'Reilly
Styling by Sinéad Keenan
Assisted by Grace Walsh
Beauty by Mary Ellen Darby
Model Bimpe at Premier Model Management
Location Grey Area Studios



FOR NOW



'Dillon' bouclé armchair, £1,526, sohohome.com



Upholstered bouclé armchair, €299, Zara Home



Rattan low lounge chair, €249, H&M Home

Sitting pretty

Darren Kennedy



Adding an accent chair to a space is a brilliant way of revamping a room with minimal effort and also injecting renewed energy

An accent chair can fill a dead zone in the corner of a room, offer some neat solutions to surplus seating needs or just introduce an inviting aura of relaxation into your home. Even just having an occasional chair placed in the corner of a room is

an invitation to stop, sit down, and think for a moment.

The great thing about accent chairs is they can go anywhere in your home, from your bathroom to your landing or bedroom, and you can switch them up easily, moving them to a new spot or a different room with ease. They are, by their nature, designed to be moved around.

I love mismatched chairs in a living room, particularly if you have enough room to have a couple of couches and some chairs around a central coffee table. You can be adventurous with an accent chair in a low-risk way and use them to add a focal point to a room or a playful pop of colour in an otherwise muted palette.

I like that you can use an accent chair to indulge contrasting tastes and styles. An occasional chair can clash with the general style of your home. If your home is modern, you can shake things up with a retro or antique occasional chair. Just make sure the styles speak to each other. If you are looking for something colourful and cheerful, anthropologie.com is knocking it out of the park with

its current selection of occasional chairs. The Marcello Velho Catwalk Petite Accent Chair or the In Bloom chair will brighten up any home, while the Heatherfield chair has an easy Californian style that harks back to a glamorous era.

I love rattan furniture or anything made from rope, cane or bamboo. I am currently obsessed with the Jonas Armchair from Soho Home. This classic design reflects a 1950s masculine style with a woven rope seat for flexible comfort, a hand-carved, solid-oak wooden frame which is jointed with brass details, and a cushion in olive green linen for a chic retro finish.

It's an incredibly comfortable design, low-slung and slouchy enough to be relaxing, but its classic design maintains a formal elegance.

For a finishing touch, make sure your occasional chair is next to a shelf or a little side table if you can. It's important to have somewhere to put your cup of coffee or Negroni while you're lounging. Ideally, of course, it will be one someone else has made for you. ●

Note: Items from overseas may incur extra charges

FOR EVER



Chair, €830, Marcello Velho, anthropologie.com



'Knot' Chair, €499, Normann Copenhagen, Arnotts

A concrete choice

It's well known that it's not easy to find a home these days. However, Graham and Stephanie O'Sullivan opted for a former warehouse which, after a stylish renovation, satisfies all their needs

Words by
Mary O'Sullivan

Photography by
Tony Gavin

The last two decades have seen a huge uptick in the use of polished concrete in Irish homes. Hardly a new house or extension is built without at least some concrete in the decor, and there are enormous benefits to what used to be solely an industrial material.

Not only is it durable and easy to keep clean, but it's stylish and has become very chic. Most homeowners confine it to the kitchen and utility areas, but it's the defining feature of the wonderful home in Dublin 7 of Graham and Stephanie O'Sullivan. All the floors on both levels are concrete, and the downstairs walls are made of the same material. And it works brilliantly, particularly as they marry it with warm woods and soft furnishings.

This talented couple knew how to make it work. Graham is an architect who has been involved in such projects as the Guildhall School of Music in London's Barbican Centre, as well as residential, commercial and industrial projects here and in London. Stephanie has 20 years of



experience as an interior designer, many of which were spent with top design firms in London, though she recently set up her own business here in Ireland.

The building, which is now their home, was previously used as a warehouse, and this dictated the style. "Because it was a warehouse,

we wanted to honour that industrial feel. With Graham's experience working around London and in the Barbican, you can't but learn about working with concrete, and brutalist architecture would be a favourite of mine, too. I love mid-century furniture and rich tones, and they



Stephanie and Graham in their light-filled kitchen, which is at the front of the house. This area was designed by Stephanie. The units are a combination of closed presses and open shelving, as she didn't want the area to look too kitcheny. They are made of sapele, with Formica worktops. The wraparound island of terrazzo was made by Mike Ryan of Lyshna Design. "I showed Mike examples of different terrazzos I liked and he made it up," Stephanie says



He asked me to a rugby game. He knew I was into rugby because I'm from Limerick. We got into a relationship straight away

complement concrete beautifully. It's a warm marriage of materials," says Stephanie.

While architects are known for loving industrial style, it's not usually as popular with interior designers, but Stephanie is probably slightly different to most of her peers in that her first choice

of career was in quite an industrial field – electromechanical engineering, to be precise – and she spent two years studying it at Limerick Institute of Technology.

Originally from Limerick city, Stephanie is the eldest of a blended family of six children, and inherited her creative side from

her late mother. "My dad, Anton O'Carroll, has a business in the microfilming of medical records called Six-Pm Health Solutions. My mother went to NCAD and was an artist. She died when I was 12. My dad met my stepmother, Caroline, who had one daughter, and together they had another »

My favourite room

» child,” Stephanie says. Stephanie has three siblings from her parents’ marriage. “Caroline and I are close – more like siblings. We all get on really well.”

Stephanie says she opted for the engineering qualification because she had a practical streak, but the degree course didn’t suit her. “I did CAD [computer-aided design] and built circuit boards, but the written side didn’t work for me. I left after two years and went to work for my dad. I told him I couldn’t go back, and it was he who suggested I try interior design. I found a design course in Dublin Institute of Design and I loved it.”

After she got her diploma in interior design in 2004, Stephanie moved to Galway and managed an interiors shop before getting a job with Seán Dockry architects, where she was the junior interior designer. It was here she met Graham, who had studied architecture in DIT Bolton Street before moving to Galway.

Becoming an architect was a no-brainer for Graham. He had been steeped in construction and design all his life. “My dad did an apprenticeship in carpentry and then worked in construction before doing a teaching diploma and teaching woodwork. He taught in a community college, the army, and then lectured in DIT. He’s also a planning consultant,” Graham, who’s one of four children, explains.

“There was always construction in my background, and I had a bit of a grá for it as long as I can remember. I was always creative. I liked art, but architecture suited my technically minded orientation.”

He also got involved in student politics while in Bolton Street. He spent six years there as he took a year out of his studies to become the president of the students’ union, an experience he considers invaluable.

“It’s a great training for life in general. It’s great for personal development and working with other people. It opened me up to other contacts outside of architecture – engineers, quantity surveyors, printers; anybody and everybody. It was great training for



Above: Graham and Stephanie in the living area. The velvet sofa is from Saba Italia. While Graham designed the concrete plinth for the fire and the TV with handy open storage beneath, the unit above it is made of sapele, like the kitchen units

Right top: This open area is flexible and can be used as a bedroom or anything else the couple decide. The flooring is concrete, the walls are simply plasterboard behind the bed and there is birch plywood around the small window and radiator

Right: Another view of the exterior. The bottom half is concrete, while the top has black corrugated metal cladding. The large window has opaque glass so as not to overlook the neighbours



a middle-management position, which I'm in now."

Graham had joined Seán Dockry architects before Stephanie and they got together after six months. "He asked me to a rugby game. He knew I was into rugby because I'm from Limerick," she says with a laugh. "We got into a relationship pretty much straight away."

In 2007, Stephanie felt it was time to move on work-wise, and she decided to go to England. "It was just before the recession, and work started drying up. A couple of jobs we were due to start just stopped. I had a feeling and said I wanted to go to London," she says.

Graham couldn't go for work reasons and the couple broke up briefly. Two weeks after she arrived in London, he visited her. "He said, 'I know we're apart, but I want us to be together,' so we picked up our relationship and he moved over some months later. It suited me. I had time to find myself and to figure things out," she explains.

Within months of moving, Stephanie got work with Sheppard Robson, one of the biggest architectural companies in London, which had a large interior design division. She moved jobs several times over the following six years, all the time garnering invaluable experience in the world of interiors, both commercial and residential.

When Graham moved over, he got work with top architectural company RHWL, famous for building cultural institutions, and together the couple immersed themselves in London life, particularly the east London area.

"I loved London. You can totally be yourself. It supports the creative person. It's very inspiring, and I still love going back. My friend put it really well when she said that I get my creative oxygen from London. I love it."

They got married in 2009 and bought their first proper home in Walthamstow, and their daughter, Sally, arrived in 2012. While Stephanie was thrilled to be a mother, she found combining a full-time job and motherhood difficult.

"I really missed home and I

contacted everyone I knew and said, 'As much as I love London, I'd love to be home, and for Sally to grow up around family'. But I couldn't find a way in, job-wise."

Then someone suggested she should contact Conor MacCabe, who had worked with her old firm Sheppard Robson and was now with the prestigious Henry J Lyons in Dublin. Her old boss at Sheppard Robson gave her an introduction and obviously gave her a rave review as Conor rang Stephanie and arranged to go to London with Henry J Lyons's managing director to meet her.

"I said to Graham, 'Perhaps you'll get a job out of this, too'." Graham wasn't as keen as Stephanie to move back, but he recognised the need for the support network. "When I met them, I mentioned Graham and how he was running an amazing project at the Barbican, and they were like, 'Wow'. Graham gave them a tour of the Barbican project. That was essentially his job interview, and two weeks later, we had job offers, and six weeks later, we came home. So we both started in Henry J Lyons in January 2014. We were made associates after a few months."

"It was a good time to move back, as construction was ramping up again," says Graham.

While Graham is still with Henry J Lyons, which has grown enormously in the last few years (he was responsible for getting the recent renovation of the Royal College of Surgeons to site), Stephanie stayed with them for six years before going out on her own in 2019. Her recent projects include Bella Italia Greenpark, a third branch of the Limerick restaurant chain owned by her stepmother, Caroline.

She enjoys combining her consultancy work with motherhood – the couple have a second daughter, Sofie, who will be six this month. She finds, since the pandemic, that online virtual consultations have become very popular. "I have found, in helping people to create a more calming environment in their homes, that my background in commercial work has really lent itself well to approaching the home for the way



The dining table and sideboard were bought in London. The chairs are from The Vintage Hub in Lusk, and the painting is by Johanna Rossi. The industrial-style chandelier is by Wo & Wé



Being president of the students' union is great training, great for personal development and for working with other people

we now live and need to live in the future," Stephanie says.

And their own home is a perfect example, as they both worked comfortably from home during the pandemic.

When the couple moved back to Dublin, they were lucky in that they were able to rent a house in Phibsborough owned by Graham's parents. Their plan was to buy a house in the Phibsborough/Glasnevin/Stoneybatter area, but they were shocked by the prices and the system here. "It was very cut-throat; very different to London. The agents in London cared about you getting the lowest rate. Here, all they care about is getting the most out of you."

Though they had a house to sell in London, initially they couldn't find anything in their price range. Then, one day, they looked at a house in Dublin 7 and, after viewing it, they decided to take another look at it online.

"When we went back into the agent's website, we clicked on the commercial sector, and I saw this warehouse, a commercial unit, »

My favourite room

» for sale. We drove down the lane, looked at the outside, and said, 'This is what we're going to buy,' Stephanie says.

The next day, as they were on the way to view the warehouse, the estate agent pointed out a little cottage, and nonchalantly said, "This house comes with the warehouse."

"If it were in London, it would have been snapped up in an instant. We had been exposed to that kind of property in London, and we knew what was possible," says Stephanie.

There were reasons it hadn't been snapped up. It was an awkward site, it was overlooked by houses on all sides, and planning permission had been turned down previously. But given that it came with a cottage, which they could renovate and rent, or sell, they felt it was quite low risk, and Graham felt he could produce drawings that would overcome the planning obstacles.

"Because we're both in the industry, we were able to cut down on the design costs normally associated with building, and we had contacts we could use, and we will return the favour," says Graham.

The house is made up of two floors. The ground floor consists mainly of a very big, open-plan space, which has a kitchen to the front, a large seating area to the back, and a dining area between the two. There is also the master bedroom at this level, with a large storage unit between the living and sleeping areas. This storage area houses utility appliances, acts as a cloakroom and also contains services like the boiler. The bedroom has a walk-in wardrobe and en suite, which doubles as a guest bathroom.

Upstairs, the open space is very flexible. At the moment, it is used as an office for Stephanie, a guest room, and a bedroom for the kids, but it will evolve and change depending on their needs.

The house isn't huge, but it has the appearance of being big because of the ceiling heights. It is very warm, with underfloor heating on the ground floor, and



Above: Stephanie outside the main entrance to the house. Nearby buildings are reflected in the glass but, when the gates are closed, it's private enough to sit outside. The door handles, which are made of sapele, provide contrast to the black doors

Right: The unusually shaped bath is made of plastic acrylic and is from Lusso Stone, as are the taps. The picture above the bath is by Scottish fine art photographer Soo Burnell



it's full of light thanks to tall windows.

It's an unusual home, ahead of its time in many ways, and a fantastic example of talented people thinking outside the box. And judging from the number of people from the fashion industry

who've loved it so much that they've used it for shoots, we will be seeing touches of the O'Sullivan's style in many homes in the future. ●

See sosullivaninteriors.com
Instagram: [@coallanhouse](https://www.instagram.com/coallanhouse)

A round chocolate tart with a scalloped edge, resting on a white plate. The tart has a smooth, dark brown surface. The background is a light-colored, textured surface.

Appetites

**Sweet
season**

Rachel Allen helps you get in the mood for Easter with some sumptuous chocolate desserts, **Susan Jane White** unlocks a tasty secret with her tofu treat and **Lucinda O'Sullivan** is loving the vibe as she samples a rebranded Babette's feast

Sweet like chocolate

If, after Easter, you find yourself in the envious position of having leftover chocolate, here are three delicious recipes to use it up. Win-win!

Rachel Allen



With Easter fast approaching, I'm starting to think of delicious ways to use up leftover Easter eggs.

It wasn't always tradition to give and receive chocolate eggs on Easter Sunday. During the week running up to Easter, the Church didn't allow eggs to be eaten, so hens' eggs were saved, decorated, and given to children as gifts.

If you're in Switzerland, it won't be the bunny delivering your Easter egg to you, but the cuckoo, and in many parts of Germany, the Easter fox does the honours.

If, after Easter Sunday, I have an excess of chocolate, I put it into cakes, tarts, buns, cookies and anything else I can dream up.

The recipe for the double chocolate chip cookies, overleaf, is the favourite cookie recipe in our

Photography by
Tony Gavin

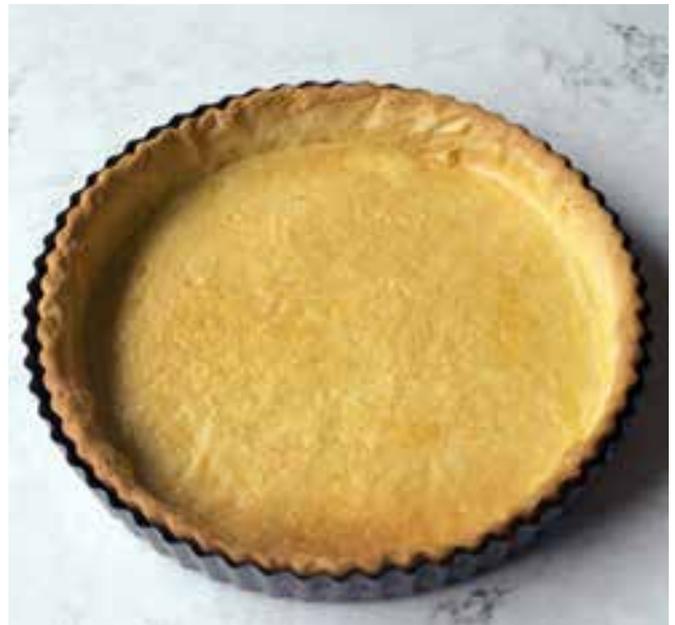
house and hopefully they'll become a favourite for you too. Crisp, chewy, buttery and intensely chocolatey, you can use dark, milk or white chocolate, or all of the above. The raw dough, once made, will keep in the fridge for up to two weeks. I roll it into a sausage shape, then store it, covered in parchment paper. It freezes well, so whenever you need a few cookies, cut 7mm-8mm-thick slices and bake them as in the recipe here.

Speaking of double chocolate, the double chocolate pecan blondies, also overleaf, are delightfully gooey, chunky and nutty – perfect served slightly warm with a scoop of ice cream, or a cup of coffee.

I adore this salted caramel chocolate tart, right, which uses dark chocolate. A luscious, rich chocolate mousse sits over a sticky, slightly salty caramel layer, all encased within a buttery-sweet pastry. It takes time to make, but as soon as you taste it you'll understand why it's worth it. Serve it with some softly whipped cream after a delicious spring meal. Enjoy.

RACHEL RECOMMENDS

To add a citrusy orange kick to the salted chocolate caramel tart, finely grate the zest from 1 small orange and add into the sugar, eggs and egg-yolk stage of the chocolate layer.



Salted caramel chocolate tart

Serves 8-10

For the sweet shortcrust pastry, you will need:

- 200g plain flour, plus a little extra for rolling out the pastry
- 100g butter, cubed
- 1 tablespoon sifted icing sugar
- 1 to 1½ eggs, lightly beaten

For the salted caramel, you will need:

- 225g caster sugar
- 75ml water
- 100g butter
- 100ml cream
- 1 scant teaspoon sea salt flakes

For the chocolate layer, you will need:

- 100g caster sugar
- 2 eggs
- 2 egg yolks
- 250g dark chocolate
- 150g butter, cubed
- Icing sugar or cocoa powder, to serve

1 You'll also need a 23cm deep loose-bottomed tart tin. If you're making the tart in a food processor: put the plain flour, the cubed butter and the sifted icing sugar into the food processor and whizz briefly until the butter is in small lumps. Add half the lightly beaten egg and continue to whizz for another few seconds, or until the mixture looks as though it may come together when pressed. (Prolonged processing will toughen the pastry, so don't whizz it until it is a ball of dough.) You might need to add a little more beaten egg, but don't add too much as the mixture should be just moist enough to come together. Reserve any leftover beaten egg to use later.

2 If you're making the tart by hand: Rub the cubes of butter into the flour and sifted icing sugar until the mixture resembles coarse breadcrumbs then, using your hands, add just enough lightly beaten egg to bring it together. Reserve any leftover beaten egg to use later.

3 Use your hands to flatten out the ball of dough until it is a round, approximately 1cm-2cm thick, then wrap in parchment paper and chill it in the fridge for at least 30 minutes.

4 When you are ready to roll out the pastry, place it on a floured worktop and dust the top of it with flour.

5 Using a rolling pin, roll the pastry out to no thicker than 5mm. (Make sure to keep it in a round shape, as well as large enough to line both the base and the sides of the tart tin.) Keep sliding a palette knife or fish slice under the pastry with a little dusting of flour to prevent it sticking to the work surface.

6 Roll the pastry over the rolling pin. Lift the rolling pin over the tin so that you can carefully lower the rolled-out pastry into the tin.

7 Press the pastry into the edges of the tin. Use your thumb to 'cut' the pastry along the edge of the tin for a neat finish. Prick the base with a fork. Chill the pastry in the fridge for 10 minutes or in the freezer for 5 minutes. (The pastry will keep for weeks, covered, in the freezer).

8 Preheat the oven to 180C (160 fan) 350F, Gas 4.

9 Remove the pastry from the fridge and line it with parchment paper, leaving plenty to come over the sides. Fill with baking beans or dried pulses (which can be reused), then place in the preheated oven and blind-bake for approximately 35 minutes or until the pastry feels dry in the base.

10 Remove the tart from the oven and take out the baking beans and the paper. Brush the base of the pastry with some leftover beaten egg, then cook in the oven for another 3-4 minutes or until it is lightly golden and dry to the touch. Remove the tart from the oven and set aside to cool.

11 Meanwhile, make the salted caramel. Put the caster sugar and the water into a saucepan over a low heat and stir until the sugar dissolves. Add the butter, stirring to melt, and increase the heat to medium. Allow the mixture to bubble away, stirring occasionally, for about 10 minutes or until the mixture is a toffee colour. Mix in the cream and the sea salt flakes and boil for another 2-3 minutes until the caramel is slightly thickened. Allow the caramel to sit until it is almost cool.

12 To make the chocolate layer, whisk the caster sugar, the eggs and the egg yolks in a bowl until thickened and creamy in colour. Gently melt the dark chocolate and the butter together in a bowl over a saucepan of simmering water (the bowl should not touch the water). Leave the melted chocolate and butter mixture to cool for a minute, then add it to the sugar and egg mixture, whisking until smooth and glossy.

13 Spread the caramel over the cooled pastry base and then spoon over the chocolate mixture, spreading it evenly. Bake in the preheated oven for about 15-20 minutes or until it is almost set but still a bit soft in the centre.

14 Allow to cool in the tin for approximately 40-45 minutes before transferring to a serving plate. Dust with icing sugar or cocoa powder, whichever you are using, and serve in slices. ●





Double chocolate chip cookies

Makes approximately 20 large cookies

You will need:

- 225g butter, softened
- 325g caster sugar
- 2 eggs
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract
- 225g plain flour
- 75g cocoa powder
- 1 teaspoon bicarbonate of soda (bread soda)
- ¼ teaspoon salt
- 175g milk, dark or white chocolate chips, or broken up leftover Easter egg

1 Preheat the oven to 180C (160 fan), 350 F, Gas 4. Line 3 baking trays with parchment paper if you're baking all the cookies at once. If not, then line one tray and bake them in batches.

2 Put the softened butter in a mixing bowl and beat it until it is very soft. Add the caster sugar and beat to mix well. Continue to beat, and as you do, add the eggs, one by one, followed by the vanilla extract.

3 Sift in the plain flour, the cocoa powder, the bicarbonate of soda, and the salt. Mix, then add the pieces of milk, dark or white chocolate, whichever you're using and mix to combine.

4 Use wet hands to form the dough into golf ball-sized pieces (or use 2 soup spoons to scoop the dough onto the prepared baking tray). Arrange the balls of dough on the tray – about 6 or 7 on each tray. Leave space for the cookies to spread.

5 If you're using a fan oven, you can cook all three trays at once, otherwise you'll need to cook the trays in batches to ensure the cookies bake evenly. Cook them in the preheated oven for 8-10 minutes until they look slightly cracked on top. Remove them from the oven and allow to cool on the tray for a few minutes, then, using a fish slice or wide palette knife, remove the cookies from the tray and place on a wire rack to cool completely. ●

Double chocolate pecan blondies

Makes 16

You will need:

- 110g butter
- 200g light brown sugar
- 1 large egg
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract
- 125g plain flour
- Pinch of salt
- 75g dark or milk chocolate drops (or broken up leftover Easter egg)
- 50g white chocolate drops (or broken up leftover Easter egg)
- 75g chopped pecans

1 Preheat the oven to 180C (160 fan), 350 F, Gas 4.

2 Line the base and sides of a 20cm square cake tin with parchment paper.

3 Melt the butter, then pour it into a mixing bowl. Add the light brown sugar, the egg and the vanilla extract and whisk to mix together. Next, add the plain flour and the pinch of salt and stir to mix. Then fold in the pieces of dark or milk chocolate, whichever you're using, the pieces of white chocolate and the chopped pecans.

4 Tip the mixture into the prepared tin and bake in the preheated oven for 25-28 minutes until it is dry on top but still remains ever so slightly unset in the centre under the crust.

5 Allow to cool for at least 45 minutes before cutting into individual blondie squares. ●

TOP TIP

To make a quick chocolate sauce for drizzling over ice cream, mousses and tarts, place equal quantities of chocolate and cream (eg 100g of chocolate and 100ml of cream) in a saucepan, and place over a very low heat to melt. Add a splash of liqueur or some vanilla extract if you wish.

Tantalising tofu

Susan Jane White
The Wholefoodie



Forming an opinion on tofu after eating ready-made, chilled packets of the stuff is the equivalent of deciding you don't like Vivaldi after hearing it played on a banjo.

Tofu demands strong flavours, heat and spices to make it sing. So, let us drown this tofu in honey and ginger before scalding it in a hot oven until it chars.

Yep, this week's recipe is a bonkfest for your tastebuds. Sticky, chewy, crunchy bits of meaty tofu, with a curtsy to the nutritional gods.

For supper, I parachute sweet and sticky tofu over a bed of mashed potato or spinach, but it's equally brilliant scattered over hummus. All it needs is a fresh green salsa to the side – and a hot, woke vegetarian to hit that high note.

Namastasty.



SWEET 'N' STICKY TOFU

For 4-5 portions

You will need:

- Approximately 400g firm tofu
- 300g mushrooms
- 4 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
- 3 tablespoons Irish honey
- 4 tablespoons teriyaki sauce
- 4 cloves of garlic, peeled and grated
- 35g fresh ginger, peeled and grated

1 Preheat your oven to 210C, 450F, Gas 8.

2 We need to squeeze out excess moisture from the tofu. This will ensure each bit of tofu drinks up the crazy-delicious marinade. To do this, place your block of tofu in a clean tea towel and pop it on to a large plate. Find something

heavy, like a casserole pot, and place it on top of the wrapped-up tofu to weigh down the tofu (some talented chefs like to sit on a breadboard over the tofu for speed). Leave for 30 minutes.

3 Meanwhile, using a food processor or a super-sharp knife and ninja skills, finely shred your mushrooms into tiny pieces. (I like to store the leftover stems in my fridge or my freezer, and use them to make a flavourful, health-winning broth later in the week.)

4 When your tofu has banished the excess moisture, remove the weight and discard any juice that has collected on the plate (your towel may have soaked up lots of juice, too – throw this in the laundry). Coarsely grate the tofu into a

bowl. Then tumble in your shredded 'shrooms and mix well.

5 Make the marinade. In a separate cup, whisk together your extra-virgin olive oil, the honey, the teriyaki sauce, the grated garlic and the grated ginger. Mizzle this marinade over your tofu and 'shroom medley, spread it out over a large baking tray (If your tray is small, the tofu will softly sweat instead of caramelize) and roast in the preheated oven for 20-30 minutes. Shaking the tray halfway through cooking will prevent the edges from burning.

6 Serve hot or cold. My family and I love it over rice, or tucked into tacos too. ●

Tom Molloy is away this week

Burrata, fig, and prosciutto crostini



A feast full of joy

Lucinda O'Sullivan



With La Bodega's flag descending and Babette taking pole position, our critic couldn't wait to try out Ali Barker's rebrand

It wasn't quite *When Harry met Sally*, but when La Bodega met Babette, it was indeed a very nice feeling. Restaurants have bent forwards, backwards and sideways to cope with the effects of the pandemic over the past couple of years, morphing into all sorts of different skins as required.

One such place is La Bodega in Ranelagh which, for the past decade or so, has had a regular clientele who'd nip down from the affluent red-brick houses in the area for gambas al pil pil, calamares a la Romana, and a couple of bottles of white wine. But, I guess things always have to move on and, last December, owner Ali Barker announced that the next chapter would be a new restaurant, a new look, new food, but still the warm welcome and familiar faces.

Spotting this on Instagram, I watched as the place got stripped out and a new colour scheme and furniture arrived, and, when it opened, we arrived too.

It was only Babette's second night in action, but Mary and I liked the vibe immediately. The door was opened quickly, and we were welcomed in from the corridor of wind that was whirling down the strip that is Ranelagh. There was gorgeous tropical wallpaper and a long banquette facing the bar; we were settled into a rather nice little area to the back.

A brasserie menu arrived, serving classic food and cocktails, with something for

everyone under the four mains headings: The Comfort; The Fish; The Healthy; The Steaks. Well, you can guess those that appealed to me!

First, to the starters (€9-€11.50), where they've kept nods to the restaurant's past life with the aforementioned prawns and calamari mingling with spicy chicken wings and French onion soup with aged Gruyère.

I've chewed through some rubbery squid in my time – we probably all have – but Mary's simply presented, tender calamari (€9) was the best ever, she said – some statement from this fish fan. Served with simple garlic mayo and lemon, we could see why this popular staple from La Bodega had made the cut for Babette's menu. Likewise, my starter of fresh, silky, Irish burrata (€12) with roasted figs and glorious pink swirls of 24-month-aged prosciutto on toasted sourdough was also a winner.

Mains (€16.50-€34.50) included various 10oz burgers under different headings, as well as mac & cheese with braised ox cheek and crispy onions. Monkfish curry featured, as well as baked cod

with a bean and chorizo cassoulet, and also beer battered fish and chips. There were 9oz/10oz striploin and salt-aged rib-eye steaks with all the accoutrements, as well as a massive 18oz char-grilled striploin for two people at €67.50. Under The Healthy section, there was a superfood poke bowl; a bean burger; and Middle Eastern-style chargrilled chicken.

Mary had the duck cottage pie (€24) which, as you can imagine, was in The Comfort section. Like a big, warm embrace, it featured a deep, rich duck leg and ragu base topped with an ample fluffy duvet of whirly mash – perfect on a bitterly cold evening. I had a large salmon and smoked haddock fishcake (€16.50), which came sitting on a rondelle of crushed pea and herbs, and topped with a suitably oozing poached egg. It was excellent too – as were finger-licking truffle fries (€5).

Desserts (€9) included a chocolate dome; sticky toffee pudding; knickerbocker glory; a selection of Irish dairy ice-cream, and a lemon meringue pie, which we shared. Light and fluffy, and torched at the table for a bit of drama, it was the perfect finish to a lovely evening.

Cocktails seemed to be the thing at the tables around us but we stuck to the vino, offering an entry level of €30 – which is accessible to most. However, for those with deeper pockets, who fancy a Saint-Émilion at €60 or a Barolo at €95, pricier wines are available. With a bottle of vegan-friendly L'Étang de Sol Picpoul de Pinet (€38), our bill, with water (€2) and 10pc service included, came to €127.05.

It was just good food you'd happily eat every day. ●

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Dear Mary: I worry my wife will make my retirement hell

Mary O'Connor



Q I am getting near retirement and I am worried as to how my wife and I will agree when I am around the house more than I am now.

The problem is that whenever we have a disagreement over anything, and it may be just something trivial, my wife will sulk and not talk and be very angry for days on end.

I know that I give her her way 100pc of the time because I do not like confrontation. She will not discuss this except to say that I am always wrong. I would love to go to a counsellor to discuss this but she would not hear of it. Our children are all gone and my wife never worked outside the home, so really it is her domain.

What would be the best approach so as not to cause a lot of bad feeling?

A The main problem, as I see it, is that you have avoided confrontation

all your married life. As a result, this behaviour has become entrenched for both of you, and your wife naturally expects that you accept that you are always wrong and, therefore, she is always right.

What is it in your background that causes you to stay away from confrontation? Is that the model that you saw in your own parents' behaviour? Or perhaps you saw an awful lot of fighting between them, leading you to ensure that you didn't have that in your own marriage.

In any case, what you have created is a very unbalanced way of operating between the two of you. I fully agree with the concept that one has to choose one's battles, and there is nothing to be gained in having a full-blown argument about something trivial. I have often said that sometimes it is preferable to say nothing rather than be right. But there are other times when it is imperative to hold your ground and quietly insist that you are correct and the other person is not.

If you are retiring around 65 or 70, then you may have another 20 years of marriage ahead of you, so it is really important that you set about making change, which is always difficult, but in your case, absolutely necessary.

Give your wife another chance to attend counselling with you. Explain that you are genuinely worried about your relationship when you have retired. You actually escaped from reality by going to work, but that is about to come to an end. If she again refuses, then you should see somebody on your own, with the express



focus of trying to change yourself as to how you respond to your wife. If she is not going to change, then you will have to. With the benefit of counselling you should be able to get stronger and see that confrontation is sometimes very necessary.

I hope that wherever you work provides pre-retirement courses. If not, then Public Affairs Ireland runs pre-retirement courses, and they suggest including partners when booking. See pai.ie/events/category/pre-retirement-planning.

Retirement is also a very good time to do the things that you always wanted to do while working, but were too busy. It is also important to have time for yourself.

Things like learning a new language, joining a walking group, or whatever it is that you are interested in; writing, or volunteering for a cause that you feel strongly about. It is a time of huge change – for instance, some men speak about never wearing a suit again except for weddings and funerals – and also a time of adjustment for the spouses.

You are absolutely correct when you say that the house is your wife's domain. But there may be something that she would like help with, something that she particularly dislikes such as vacuuming or laundry, which would make both of you feel good.

A couple of don'ts: Don't ask her where she is going and what time she will be back; don't offer to go with her when she is shopping, or worse still, expect it to be your right; and don't ask what's for lunch. You should be perfectly capable of making your own lunch. As a friend once remarked: "I married him for better and for worse, but not for lunch!"

So let us hope for a cessation of hostilities, and good luck with your retirement. ●

You can contact Mary O'Connor anonymously by visiting dearmary.ie or email her at dearmary@independent.ie or write c/o 27-32 Talbot St, Dublin 1. All correspondence will be treated in confidence. Mary O'Connor regrets that she is unable to answer any questions privately.

TOP

12

Dolly Parton songs

Dolly Parton has enjoyed one of the most spectacular careers in music. If anyone deserved entry into the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame, it's the 76-year-old, but she recently ruled herself out, saying, "I don't feel I have earned that right." **John Meagher** respectfully disagrees and yet, despite being an intrinsic part of popular culture, her biggest hits tend to overshadow the depth of her work. There are many classic tracks to enjoy, starting here...

12 DUMB BLONDE
She may not have written it, but the proto-feminist anthem was tailor-made for Dolly Parton. It was her breakthrough hit in 1967 when she was 21 years old and it was something of a mission statement: dismiss me at your peril. Only those who fail to see beyond her glamorous persona could fall for the 'dumb blonde' trope. Parton has long been hailed for the brilliance of her songwriting, the smarts of her business acumen and the benevolence of her philanthropy. And here, her gifts as an interpretive singer of the first rank are laid bare.

11 LITTLE SPARROW
Like many veteran performers, Parton has had some lean creative periods – she became something of a pastiche of herself for much of the 1980s and 1990s. But the new millennium signalled a creative rebirth and on the *Little Sparrow* album she leaned on Alison Krauss and Jerry Douglas to help her rediscover the roots that had first fuelled her imagination. The title track is plaintive and haunting – a wise and timeworn tune about charming but untrustworthy men who "will crush you like a sparrow".

10 SMOKY MOUNTAIN MEMORIES
There are numerous 'Tennessee songs' in Parton's catalogue – her childhood has been an inspiration for her entire career – and this affecting track is about the men like her father who toiled long and hard and with little reward. A powerful piece of social commentary, it considers a generation of labourers who had to migrate from southern states to go and

work in the factories of Detroit and other northern cities. When she plays it live, she always dedicates it to her father, Robert.

9 DOWN FROM DOVER
Parton has never shied away from writing about social issues and on this early song she tells the tale of a pregnant woman who has been abandoned by the father of her child and rejected by her family. She hopes the man will have a change of heart and the young family can be together, but there's no happy ending. The protagonist goes into labour alone and her baby is stillborn. At the time of its 1970 release, many commercial radio stations didn't want to know – but the power of the song has not dimmed.

8 TRAVELING MAN
The beauty of Dolly Parton's rich oeuvre is the sheer breadth of songs that tell a compelling story. Whether real or imagined, her best compositions have a way of transporting you to a place and time and to the lives of others. *Traveling Man* is





Left: Dolly Parton's greatest songs pack a powerful emotional punch

Below: Parton in the 1980 hit comedy *9 to 5*

most emblematic songs is a plea to another woman to steer clear of her husband. The inspiration came one day when she noticed a young bank teller flirting with Carl – he cut a dashing figure in his youth – and the rest is history.

2 I WILL ALWAYS LOVE YOU
Whitney Houston's version of this fantastic ballad has managed to eclipse the original. That's no slight on Dolly's 1973 song, of course, but acknowledgement that a track that features on the gazillion-selling *The Bodyguard* soundtrack is going to be heard by a hell of a lot of people. The original is stripped back, everything centres on the vocals, and they grab hold of the heart. The song was written as a farewell to her mentor and business partner Porter Wagoner. After years under his wing, it was time for her to go it alone – and how she soared.

1 COAT OF MANY COLORS
Like many of the great country singers who came of age in the 1960s, Parton grew up in humble circumstances. When she was a child her mother had stitched a coat together for her from rags that she had collected. She told her the Biblical story of how Jacob had given Joseph a coat of many colours. The memory stayed with her and in her first flush of success it served as the motivation for one of her most powerful songs. She wrote it on a tour bus while traversing the US with Porter Wagoner and, having run out of paper, completed it on the back of one of his dry-cleaning receipts. When the song became a hit, Wagoner had the receipt framed. ●

one of them and focuses on a love triangle between a woman, her mother and a door-to-door salesman. The song is droll, but all human emotion is here.

7 TWO DOORS DOWN
The disco craze of the late 1970s touched many artists and Parton was no exception. This glitterball boogie isn't all that removed from the sort of pop fare that her godchild Miley Cyrus would deliver a few decades later. The idea is simple: our protagonist's loneliness is heightened by the fact a party is in full swing two doors down the street. There's typical Dolly defiance as she gatecrashes the shindig.

6 9 TO 5
Famous as she was beforehand, it was her appearance on the hugely popular 1980 film *9 to 5* that made Parton a superstar. The comedy had a serious message at its core – the appalling way women were treated within the workforce – and, together with Jane Fonda and Lily Tomlin, Parton railed gloriously against the patriarchy. The film's theme song, a US number one, was apparently dreamt up by Parton when she tapped out a beat with her acrylic nails.

5 THE BARGAIN STORE
One of country music's more persistent themes is the notion of the woman who's trapped in

an unhappy relationship. It's a subject matter that can yield hackneyed songs, but not here. Using thrift store goods as a metaphor, Parton's words cut to the quick. Her singing leaves you in no doubt that she feels great compassion for those who find themselves stuck in a loveless union. And yet, when the song was first released, some radio stations erroneously thought "*you can easily afford the price*" referred to prostitution and refused to play it.

4 MY TENNESSEE MOUNTAIN HOME
Written by Parton, this beautiful ballad is nostalgic, but never cloying. It's a song that celebrates nature's soothing embrace – there are references to crickets and eagles and distant hilltops and a line that stops you in its tracks with its uncommon loveliness: "*Life is as peaceful as a baby's sigh.*" And here's Parton's fantastic singing – pure and true. She really was at her peak in the early 1970s.

3 JOLENE
Few showbiz stars of Parton's stature have a marriage as long and steadfast as hers. She married Carl Dean in 1966 and he eschews the limelight – a choice that seems to work for both. But she has admitted their marriage has been tested over the years and one of her



Nobody tells you...

...how to weather serial ghosting when it's perpetrated by the person you need most in life. Help! I am desperate for his attention

By Sophie White

He has left my husband and me blue-ticked for days now. It's a torment. We just want to see him, hear from him – anything! Is he unnerved by the two of us (my husband and me) pursuing him at the same time?

We know he's busy, and we don't want to seem desperate. The agony of unrequited obsession is hard to soothe. We just want to know if he's OK. We just want to know if he's thinking about us as much as we're thinking about him. We just want to know if we should order the tiles for the bathroom.

That's right, we are being ghosted by our builder. It all began a year ago, the first time he agreed to see us. He should never have let us into his sphere. I'm sure he rues the day he gave us his mobile number.

It was the summer of 2021 and our little triad was in the first flush of a friendship. Like the beginning of any new relationship, we were nervous of each other. On the first date, we invited him to our house to take a look around. My husband and I were coquettish – I was flipping my hair and my husband (who has less) was fluffing his.

Like any newly acquainted couple, we tried to hint at our plans and hopes for the future without scaring him off. However, instead of the usual questions (Any plans for a family? Where do you see yourself living?), we were asking about rerouting the gas pipes and

delicately trying to feel out whether or not he could be persuaded to have a look at the garden while he was here.

He left, and my husband and I dissected his every utterance. He liked the place, right? He liked us? Do you think I came on too strong? No, no you were fine. Do you think I looked OK? Did you notice, when he was taking measurements, he seemed a little disappointed with the size? Did he think we had only posted photos of the best angles? Does he feel like we lied? Did we housefish him?

Our job was small (fitting an eight-foot galley kitchen) and, from the start, we worried that we would struggle to hold his interest. Anything could happen. An interior atrium in a generous Georgian terrace. A light-filled extension in a 1940s semi-d. We were on edge all the time, comparing ourselves to these other potential projects that would come along, batting their eyelashes and flaunting their pert dormer windows, ready to steal him away from us.

Like many people who have perpetrated their needy, suffocating love on an unwilling recipient, we probably played a role in the downward spiral of the relationship. Maybe we pushed him away with our incessant calling, email and texting? It became clear that we were trapped in a stage worse than the friend zone. He was clearly trying to keep us in the purely professional, transactional zone, holding us at bay with proposed timelines and promises of 'pencilling us in'.

Then the customary unrequited

relationship death knell came – that moment when a crush, in a bid to disengage from your pet-boiling mania, starts suggesting friends of theirs you might 'hit it off with'. To our devastation, he began to make vague references to other contractors required for the build. "But we only want you!" We held back our wailing. We wanted to be the cool clients. Laid-back, relaxed, not clingy.

"I'll still be involved in the work," he made reassuring noises. "I'll have a foreman on site and I'll be getting someone in to do the electrics."

It was obvious. He was pawning us off. He clearly didn't see us as a long-term prospect. We were a fling and nothing more. In more rational moments, we did allow that it was a very small job.

Friends and family tried to console us. If you've ever had a friend going through a break-up, you undoubtedly know the Herculean efforts it takes to not tell them to cop on. My mother wasn't arsed with empathy. To be fair, we needed a slap. "Builders are notoriously withholding," she advised me. "They treat you mean to keep you keen. He'll come back to you. There is a pandemic on, and worldwide shortages of building supplies. You're bloody lucky to have a house to be putting a kitchen in."

The fact that she was correct in every aspect finally got through our bullshit. And once we chilled out, the builder did, in fact, come back to us. And we're bloody lucky to have him – he's the best, and we're so grateful to have this home he's improving for us. ●