

Weekend

Irish Examiner

01.02.2025



The Roaring 20s

From housing to culture, a new generation on the issues that matter

: With nightclubs on the decline, meet the people keeping the party going

: The young designers taking the fashion world by storm



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20 May	€1499
23 Sep	€1489

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Esther McCarthy

What I'd tell my 20-year-old self

BEING in your 20s is like having a superpower — but you don't realise you have it. You're Superman, but you believe you're Clark Kent and when you look back after 20 years have zipped by, you smack yourself on the forehead and you say, what an idiot! What was I doing walking when I could fly the whole time?

So, looking back, here's some words of wisdom for me in my 20s.

Age 20: When you go on your J1, don't trust the Killiney guys you're going to share that first room with, they end up stealing your clothes. Just because someone has a posh accent and lives near Bono, does not a good person make.

Also, when you're invited to go to your first baseball game in Yankee Stadium, do not drink so much you fall asleep in the toilets and end up losing your friends who have your bag and money. Pick the right, non-stabby-looking stranger to ask for that lift to Jamaica Station. You'll also have to bum the money for the train to Long Island, and make sure your thumb is working, you are hitchhiking back to that room, missy.

Age 21: You know that surfer dude that offers to buy you a pint in Yo Latino? Take it. It doesn't matter that you're on a date with a fella who came down from Galway, he'll get over it. He is a Jimmy Jib camera operator for chrissake, you can't even say it without sniggering. The surfer fella ends up cutting his hair, he has a very sexy skull. Oh, he also impregnates you thrice in the future, spoiler alert.

Age 22: Turns out hanging out in the old bar wasn't a complete waste of time, you don't end up a teacher, but a journalist! Mooching in pubs is going to come in so

handy!! Do get that HDip though, Mam and Dad getting dressed up for the graduation, showing them around UCC, that's pretty special. And don't forget to get those photos developed, you'll treasure them.

Age 23: Heed the wise words of pop sensation TLC and Don't Go Chasing Waterfalls. Lisa 'Left-Eye' Lopes knew what she was talking about. In fact, don't leave the house this year, please. You might think flying off to Australia is a good idea, but falling off a 120-ft waterfall in Canberra is no picnic, even if you do defy all sense and end up surviving. Sure you break your back, and your hip, and the doctors say you may never walk again.

They'll put you in a rehab centre to learn how to adjust to life in a wheelchair. You will annoy the staff endlessly during cookery lessons by constantly referencing *The Simpsons* episode where Troy McClure says to the doctor: "Can I play the piano any more?"

"Of course you can."

"Well, I couldn't before."

"Because I couldn't cook BEFORE I was in the wheelchair!" you'll guffaw and they'll roll their eyes and say "Strewth, mate, change the record", and then they'll show you again how to put a muffin tray into a knee high oven. The doctors will also break it to you gently with kind eyes that you will face significant issues with any future pregnancy, but they don't know about the surfer's impregnation abilities, so that all works out. By the end of this year, you'll be in Maui with the surfer dude, skipping, swimming, sailing, surfing, you'll be grand, girl.

Age 24: Don't leave the surfer dude's shoes in the common room of that hostel in Hollywood. They get stolen, and he brings it up a lot

over the years. Also, it's worth taking the three buses to meet the guy with the beat up VW camper van with the pop up tent — you end up selling it at profit to a student in Chico a few months later, after driving it around Mexico. Also while you're there, when the rando guy who crews rich people's boats for a living asks ye if you want a snap, it doesn't mean take a photo and you'll look quite the rube when you agree and go rummaging in your bag for your digital camera while he produces a bag of cocaine, and a rolled up five dollar bill.

Age 25: Spend as much time as you can with Mam and Dad. By the end of this year, you won't ever get the chance again.

Age 28: Do go to that party in Kinsale. You'll see a *National Geographic* atlas on a coffee table and on the drive home you and surfer dude will talk about Africa and weeks later you'll have shipped a Toyota Hilux to Alexandria and you'll drive it from Cairo to Cape Town. (No need to tell the bank you're leaving, I know they're throwing mortgages at people, but best they don't know. And get the tracker, I know you don't know what it is, just do it.) You'll get malaria, and ye'll be arrested, ye'll be lost and scared a lot, and you'll nearly get smushed by elephants... it'll be one of the best years of your life.

Age 29: Make an effort for this interview will ya? Imagine how delighted Mam and Dad would have been if you get a job in de paper. I know you think it'll only be for a year or two before you go gallivanting off somewhere with the surfer again. But eh, heads up, it's possible you'll still be there 18 years later. You might even get your own column.

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New,
noteworthy
and novel



The scarf

Irish designer and DJ Megan Nolan Walsh is the queen of Celtic revival. One of the most iconic pieces from her collection, MNW Design, is the Claddagh scarf and it's recently had a beaded glow-up, €365. There are plenty of other gems to find on her website including tank tops, gem-studded t-shirts and lots of Irish references. ■ mnw.ie



The night out

Luke Littler seems to have ignited an interest in darts across the country, so there's perhaps no better time for Ireland to finally get its first Flight Club. With locations across the UK, US, and Australia, the brand blends 'social darts' (this isn't your traditional dart board, it's high-tech with multiple different games to choose from), food and cocktails for an everything-in-one night out. Their first Irish venue will open this Friday, February 7, at 35/36 Dawson Street, in the former home of Sams Bar and Samsara, where the 8,000sq/ft venue has undergone an extensive €7 million renovation. Bookings open now. ■ flightclubdarts.com/ie



The drink

For lots of us — Gen Z included — reducing or avoiding alcohol isn't just for Dry January.

A report commissioned by the Drinks Industry Group of Ireland last year found alcohol consumption has dropped by almost a third in the last 20 years, with many of us reevaluating our relationship to booze. For those looking to still enjoy a taste of beer without the hangover, Lucky Saint now have two no-alcohol brews on shelves at Dunnes stores nationwide.

The lager, made using just four natural ingredients with no flavourings or additives, is left completely unfiltered for maximum body and flavour, and perfect for those mindful of calories with only 53 calories per 330ml bottle.

Or, if you're after a more hoppy beer, its recent addition to the shelves, Lucky Saint Hazy IPA, might be just up your street. Both retail at €2.50 each.

■ luckysaint.co



The print

Irish language store As Gaeilge founded by graphic designer Rachel Brady combines colourful cartoons with common phrases that will help you incorporate a cúpla focail into your everyday life. Choose from common phrases like "Lig Do Scith", "Tog Go Bog E" and "Cula Bula". From €24.95. ■ asgaeilge.ie



The ball

A Roaring 20s-themed empowerment ball is being held on March 5 to raise funds for Women's Aid.

Take a step back in time at Old Fashioned Sam's on Montague Street in Dublin for a night of dancing and great food in the name of a good cause. And don't forget the glam rags.

Early-bird tickets went on sale in January but the remaining tickets go on sale this Wednesday, February 5, from €80. Live out all of your Gatsby dreams.

■ [@empowermentballfundraiser2025](https://www.instagram.com/empowermentballfundraiser2025)

The barber

Ireland's first LGBTQ+ barbershop and salon opened its doors in October in Dublin's Temple Bar and has been providing a safe space for anyone to get their haircut. Queer Hawk are unapologetically themselves, is "straight-friendly" and is offering asylum seekers and homeless people free cuts. More of this please!

■ [instagram.com/queerhawkdublin](https://www.instagram.com/queerhawkdublin)



The gig

Emmet Kirwan's renowned 'ACCENTS' will come to the city's Everyman Theatre on February 18 and 19. The play takes the form of eight poems by Kirwan delivered against a soundtrack composed by the late, beloved Cork artist Talos (Eoin French).

Speaking about bringing the show back to the stage, Kirwan said: "The loss of Eoin has profoundly affected all of us and changed how we see the world and his work. We hope to bring Eoin French's incredible score and body of work back to the stage so it can be heard by new audiences and make sure that it still pulsates and lives on in people's memories." Tickets from €11.

■ everymancork.com



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We were jobless and broke in our 20s, but at least we had a place of our own

THE Central Statistics Office released a report on Monday, entitled *Growing Up In Ireland*. Its parameters were set on the wellbeing, education, employment and economic prospects of Irish people born in 1998. If you're as thick as I am, you may have read that sentence and wondered, for a few seconds, why the government was so invested in the financial and professional outlook of a bunch of six-year-olds. It therefore falls on me to give you the bad news that everyone born in 1998 is now at least 25 years old. And, I'm afraid, the bad news does not end there.

There are a few bright spots in the report, which tells us that 59.5% of Ireland's 25-year-olds have a degree or equivalent qualification, nearly double the EU average. This cohort seem an impressive bunch in other ways, too, with 73% saving on a regular basis, and 58% saying they had been "vigorously exercising" — the report's own sprightly wording — in the past week. As someone who was neither saving nor exercising very much at all at that age, I can only doff my cap to this generation of fiscally astute athletes fifteen years my junior.

Unfortunately, however, the 3,380 respondents report more sober findings. Some 86% of those surveyed said they were very concerned about access to housing in Ireland, which is unsurprising given the report's single most shocking statistic: 69.9% of 25-year-olds in Ireland live with their parents.

It's worth sitting with the sheer enormity of that number for a moment. It is, of course, a function of the ongoing housing crisis, and represents only the most sanitised expression of the problem from which it springs. It sits atop the deeper, more pressing, facts of homelessness in Ireland, not least the unhoused people — families and children included — who now number nearly 15,000 nationwide. And it masks the sad reality that there are many for whom the option of living in safety and security with a parent simply does not exist.

But to take the numbers of those who currently do live at home, be warned that any attempt to place them in context does little good. The UK's Office of National Statistics released a similarly detailed report for England and Wales in 2023, which found that, among 25-year-olds, 47% of men and 29% of women now live with parents. This was considered, quite reasonably, a worrying number, and a significant increase from 2007 numbers (when 16.7% of 25-year-old Brits lived at home) but it is absolutely dwarfed by Ireland's current tally. Elsewhere, numbers vary depending on methods, but it seems that Germany and France hover around 28%, and checking in on our Scandinavian cousins, Denmark (4.4%), Finland (5.7%), and Sweden (6.3%) makes for grimmer reading still.

Ignoring the rest of the world and focusing purely on ourselves, the historical context is no less alarming. According to census figures, only 24% of Irish 25- to 29-year-olds lived with their parents in 2011. Conveniently for my purposes, I turned 25 in November 2010, so that data presents a handy snapshot of my own generation's tribulations.

In 2011, I was still living in Dublin. We were deep into the worst economic conditions Ireland had seen for decades, with youth unemployment near 30%, and even Grafton Street's grand avenue of commerce sprinkled with half a dozen ominously shuttered premises.

My now-wife, an archaeologist by trade and training, had been out of work for over a year, and I was picking up a very slender living as a tour guide at the National Leprechaun Museum. You might think that I, a grown man with a degree and pretensions

“There are hundreds of thousands of young adults who have never bought a plate, a lamp, or a bedsheet. Will never hire a plumber or an electrician

toward literary glory, was the subject of ribbing from friends about the fact I worked in — I repeat — somewhere called the National Leprechaun Museum. What's striking to me now is that I was not. This was because almost none of my friends had jobs, and the fact that I had one at all meant I might as well have been a surgeon or an architect.

WHAT is also striking is that very few of those jobless friends lived at home. I can think of one, maybe two. The rest, like me, lived in chaotic house shares, and crumbling flats, and appeared to spend every spare penny they had on cheap cans and tobacco, but the dole was just enough for them to live independently, to forge the bonds of adulthood that have been a rite of passage for young people of every generation since time immemorial.

Ireland has, apparently, weathered the storm that sent me over the sea a few months into 2011. We are told it has emerged richer than it was before. Youth unemployment is a third of what it was when I left. GDP has tripled. To think that, despite all this, almost 70% of today's 25-year-olds do not even have the freedoms that my generation enjoyed, is mind-boggling.

Sometimes I imagine myself making this point to people who don't care about any of the above, to convey the smaller ramifications in a way that even the most committed capitalist might take them to heart: why not consider that there are, effectively, hundreds of thousands of young adults in Ireland who've never bought a plate, a lamp, or a bedsheet in their lives? Will never hire a plumber or electrician, buy a lawnmower, build a shed. I have to believe, even for the money men, that there is a downside to locking young people out of all of the things you need them to be doing in order for a high street, or an economy, to exist.

But we should be clear that the primary problem with the current state of things is not in any set of numbers on any balance sheet. To be locked out of housing by obscene rents, a vulturous short-term-let economy, and catatonic house prices is simply no way to enter life as a young adult. It's no way to forge relationships or start a family. And it's no way to build a country for a generation who deserve so much better.

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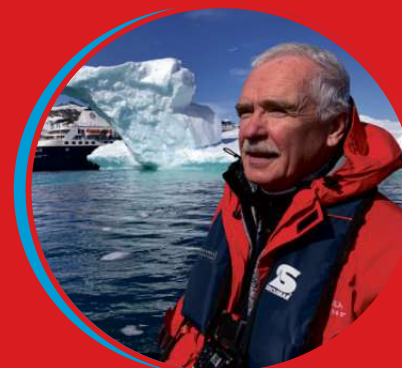


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WELCOME to Roaring 20s – a special edition of Weekend where we look at all things related to 20-somethings in Ireland.

The song ‘Vienna’ by Billy Joel often trends on TikTok. “Slow down you’re doing fine, you can’t be everything you want to be before your time,” the New Yorker sings on the iconic track. It’s not hard to see why it resonates with so many of us navigating this defining decade.

Being in your 20s today can look so different from one person to the next – some are working full-time in careers they are passionate about, others are just finding their feet; some are exploring creative endeavours in Ireland’s arts scene; others are travelling the world; some are still living with parents, while others themselves are parents.

We hope to illustrate a range of these realities in this edition, and if you are in your 20s, we hope you’ll find yourself represented in these pages. For readers outside that bracket, we hope it will offer some insight into our roaring 20s.

Le grá,
Rebecca Daly, commissioning editor



Left, student and musician Ahmed Karim Tamu. Above, content creator Keelin Moncrieff.
Pictures: Moya Nolan

Our roaring 20s

From a content creator to a taxi driver, an artist and our youngest TD, Rebecca Daly profiles six Irish people navigating a defining decade

AHMED KARIM TAMU **Musician and student**

“I would like to stay in Ireland for as long as possible, and I would like Ireland to have me.”

Dublin-born Sierra Leonean rapper Ahmed, With Love — real name Ahmed Karim Tamu — is living a bit of a dual life at 24. By day, he’s pursuing his master’s in pharmacy. By night, he makes music and has over 18,000 monthly listeners on Spotify.

“It’s kind of like the Batman or Clark Kent situation of working during the day and doing all my creative bits afterwards or in between, like during lunch breaks and stuff like that,” he says.

Ahmed recently moved into an apartment in Inchicore with his girlfriend, after having lived with a friend’s family from the age of 13. He was born in Ireland and his family moved back to Sierra Leone when he was nine but he made a return on his own four years later.

“Dublin is a place where if you do want to find stuff to do, you can do it. It’s not as easy maybe in bigger places like London.

“I’m always doing stuff for my music or, even just beyond that, in other forms of artistry, be it acting or producing shows. I always feel like I have people I can talk to satiate that thirst for creative outlets.”

On the other hand, however, when it comes to renting, the capital isn’t all it’s cracked up to be.

“It does not make sense to be spending €2,000 a month for an apartment in Dublin. I don’t feel like your return on investment is ever earned when you’re renting in Ireland.”

When asked if he’d consider moving abroad, it’s a no-brainer for Ahmed. Wherever there is a home or an opportunity, he’d be happy to lay his hat. For now, though, he has plenty to tie him down.

“I would like to stay in Ireland for as long as possible, and I would like Ireland to have me.”

As well as rent, there are other issues he finds with the capital — from public transport and how lengthy journeys can be to dying nightlife in the city. But he’s counting the blessings Ireland has to offer.

Irish people’s creativity is something Ahmed loves about being a 20-something — and how many people are “unapologetically themselves”.

The culture scene, in particular, has grown expo-



Lara Quinn at her Backwater Artists Group studio space on Wandesford Quay, Cork. She’s preparing for an upcoming exhibition, opening April 3, at The Lavitt Gallery.
Picture: Larry Cummins

entially in recent years. “If you asked me 10 years ago did I know anything about Irish music, Irish hip-hop, I’d be like, ‘There’s not really much there.’ But now I can happily say there’s a community.”

LARA QUINN **Artist**

“I have all these opportunities happening at once but I am also trying to make enough money to be able to pay rent and bills.”

Newly graduated Lara Quinn splits her time between her hometown of Carrigaline and the city centre.

The 25-year-old studied fine art at Crawford College of Art and Design and was awarded a studio space on Wandesford Quay for nine months.

She describes her situation at the moment as a “weird limbo”. Having earned a number of residencies, Lara is trying to strike a balance between her craft and working for money, and says financial stability is the biggest issue for her now.

“I have all these opportunities happening at once

but I am also trying to make enough money to be able to pay rent and to pay for art supplies and bills and everything else, which is really hard because I just don’t have time.”

While there are a lot of grants out there to support Lara and her peers, their prospects for the future look to other lands.

“The majority of people want to do a master’s abroad. I know that’s where I want to go. Doing my degree in Ireland was great but master’s programmes, from what I’ve heard, have been dwindling in a lot of places [here].”

This not only means uprooting your life and base, it also means trying to secure a scholarship that will pay for the course in the likes of Britain. There is competition to deal with too.

While Dublin could offer more for Lara, she says the rent is simply unaffordable. For now, she wants to spend some time making a name for herself in Cork and the rest of the country.

Trying to find the sweet spot in working, taking time out from formal studies, and creating is hard.

“You don’t want to rush into [a master’s] straight

away because you want to build a nice foundation where you're from. But you also don't want to wait too long because then you're losing that momentum."

One of her favourite aspects of being an artist in her 20s, though she jokes that it's cheesy, is that it's easy to feel part of the community because everyone knows each other.

"There's a really lovely, flourishing art scene in Cork but it's not huge either. Now that I've gotten a feel of some of the communities up in Dublin, it still feels tight-knit compared to living in London and trying to be an artist over there."

KEELIN MONCRIEFF

Content creator

"There would be good opportunities for me if I moved abroad but I wanted to be closer to home — that's what your priorities are when you have a child."

Having built up her online platform, Keelin Moncrieff shares snippets of her life with her followers — from moving to London during the pandemic to having her daughter at 24.

At 27, her life looks fairly different to most others in their 20s with the arrival of her daughter, whose identity Keelin keeps private.

"I've kind of been catapulted into a sort of more 'adult' lifestyle. Most of the people I know, who I'm parent-friends with, are in their mid-30s and already have houses or are married.

"It was a new experience for me and I wasn't able to relate to any of my friends."

On top of this, becoming a mother has made Keelin consider things she may not have otherwise, such as finding a place to live with schools in mind.

Just as she did in her early 20s, most of her close friends have chosen to leave Ireland but that option just isn't the same for her any more.

"Any of my friends who have had really good prospects in their career have decided to leave. There would be good opportunities for me if I moved abroad but I wanted to be closer to home and closer to a village, because that's kind of what your priorities are when you have a child.

"I think the trajectory of my life just changed a little bit. I probably would have emigrated if I didn't have a child. I also learned to love my community and have more of a drive to try help us, in a way."

In her area, Keelin has noticed a lot of housing developments springing up but a lack of key facilities. She says she'd like to see money being put into the right areas in order to help communities thrive — and help young people to stay in the country they grew up in.

"Ireland never really cared about young people. I'm just hoping now that the housing market improves a little bit so that when my friends do want to settle down and have children, they can actually move home and do so."

Asked if she feels supported in her career, she says, in a "general, social conversation sense", probably not.

By the nature of her job, Keelin has to show a lot of her life online, which can attract a lot of hate. For her, the age-old Irish begrudgery appears to creep in.

When she lived in London, she got "way less hate". She finds she gets more negative comments on her TikTok — where the algorithm is linked to an Irish location — versus YouTube, where the majority of her following comes from overseas.

"There's a cohort of people in Ireland that would admire [creating content] because it seems very American. Especially in Ireland, the thing is you have to be modest and really humble. Filming yourself is the complete antithesis of that."

That being said, she feels like attitudes are changing, with people not caring as much.

While working as a content creator means there is some flexibility, Keelin says it is the "only option" she really has as it has been hard finding childcare. There is "not really much longevity" to the job, however, once you become a parent.

"If you want to have the balance of privacy and then having your children involved, there's an expiry date. Like, by the time she's in school, I wouldn't want to be online, which is why I need her in full-time childcare so I can actually start a career that doesn't involve me being in the public eye."

For those who are left in Ireland, Keelin believes there is an increased desperation to "have a good time" to convince themselves they are making the right choice by not emigrating.

"I would say that people in their 20s are so desperate to have a good time, to prove [to] themselves that



Student Abi Mar with her taxi in Blanchardstown, Dublin.

Picture: Gareth Chaney

they made the right decision to stay here. Everyone's way more open to chat to each other and make friends and make connections.

"It's different if you're in London or in Australia. Everyone's a bit more closed off. And maybe that's just a cultural or social thing over there.

"But with Irish people, everyone is so friendly and up for having the chats."

EOGHAN KENNY

Politician

"We need to be the flag bearers in trying to solve the issues that this country faces right now."

Mallow-born and reared, Eoghan Kenny TD has a job like no other 24-year-old in Ireland.

He had worked as a secondary school teacher until his election to Cork County Council in 2024, followed by his election to the 34th Dáil — making him the youngest TD in the Cabinet.

"While it is a very difficult job, I'm absolutely living the dream as a 24-year-old to receive a mandate like this, to represent over 140,000 people in Cork North Central," he says.

Eoghan has lived with his grandmother since he was 10 and says she "keeps him grounded".

Like many others, the hope is to one day own his own place.

"I can see how difficult that is for people of my own age in their 20s. The average age of a person buying a house in Ireland now is 39 years old, which is significantly higher than it was 20 years ago."

Despite the age gap between himself and some of the more senior members of the Dáil, Eoghan believes it is crucial to have people like him in the role.

"We, as 20-something-year-olds, need to be the flag bearers in terms of trying to solve the issues that this country faces right now. The way we can continue to do that is if we elect younger TDs, younger politicians in their 20-somethings, to be those representatives because we're understanding the issues that are facing the country."

As a home bird, Eoghan had no real desire to move abroad but has seen some of his friends emigrate — for the adventure or perhaps not feeling like they had a future here.

"I'm in a position where, hopefully, I could change that perspective for a lot of people, where I can try to get the narrative across that there is a future for people in this country if we elect people who are progressive and who do genuinely want change."

Like anyone in their 20s, Eoghan likes to switch off with his friends, who will often tell him when it's time to stop talking about politics.

And, like the others, getting to know his community is so important too.

"For a country of 100,000 welcomes, even in your own community, where you head into town on a Saturday morning and you are greeted with a smile on people's faces and a hello — I don't know... does that happen in many other countries? What brings me joy is the happiness that people share in their own communities, the comradeship that we share."

ABI MAR

Taxi driver and student

"I feel the housing crisis is going to get worse but every country has their own issues."

Like many 21-year-olds, Abi Mar splits her time between college and working. Instead of working in a



Newly elected Labour Party TD Eoghan Kenny, Cork North Central constituency, at his office in Mallow, Co Cork.

Picture: Larry Cummins



GAA player and teacher Sean Fitzgerald in Crumlin, Dublin.

Picture: Gareth Chaney

typical student job in retail or hospitality, though, the Blanchardstown woman drives a taxi. After passing her driving test during the pandemic, Abi worked as a delivery driver until her father got her into the taxi business.

"[He said] 'If you like delivery driving, you're going to like this job a lot more. It's less stressful. You pick your own hours. You won't have to work at 12 o'clock.' And that was pretty much it.

"Initially, I was like, 'No, that's a bit weird. You don't really see female taxi drivers.' I had excuses like I won't get insured, it's going to be awkward. My friends are telling me how dangerous it is."

In the end, Abi decided to give it a go and now finds it to be flexible for going on holidays and fitting around her course. "The pros definitely outweighed the cons for me."

Abi says she feels quite satisfied with her life at the moment, being self-employed at just 21. Her current PLC course is in criminology, law, and psychology — and, despite initially wanting to get a full degree, she's been turned off the idea.

"I've had two friends who went on to get a degree. They were constantly struggling with money, unhappy as well. They were working the weekends after being in college all week, not having a social life. I feel like I have a really good balance of it all."

Instead, she wants to start another short course when she finishes this one and have the opportunity to try new things.

Saving is a big issue for Abi and, unlike many other 21-year-olds, she's thinking ahead to her future. In the next five years, she wants to be able to step onto the property ladder.

"I feel like [the housing crisis] is going to get worse. I don't think it is going to get any better. Ideally, I'd like to live a bit outside Dublin — like Dunboyne,

Dunshaughlin — have a bit of land, have a little cottage. That would be my vision and I just don't think I'd be able to afford that."

These concerns add to her reasoning for not wanting a degree, as studying will take away from the time she has to earn money. Some of Abi's friends are not hopeful about ever owning a home, she says, but she wants to try.

With parents who came to Ireland from Romania to give her and her brother a better chance at life, Abi has no intentions of leaving.

"I think other countries are definitely far worse. I always try to put myself in someone else's shoes. I think every country does have their own issues, especially capitals like Dublin and London."

Having friends who are up for new experiences is hugely important. She says her group do more than just go out, they join running clubs and travel.

At the end of the day, she likes the capital.

"I really don't think Dublin is as bad as people make it out to be, especially after hearing things about how my parents grew up."

SEÁN FITZGERALD

Teacher and GAA player

"I would have gone to Australia but the thought of the lads winning the All-Ireland and me not being part of it would haunt me forever."

For many young GAA hopefuls, playing county is the ultimate goal. Seán Fitzgerald is one of the lucky ones, as a defender for Galway.

The 24-year-old, who is also known as Fitzy, lives in Dublin and works as a primary school teacher.

There's no way he could be accused of not being committed to his sport as he drives back home a

number of times a week for training. Having gone to college in Dublin, he became fond of having "the best of both worlds" by spending time in the capital as well as back home.

It is stressful but it's self-inflicted, he says. "It's my choice to do the football and do things I want to do. It's tough to just get a night out with the lads because if you have [football commitments on] Saturday and Sunday, you can't really be going out. Or if you're training during the week, [it's] hard to go out."

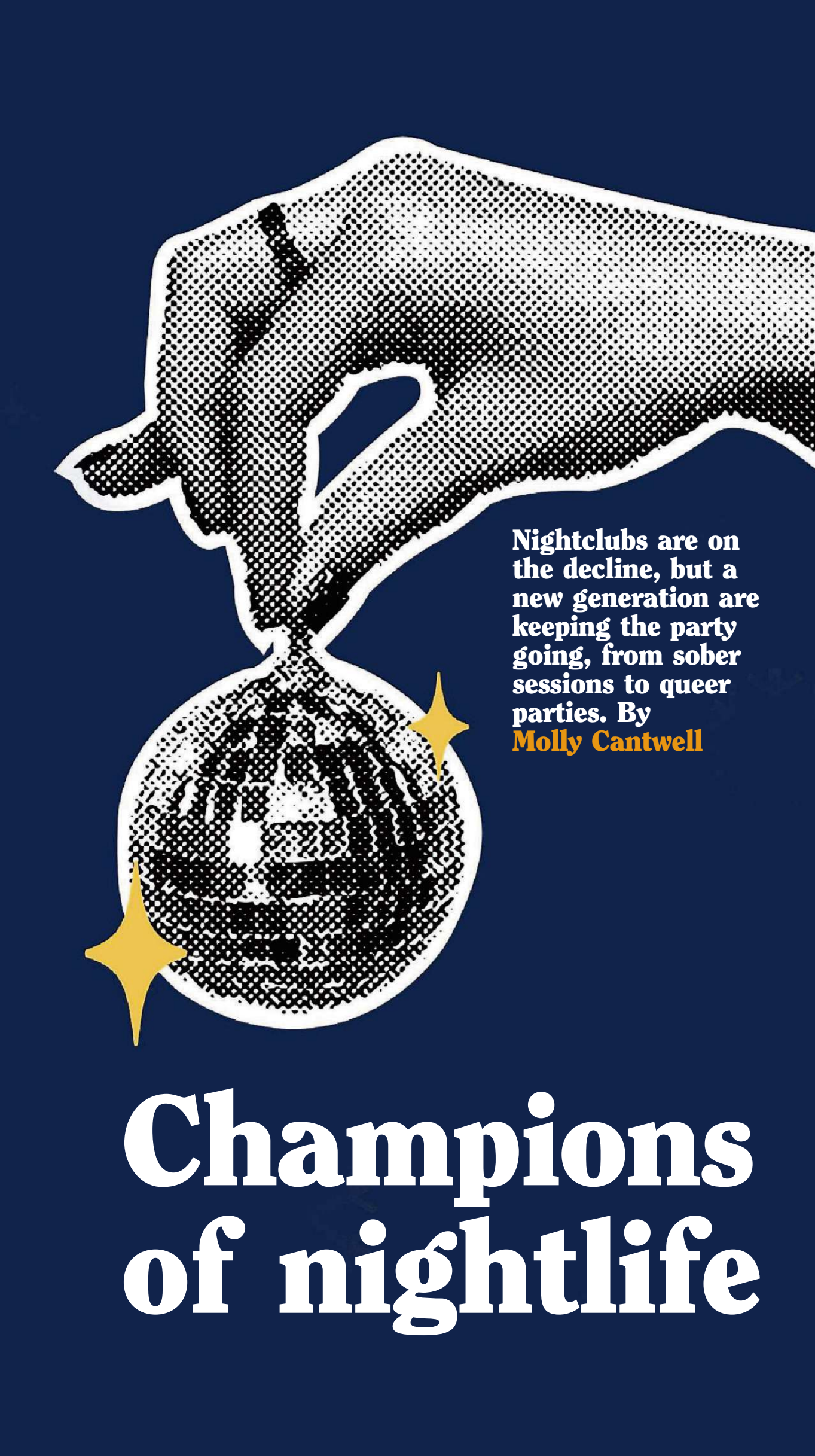
As a result of his lifestyle, a lot of Seán's life has to be mapped out in advance — from meals to school plans. Most of the alone time he gets are the journeys to and from training.

Despite the chaos, he says he loves being a teacher and finds it very fulfilling. "When you have a kid in the class and they don't understand something, you are the person that impacts them in a positive way. It's wholesome. I just love it. I suppose, if I was getting paid for football as well, it wouldn't be too bad."

Saving money is a huge issue. Despite being reimbursed by the GAA for his journeys back to Galway, he says this doesn't happen until afterwards, which means his pocket can take the initial big hit. Saving for the summer or the future can be tough.

"I'd like to go travelling but you don't make too much money when you live in Dublin. When summer comes, you have a bit of money saved up but you'd have to be working for a fair few years, I'd say, for when you can go off travelling for a year."

Asked if a move abroad was on the cards, Seán says if the football final last year had gone to plan, he would have left. "If I had won the All-Ireland last year, I would have gone to Australia. But the thought of the lads winning the All-Ireland and me not being part of it would haunt me forever. So we'll just win it this year and then I can go off and do what I want."



Nightclubs are on the decline, but a new generation are keeping the party going, from sober sessions to queer parties. By Molly Cantwell

Champions of nightlife

NIGHTLIFE in Ireland has been a consistent topic of conversation for as long as I can remember. Long before I was old enough to make my debut at iconic Limerick nightclub, Costello's. Undeniably the best alternative nightspot of its time in the city, Costello's and its sticky carpet closed its doors for the final time when the covid pandemic took hold. A staple of Limerick nightlife — and probably the only place where people older than 22 could feel comfortable dancing the night away — it has left a hole in the scene.

New figures from 'Give Us The Night', a campaign group for positive changes to nightlife in Ireland, found only 83 nightclubs remain open in Ireland at present, marking an 83% decline within this century.

According to the group, Dublin has 23, Limerick has eight, and Cork has five. Meanwhile, Kilkenny doesn't even have a single nightclub.

As someone based in Limerick, I can tell you the figure of eight came as a surprise to me. I've been asked in many a pub where the best place to go for a dance is on a night out and, honestly, it's very hard to give a recommendation if you're not a student.

Pre-pandemic, you would have found me on the dancefloor every weekend. But, now, it feels like we're at a standstill and struggling with the lack of support to fill the gap.

So, after years of different campaign groups and activists begging for a change to nightlife policy in Ireland, it's a bit of a relief to see the tides possibly turning in Ireland's major cities.

A long-awaited night time economy strategy was approved by Cork City Council in late 2024, which aims to drastically improve nightlife, with alcohol-free late-night spaces, improved city animation, and a new night time culture hopefully on the horizon.

The news came after Limerick City and County Council launched the night time economy innovation grant scheme — offering up to €5,000 in funding for new and creative ideas that will contribute to the night time offerings.

Let's hope these are starting points for real change when it comes to our night time economy beyond Dublin, with some organisers and nightlife enthusiasts up and down the country already attempting to bring back the party to our streets.

Here are just some of the champions of modern nightlife.

Dali

Dali is a "no frills music venue with good sound", located in the upstairs part of Nudes Craft & Cocktail bar on Lavitt's Quay. It focuses on bringing "the freaks" out.

The venue hosts some regular queer parties, such as Machina and MILK, as well as Techno Thursday. Owners Hope Alo and Stephen O'Byrne are also looking to collaborate with parties from "across the pond" this year.

The ethos of Dali "has always been" to create a free space to be yourself and dance the night away.

Alo says: "We're working towards recreating that 'alternative' safe space again, as so much of dance music now has become commercialised.

"A lot of places that do dance music in the city, for me, are not a safe space. They're soulless."

Along with her colleagues, Alo will be "spending a lot of time recreating" what Dali is throughout this year.

"Having such an intimate space [allows us to be] able to book really interesting stuff and it's pushing me to explore my taste again," she says.

"We have lost so many venues over the years, especially small ones, and we need these spaces desperately. They grow and nurture the music scene."

Alo says the team are building a new live music venue, which will be a place for music heads, run by music heads. Speaking about nightlife in Ireland, she says: "For me, spaces like Dali or Plugd [city centre record store and venue] make this city liveable for so many people. They're weird. They're safe."

Dyke Nite

Dyke Nite is Limerick's first and only event dedicated to queer women, trans people, and everyone in between. First held in July 2022, the event has since taken off and has become well-known around the city and county alike.

Singer-songwriter Neev Kennedy is credited by the group for getting the ball rolling, having created a chat with El Reid-Buckley and Aoife O'Toole, known as DJ Egg — who both use they/them pronouns — and suggesting they throw a "dyke party" for Limer-



Hope Alo at Dali, upstairs at Nudes Craft & Cocktail bar and music venue, described as a free space to be yourself and dance the night away. Picture: Larry Cummins



El Reid-Buckley with the Dyke Night group: 'We were interested in providing something radical and political.'

ick Pride.

"As if I was ever going to say no to being involved in that," Buckley says.

"We were interested in providing something different in Limerick that was radical and political, and celebrated our diverse ways of being queer and trans. I don't necessarily think this is opposition to mainstream events but rather providing a space beyond this."

Buckley says: "Without being too academic about it, I suppose you could say we embrace a politics of messiness and fluidity."

In the same year Dyke Nite was born, Buckley began Limerick Alternative Pride as a creative and

community-centred programme in collaboration with Ormston House, with focus on making a sober space for queer and trans people to celebrate Pride.

"Even though I'm no longer sober, it is hugely important for me to provide space for people in our communities that do not have drugs and alcohol on site, and that is something I'll always be committed to," they say.

"In many ways, both Dyke Nite and Limerick Alternative Pride were born out of a need for something missing and a desire to connect in ways that we didn't feel were currently available to us. I think we have been more than successful in that regard."

And while there are some great gigs and parties out

“Having such an intimate space [allows us to be] able to book really interesting stuff. We have lost so many venues over the years, especially small ones, and we need these spaces desperately. They grow and nurture the music scene

in Ireland right now, Buckley acknowledges that resourcing is not up to scratch.

"I adore our DIY scene here that is built in the face of and in spite of commercialised club scenes. What happens here is special and the only thing I would change is our resourcing. Sure, there is value in outlaw parties, but I want us all to get paid," Buckley says.

"The Government can always be doing more, but will they? They dragged their heels on the bill for later club hours for far too long and, even if this bill does pass, there are wider issues at play which they also have not really sought to address: housing, public transport, drug and alcohol policy, to name a few."

They suggest the best thing national and local governments can do is to trust people and give them agency and resources to keep doing what they are doing.

Sober Seisiún

Sober Seisiún is an alcohol-free event run in Limerick, aiming to provide non-alcoholic social events in the evenings. People gather and play board games, chat, listen to some top-notch DJs, and simply hang out — embracing a social night out without the alcohol.

After 5pm, when most cafés in the city close, there is really nowhere for people to meet or socialise that isn't a pub. As Sober Seisiún organiser, Lisa Henihan, is sober herself, she really identified with that gap in the market for social activities.

The Limerick woman joked that she was so sick of going for hikes or going to a talk as a way of socialising outside of a pub, saying "there's only so much of that you can do".

Henihan approached the owner of Hook and Ladder in Limerick about running an alcohol free social night and "he was all for it".

"He sent me on a link to this grant that Limerick County Council are running with the Nighttime Economy and I got grants to run three nights," Henihan smiled.

"The way I was kind of looking at it was like you know the way you can do 'booze and board games' and 'paint and prosecco' — this was 'cartoons and coffee' and the next one was 'music and mocktails' — but the main thing was that there was a community corner because what was the most surprising thing is a lot of people came on the night on their own."

Henihan said that the first two events "worked out a treat" with great attendance, though her third event, in the run up to Christmas, had a poor turnout. In terms of running the events in the long term, Henihan isn't sure if she can keep it up by herself but would be open to welcoming new people to get involved with the event organising and running. Henihan suggested that local councils could support those in need of alcohol free spaces by funding late-night cafés to create a more diverse nightlife scene. Hopefully Cork's lead here will travel up to Limerick and aid Henihan's mission.

In Vogue

Ríon Hannora O'Donovan dresses Kate Nash, Oran O'Reilly has worked with Chappell Roan, and Roy Keane is the latest to sport Greg Hall's designs. Meet the young Irish designers taking the fashion world by storm

Ríon Hannora O'Donovan

AS A FORMER theatre school kid at the Academy of Dramatic Arts in Cork, Ríon understands the potential and the power of fashion.

"I don't name my garments but I do feel that I take on a different mood when I am wearing certain items of clothing. I feel like I can play different characters within different pieces of clothing," she says.

This might explain why high-profile performers are so drawn to her designs and her vision of how to style them for the stage.

Her list of fans includes Kate Nash, Denise Chaila, and Lyra. Last year, she also created her first custom wedding outfit for *I'm Grand Mam's* PJ Kirby, from a repurposed vintage wedding dress and white denim (an embrace of zero-waste fashion is core to her brand).

"I work a lot with Kate Nash and we do a lot of world-building together," she says. "Kate is up for anything and we have the same vision. I dressed her for one of her shows during the summer and she also let me dress all her band members, the people on lights, the people on the door. If you were in the audience and you could see crew members, they were dressed by me."

Ríon, aged 28, is a previous recipient of the DCCI Future Makers Award and the RDS Craft Award. Having studied at Limerick School of Art & Design, she has interned with Charles Jeffrey Loverboy, worked on the production of the YSL AW20 collection, and showcased her work at Copenhagen Fashion Week.

She is seen as a shining light by many in Ireland's young and thriving fashion industry, and is one of the founders of Dublin Independent Fashion Week (DIFW), an event which brings creators across the capital together for a week in November.

"It's great to see people getting excited about it as they do about fashion weeks in Copenhagen or Paris," she says of DIFW. "I've been seeing people taking pictures of each other's outfits in the street and thinking, 'Oh my god, are we really making a Dublin Fashion Week?'"

For many of the designers involved, DIFW has provided a chance to showcase their work to the media as well as prospective trade and retail buyers.

Designed to increase the profile of the Irish fashion scene both here and abroad, it has also given these

independent designers the opportunity to support each other as creatives.

"It can be difficult working as an independent designer. You spend a lot of time by yourself in your studio and sometimes you can think, 'What am I doing this for?'" she says. "You work so hard and put your heart and soul into something for it to exist somewhere in the abyss of the internet, so having people physically being there and supporting each other has been the best part of it for me."

The original eight founders — including Laoise Carey, Aisling Duffy, and Sarah O' Neill of The Zero Waster — got together after the Trinity Fashion Society fashion show in 2023.

"We decided it was mad that this show was the only place in Ireland that we could show our work. It was great but you can't even study fashion in Trinity and we thought that we would start our own thing."

"We pulled together the first, somewhat rickety, DIFW about four months later — there were handwritten signs on the door — but last year there were 24 designers involved in a much bigger affair, including our Ones to Watch applicants."

It comes as nothing new that Irish fashion graduates tend to leave these shores for work. Ríon, who hails from The Lough in Cork, says it doesn't have to be the case.

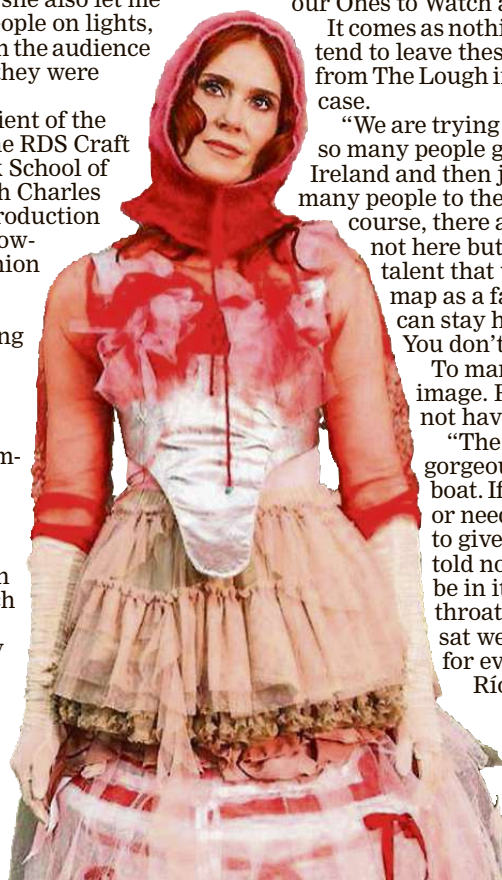
"We are trying to build a support network because so many people graduate from fashion colleges in Ireland and then just move away. We are losing so many people to the likes of London and Paris. Of course, there are opportunities there that are just not here but Ireland is so rich in creativity and talent that we are trying to put Dublin on the map as a fashion capital and to show that you can stay here and become a fashion designer. You don't have to leave Ireland to make it."

To many, fashion has a tough, bitchy image. Ríon says that this is not, and does not have to be, the case.

"The community that we have built is gorgeous because we're all in the same boat. If someone has broken their machine or needs advice on a shoot, we are all here to give each other a hand. I was always told not to trust the person next to me, to be in it for myself, and to be rather cut-throat, which is something that has never sat well with me. There's enough space for everyone."

Ríon makes clothing for

Kate Nash wears, and was styled by, Ríon for her music video 'Millions of Heartbeats'.



Fashion designer Ríon Hannora O'Donovan in her studio in Dublin.

Picture: Moya Nolan

“humans of all sorts” and is less concerned about the gender of the wearer than she is with the garments themselves and their theatricality. “I’ve never really thought about it too much,” says the designer.

“Every time I make a collection, my priorities shift a little bit,” she says. Her latest collection, ‘Chapter 6,’ is made from Irish linen sourced at third-generation Emblem Weavers in Wexford.

“Meeting the weavers and using this sustainable fabric is an important aspect of things for me at the moment,” she explains.

As a zero-waste designer, Rion has also become known for her “scrap babies”, which are creatures made from the fabric remnants in her studio. She says that she often personifies the things she owns and that the scrap babies are an extension of this habit, as well as a way of making people think more about the value of the fabric they’re made from.

“If you put a face or a hand or a boot on something, people will automatically start giving it pronouns, have more respect for it, and will look after it much better. When it comes to the idea of sustainability, looking after your clothing is so important.”

She has always been drawn to making clothing or “sculptural things that you can wear”, even as a secondary school student applying for art college. “I was very focused on the crinoline skirt. It’s the proportions and the idea of inner-wear as outerwear — what lies beneath. Maybe I was a Victorian lady in a past life or something. I have no idea why but, when I’m stressed, I’ll make a corset. It’s how I relax,” she says.

She also loves to wear them. “When you put on a corset, you hold yourself differently, you stand differently. I loved when Denise Chaila told me that wearing one of my corsets was like wearing a weighted blanket. I totally get that. That was one of the biggest compliments ever. For someone to feel so held and safe by one of my garments is just so beautiful. I also think people like the costume element, the idea of escaping into a different world or escaping your everyday life when you put on this garment.”

For her own part, Rion says that she has realised over time that she much prefers to make costumes than to perform on stage.

“I loved drama school but I actually hate lots of people looking at me. I’ve realised that, while I love the creative side of it and the buzz of it, I much prefer being backstage. Ask me to make you an outfit for the stage? That’s my dream.”

■ rionhannora.com

BY RUTH O’CONNOR

Oran O’Reilly

LAST year was the year of cool-girl genre mixing musicians and one Dubliner was dressing them from his family home in Rathfarnham.

Using his mum as a fit-model, Oran O’Reilly specialises in creating designs conjured from his endless catalogue of pop-culture references, from *Desperate Housewives* to supernatural female-focused flicks and everything in between. Creating pieces for Chappell Roan, CMAT, The Last Dinner Party, Paul Mescal’s sister and budding musician Nell Mescal, as well as a bevy of top drag performers, Oran is just 22 and wrapping up his final semester in IADT in Dún Laoghaire.

A creative child growing up, he was always drawn to art but fashion wasn’t his focus until early adulthood. “The culture on my peripheral was really impactful. My mum was obsessed with *Sex and the City*, *Neighbours* — all these soapy, campy shows. That definitely had an impact on me in terms of style and fashion,” he says.

The designer initially set his sights on playwriting but opted for design for film as his choice of education. Here, he practised a number of disciplines but fell in love with costume design, igniting the series of events that would lead to his career and, ultimately, influence his work.

“There has to be an explanation or a story or a reasoning behind everything in costume design. So, when it comes to fashion, it really informs me in the way of the theatrics — over-the-topness and camp sensibility is always inherent with costume. It makes me think, ‘What story is it telling just by looking at it?’”

This referential storytelling is blatant in his work — such as imagery from the cult horror *Possession* printed onto a performance dress for The Last Dinner Party’s Abigail Morris, or a dress for Roan inspired by iconic drag artist Divine in John Waters’s flick *Pink Flamingos*. And, really, it all started with a story



Right, Greg Hall, designer and founder of Pellador at his studio in Roches St, Limerick. Picture: Brendan Gleeson
Above, Clare Dunne in Pellador. Picture: David Doherty



Oran O’Reilly, left, and Chappell Roan, above, and CMAT, below, in custom outfits he designed. Top left, Siobhán McSweeney, styled by Oran. Picture: Lee Malone

of a different kind — an Instagram story. Ahead of his college course, Oran got a sewing machine and, being “obsessed with Vivienne Westwood at the time”, found a pattern for a corset online. “I made two shitty little corsets that were, looking back, horrible,” he says. After some experimentation, he made a corset for a friend emblazoned with the face of actress Natasha Lyonne. “That was the third thing I’d ever made and the first thing I was proud of, so I posted it on Instagram and Natasha reposted it on her story. I got a few messages from people asking if I sold them and that was the moment that [it] clicked.”

Acknowledging the role social media has played in his success so far, he is well aware of the need for young designers to be visible on algorithms.

“Social media is the most impactful thing when it comes to young designers. It’s how everything has come about for me. I’m so grateful for it. But I hate social media. I get so overwhelmed by it — but it is the No1 tool.”

He mourns the loss of fashion culture of decades past, when mid-century designers would work with individual clients rather than for the many.

“I miss that aspect of when clothes were just clothes for clothes’ sake but now you have to think of the social media aspect. You can’t control how

something’s going to be perceived on social media but I’ve been so lucky and so grateful that things have worked out.”

The junction where real life and social media perception meet is in performance garments for artists.

Reflecting on the opportunities he found with a number of musicians, the Dubliner can’t quite believe the “snowball effect” he has experienced. As always, success can come with imposter syndrome. He recalled the torment of wondering if Roan would really wear

the dress he made for her Kentucky Pride Festival performance in 2024, waiting up late into the night as photos and videos from the festival began surging onto social media.

“I was like, ‘She’s not going to wear it.’ On the day, I was on Twitter, refreshing, waiting. And then I finally



saw it. I was overwhelmed. I thought, ‘That’s not my dress.’ I had convinced myself that they got somebody else to make it. I woke up the next day still conflicted. Hours went by and I got a notification saying, ‘Chappell Roan tagged you in a post.’”

His dad insisted that he make a TikTok about the process of creating the dress for the Midwest Princess and it blew up, with over a quarter of a million views at the time of publication.

Many of Oran’s pieces feature imagery of influential women. “It’s purely just my appreciation, love, and reverence for women, especially misunderstood women,” he says. “I feel like, in the media, women are portrayed as characters, whether they are or not. They always have to represent something. Women can’t just be women. They can’t just simply exist. People always put labels on them.”

Existing in the fashion industry in general can be a struggle and, while the fashion designer wants to remain in Ireland, he understands the necessity for many to seek work abroad. “If only there was some way for everyone to uplift each other but it’s very difficult when people are struggling to uplift themselves,” he says.

And despite his work being worn by some of the ultimate insiders in the worlds of art, music, and fashion, Oran doesn’t see himself as one of them — heralding it as the only attitude that helps him persevere with his work without overthinking too much.

He added: “I feel like I am an outsider in the fashion industry and that gives me the opportunity to look at the industry as a consumer rather than a player in

the game.

“It’s an odd thing. I always just say that I make clothes.”

■ @oranjaurelio

BY SARAH MAGLIOCCO

Greg Hall

WHEN Pellador hosted a fashion show for its spring/summer 2025 collection at Skehan’s Freehouse pub in west London in December, the guests stayed for more than a procession of the Irish brand’s hit jacquard sportswear, printed denim, and hoodies inspired by 1990s football culture. In one corner, there was a traditional music session. Bowls of hearty beef stew floated around, to be washed down with creamy pints of Guinness. This wasn’t your average fashion show. This was a community gathering.

Pellador isn’t your average fashion brand either. Founded by Limerick-based Greg in November 2022, the sportswear brand capitalised on a childhood obsession with Manchester United greats such as David Beckham and Roy Keane and a generational affinity with vintage-inspired clothing. To wear the brand, whose name derives from the Irish word for “footballer”, is to pledge allegiance to a club.

It’s a club whose members are in the hundreds if not thousands. At a Dublin pop-up in December, a

queue formed for hours outside in the cold to have a chance to buy the brand’s latest products. In London the week prior, a pop-up shop turned into a venue to meet like-minded fans of the brand.

“It was so much fun getting to meet the people who support Pellador,” says Greg. “People would come to shop and have a pint of Guinness. Most people stayed there all night and came out with us afterwards.”

Greg, who turned 30 in November, is a self-taught designer from Co Clare. He studied music and English with computer science at University College Cork. As a teenager, music was always an outlet and the branding behind it led him to graphic design. When he graduated, he worked as a graphic designer for an events company in Dublin and moved to Limerick during the pandemic to start a printmaking and design business. Like Pellador, his first brand, Execute Exist, riffed on Celtic symbols and the Irish language. As this venture developed, Greg realised the clothing aspect interested him the most.

In November 2022, he launched Pellador as a line of vintage-inspired knit football jerseys.

“When I started designing knitwear — with no training, no experience — I naturally started designing football tops because it’s what I wanted to wear,” Greg says. He spent a year researching, sourcing, and visiting manufacturers and sampling product prototypes before Pellador launched. “I didn’t know how the industry worked,” he admits. Resourceful and intuitive, Greg and his former design partner — a friend who now lives and works in Copenhagen — took the collection to the epicentre of fashion: Paris Fashion Week. With limited knowledge, he stumbled upon Impossible Objects, a London-based showroom hosted in Paris, whom they befriended. The agency happily took them under their wing.

Six months later, he hosted a showroom during Paris Fashion Week with a full collection and a line sheet for wholesale buyers.

“I didn’t even know what wholesale was before going to Paris,” he says. Now, Pellador’s team consists of four people, including Greg. His right-hand man is Jordan ‘Dewey’ Kenny, with two other team members to help with design and other operational needs. Greg credits Impossible Objects with leading him down the path of becoming a “fashion brand” rather than an “Instagram direct-to-consumer brand”. He considers their guidance and taste levels influential to his success.

He isn’t beholden to fashion in the conventional sense of presenting up to six collections a year, selling to countless wholesale clients and hosting biannual fashion shows in London or Paris though. “I like being an outsider in the industry. I love being flexible and doing it our way,” he says.

His biggest strength is instinct and, over time, he has learned what offers to say yes to and what compromises are worth reaching.

Greg often soundboards ideas with friends in the Irish fashion industry such as Robbie Fidgeon Kavanagh and Charlie Proctor-Quigley from Emporium, Megan McGuigan from Seeking Judy, and Rion Hannora O’Donovan, also profiled here.

In 2023, when Guinness came calling to produce a collaboration consisting of sweatshirts inspired by the 1980s Guinness soccer ads, Greg knew he had reached a big break. The limited run of 200 sweatshirts sold out online in minutes. At the Dublin pop-up, which was sponsored by Guinness, a re-release of 80 sweatshirts was the first item to sell out.

When an email from a buyer at Brown Thomas arrived the day after asking to stock the collection, he knew the brand was about to leap forward.

“I couldn’t believe it — two days in a row. I thought somebody was messing,” Greg says.

Late last year, Pellador’s ambition to open a permanent, standalone store was thwarted by a landlord who, Greg suggests, didn’t understand the brand or its vision. He took this as a sign, however, to channel his efforts into improving design and production, launching pop-up stores, and hosting events worldwide. Plans are already under way for Pellador’s first pop-up outside of Europe, he says.

Instead of hosting intimate runway presentations to showcase new work, Greg wants to produce bigger events and invite hundreds of people — industry professionals and fans alike. While Pellador’s production runs are limited, the brand doesn’t want to project an exclusive veneer — anyone can join this team.

Beyond business ambitions, Greg had one personal goal for 2025: “I want Roy Keane to wear Pellador.” By January 16, he had completed the mission. Next, with a buying trip to Paris Fashion Week, he hopes to secure more stockists that share Pellador’s values. “In 2025, I want us to do bigger and better collections.”

■ pellador.com

BY PAUL McLAUCLAN

ANNMARIE O'CONNOR



Trend of the week

Gen Z

When it comes to fashion clout, Gen Z is peerless. This is the cohort born between 1997 and 2021; the one that cancelled skinny jeans; the digital natives who create viral TikTok cores, and the sartorial nemesis of their millennial precedents. Revered and feared in equal measure, their distaste for all things prescriptive (sartorial or otherwise) ironically makes them easy to spot in the wild. Not trend-led per se (they set the agenda); their aesthetic reflects common elements of style that demonstrate how they move through the world. Here's what they do best—comfort. While wide-leg jeans are a de facto Gen Z signature, expect unisex and oversized pieces as standard, including roomy shirts and gender-neutral accessories like retro sneakers, bucket hats, and UGG boots. Nineties-inspired leather and suede jackets, slub knits and hems for days make the 'fit that fits best. Spoiler alert: last year's striped pyjama pants continue their daywear reign, and I'm not mad at it. Although notoriously fickle (boredom is the kiss of death), their collective purchasing power makes them coveted consumers, however fleeting. Just look at Coach; a Gen Z favourite, the brand's position in 2024's last quarter of The Lyst Index—a proprietary ranking of fashion's hottest brands and products, sees the American luxury fashion house positioned at number 15 with its 'Brooklyn' tote at number five. Not bad innings. For 2025, my money's on Scandi brands winning over Zoomers: from the bricolage spirit of Stine Goya and Essentiel Antwerp to Ganni's cool collaborations and authentic commitment to sustainability. What's more, there isn't a pair of skinny jeans in sight.



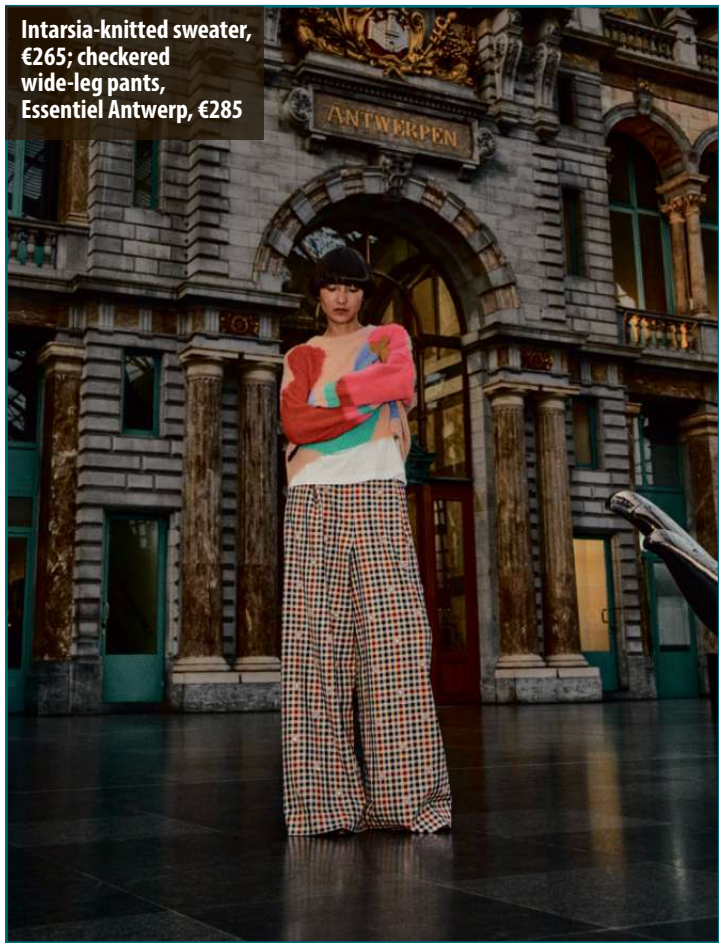
'Hapricorn' shirt, Essentiel Antwerp, €195



'Stanton' crossbody bag in signature jacquard, Coach, €169



Adidas Originals 'Gazelle' sneakers, Lifestyle Sports, €120



Intarsia-knitted sweater, €265; checkered wide-leg pants, Essentiel Antwerp, €285



Embroidery stripe trousers, Stine Goya, €255



UGG ultra mini crafted 'Regenerate' boots, Zalando, €220



Two-tone jeans, Essentiel Antwerp, €215



ZW Collection leather jacket, Zara, €239



Fur-lined bucket hat, Parfois, €19.99

How to wear it

Tap into signature Gen Z style with a pair of wide-leg jeans. We've got three ways to wear them.



OFF-DUTY

Top and tail an oversized silhouette with iconic suede pieces.

New Era trucker cap, Zalando, €32

Suede blazer, Zara, €149

NFL Dallas Cowboys oversized t-shirt, Penneys, €14

Extreme wide-leg jeans, Penneys, €20
'Speedcat OG' unisex sneakers, Puma, €110



PREPPY

Disrupt playful colourways and classic argyle with a hint of animal print.

Animal print neckerchief, Bershka, €9.99

ZW collection oversize wool blend coat, Zara, €179

Argyle jacquard cardigan, Zara, €49.95

Extreme wide-leg jeans, Penneys, €20

Patent leather-effect ballet flats, Mango, €45.99



DEMURE

Give coquettish vibes with ribbons, ruffled collars and a quirky beret.

Leopard printed beret, Ganni, €115

Le Specs 'Hypnosis' sunglasses, Zalando, €47.95

'Swallow' hearts quilted jacket, Sister Jane, €112

Extreme wide-leg jeans, Penneys, €20

'Mora' square-toe loafers, Whistles, €199

KATE DEMOLDER



Do
Gen-Z's viral
favourites
live up to the
hype?



BEAUTY, these days, seems entirely focused on hype. Today, we're looking at the products Gen Z have helped go viral to see if they really live up to that hype.

The Smooth Company Mane Master (€29.99, thesmoothcompany.com)

Creators of the Smooth Stick — a mascara-like product that tames flyaway hairs with a perfectly non-sticky formula — Áine Kennedy's team knows that a product has to be two things for people to love it; easy-to-use and catering to a need we didn't think we had.

The Mane Master, their curved boar bristle smoothing brush, does just that. Curved to grasp every hair, with dense enough bristles to grab hair all types, this product is a straight-up winner for anyone after a slick-back style. There's a reason Molly Mae can't put it down.

Kosas Reveal Concealer (€31, Space NK)

Few products are as omnipresent

online as Kosas Reveal Concealer. With its famous yellow lid, this multitasking product uses caffeine and pink algae to brighten while providing medium coverage. Buildable, smooth, dewy... this is one of the best undereye concealers I've ever tried. Another win for Gen Z.

Gisou Honey Infused Hair Oil (€22, Brown Thomas)

A good head of hair will always sell product. Gisou owner Negin Mirsalehi knows this, so decided to bottle and sell the product that made her hair so good. The result is Gisou's honey-infused hair oil, a best-selling product formulated with Mirsalehi Honey and Bee Garden Oils to provide instant hydration and shine. As a product, this is beautiful, smells good and does indeed increase shine, as oils are wont to do. But, would I buy it again? Probably not. My hair is quite fine and it felt a little heavy. For thicker, curlier hair, this could be great.

Benefit Benetint Cheek & Lip Stain (€26.50, Boots)

I have a long history with this product.

First procured as part of a Christmas present when I was a preteen, this formula made me fall in love with stains and tints. Great then, great now.

Color Wow Dream Coat Anti Frizz Spray (€30, colorwowhair.ie)

Everyone I know who has tried this is hooked. An advanced anti-frizz formula, this leaves even the coarsest, frizziest hair glossy, glassy and smooth. Drench your hair in it post-wash, then dry as normal. You'll be amazed at the shine it creates. As someone who is trying to get their hair back on track after a bleach from hell, this product is the only thing that makes my hair look healthy again.

Charlotte Tilbury Airbrush Flawless Setting Spray (€20, Space NK)

I've never been a setting spray kind of girl. That said, people rave about the Charlotte Tilbury one, so I tried it, and I was pleasantly surprised. I still feel that nothing can protect your makeup fully from Irish weather, but this

product definitely made my face last longer than it should have. It was also dewy and felt like I was wearing nothing at all — which means two thumbs up from me.

e.l.f. Halo Glow Liquid Filter (€15, Boots)

This Charlotte Tilbury Flawless Filter dupe is unputdownable. An excellent formula to give the skin a glow without applying thick layers of foundation, this product is affordable, dewy and life-giving on days when you need about eight hours more sleep.

COSRX Advanced Snail 96 Mucin Power Essence (€32.95, lookfantastic.com)

COSRX's snail essence is a hugely hyped product because a) it's got the word 'snail' in it, and b) it's really, really good. For lovers of a juicy, glazed doughnut look — this is your secret weapon. Fast-absorbing, hydrating and compatible with all skin types, this essence is exceptional under makeup and will leave your skin glowing all night long. Gen Z, we salute you.

LESLIE WILLIAMS



Wine

Raise a glass to the women of wine

BRIGID's weekend is upon us, and I can think of no better woman for the Irish people to dedicate a holiday to. Brigid is the patron saint of brewers as well as poetry and healing and we all know the story of her turning bathwater into beer — beer often leads to poetry and healing in my experience.

Brigid features prominently in the first chapter of *Filthy Queens, A History of Beer in Ireland* by Dr Christina Wade which is published this week by Nine Bean Rows, sister publishing house of Blasta Books whose excellent cookbooks you likely already own (if not, get that sorted). Nine Bean Rows also published Oisín Davis's *Irish Kitchen Cocktails* which I also recommend.

Filthy Queens is a proper, meticulously-researched history of brewing in Ireland covering ancient times through the Viking period, the English invasion, the era

of revolutions and up to the modern era. Almost in spite of its academic heft, the book is enormous fun to read and packed with wit and anecdotes. What I enjoyed most was learning how integral beer has been to Irish life through the centuries and how central women's role was in making that beer.

The book puts women at the centre, wresting back the history of beer from the (male) industrialists who so dominate the story of beer in Ireland today. Had she access to grapes you know that Brigid would have been making wine also of course. All my drink suggestions this week have a woman at the helm. It is now so common to encounter women winemakers that I often don't even mention them. Even in traditionally patriarchal countries like Spain, women winemakers are everywhere so I've focused on regional Spain — skip Rioja this weekend and look to the region.



Bodegas los Frailes Monastrell-Garnacha, Valencia, Spain, €18

■ MacCurtain Wine Cellar; Lennox Grocer; Higgins; Jus de Vine; SheridansCheesemongers.com

The Velasquez family are making wine since 1711, and have been organic and biodynamic since 2002. Winemaker Maria José and her brother Miguel dry farm biodynamically at altitude (650-680m) and use amphora and traditional methods. Vibrant blackberry and black cherry aromas with a touch of spice, fruit driven, layered and complex.

One of my favourites.



Mar de Frades Albariño, Rias Baixas, Spain, €18

■ Mollys, Martins, Jus de Vine, McHugh's, Whelehans Wines, Donnybrook Fair, WineOnline.ie

Paula Fandiño is one of the many women winemakers of Rias Baixas, male winemakers are in the minority.

Ireland is this region's third biggest consumer (by volume) so I should mention it more often.

Peach and lemon zest aromas, textured, zingy, and crisp on the palate with a salty freshness.



Mas Collet Celler de Capcanes, Montsant, Spain, €22-23

■ JJ O'Driscolls; 1601; Cass & Co.; Ardkeen; Matsons; Basil; Vintry; Fresh

From winemaker Anna Rovira in the excellent Montsant Co-Op located just down the hill from the more famed (and expensive) Priorat region.

Full, ripe, juicy and supple with ripe cherry and plum fruits and with weight and texture.

Also watch for her lively Mas Donis Negra (€17-18).

BEER OF THE WEEK



Connemara Brewery Pale Ale, 4.5% ABV, 330ml, €2.99

■ Mace, Spar and Eurospar shops; McCambridges; or via connemarabrewery.com

I asked Dr. Christina Wade author of *Filthy Queens* to recommend a beer and she chose this Pale Ale: "Áine O'Hara is a powerhouse brewer and someone I deeply admire." I concur.

Pouring a pale reddish gold with orange peel, peach and citrus aromas, smooth and refreshing with lots of hop vibrancy.



Unearthing the underrated, yet brilliant Jerusalem artichokes

AS PROMISED, this week’s column is completely devoted to what is probably my favourite but most underrated winter vegetable — the Jerusalem artichoke. Despite their name, they’ve got nothing to do with Jerusalem and aren’t even related to artichokes. The flavour is reminiscent of globe artichoke hearts: Sweet and nutty. The name appears to be an adaptation of girasole, the Italian word for sunflowers.

They wouldn’t win any prizes in a veggie beauty contest. They resemble misshapen, knobbly potatoes and can be white, pale purple, or yellow depending on the strain.

The variety we grow has been passed down from generation to generation in the Allen family. They are ridiculously easy to cultivate, just pop into the soil like potatoes once the weather is dry from the end of February/early March, allowing about 9-12cm between each one. Next winter, you’ll be rewarded with at least eight or 10 plump rhizomes where you planted a single Jerusalem artichoke.

In the US, they are called sunchokes — they are in fact a species of the sunflower family. The foliage grows about eight to 10 feet tall. The yellow flowers in August resemble small sunflowers and are loved by bees. You could plant them at the back of an herbaceous flower bed to give height and colour. Some folks have had fun creating an annual maze with them — how fun is that?

The leaves are frost tender, but the tubers are hardy and can stay in the ground throughout the winter. We harvest from November right through to the end of February even into March, depending on the weather. They begin to sprout if it’s particularly mild.

Choose the largest rhizomes and replant in a different location so the next harvest will be healthy and fulsome too.

Some supermarkets are now selling Jerusalem artichokes, you’ll also find them at Midleton and Mahon Point Farmers’ Market and the English Market in Cork City.

If you haven’t already got some growing in your garden, jump into the car and make a pilgrimage to our Farm Shop in Shanagarry, I’ll give you a present of a few artichokes. Where you plant one artichoke, you’ll have 10 next year — it’s like magic!

By the way, Jerusalem artichokes have the highest inulin content of any vegetable, super important to stimulate the microbes in your gut biome, so here’s a really valuable tip. If you’ve recently been on a course of antibiotics, go out of your way to get some Jerusalem artichokes. I love the flavour but for some they can be a little difficult to digest, hence the nickname ‘fartichokes’ but that’s just an indication that they are definitely stimulating your gut biome!

So now what to do with this ugly vegetable? They are wonderfully versatile; of course they make a delicious soup which I sometimes scatter with chorizo crumbs or add a topping of avocado and hazelnut salsa. We love to roast them until the edges are caramelised, they’re delicious hot or cold, as a side or as a basis for a salad.

Slice them thinly and fry until crisp for artichoke chips. Slice and cook to melting tenderness in butter or extra virgin olive oil, whizz to a purée and mix with mashed potato — so good! They also work brilliantly in a gratin layered up with potato and maybe celeriac or parsnip. That can be an entire meal, maybe with a few bacon or pancetta lardons added.

Now you see why I am so passionate about raising awareness of probably the most underrated of all winter vegetables!

Here are a few recipes to whet your appetite.

Roast Jerusalem Artichoke & Hazelnut Salad

Everyone loved this delicious combination — a recent addition to our repertoire. The winter salad is particularly good with goose, duck, pheasant, or as a starter.

Serves 4-6

- 450g Jerusalem artichokes, well-scrubbed
- 2 tbsp sunflower or extra virgin olive oil
- Salt and freshly ground pepper

For the salsa

- 1 ripe avocado, halved, stone removed, peeled and diced into neat 1cm dice
- 3 tbsp of hazelnuts, roasted, skinned and coarsely chopped
- 3 tbsp of hazelnut or olive oil
- 1 tbsp of chopped flat parsley
- Maldon sea salt and freshly ground black pepper

To garnish

- Sprigs of flat parsley

Preheat the oven to 200°C/gas 6. Leave the artichokes whole or cut in half lengthways, if large.

Toss the Jerusalem artichokes with the oil. Season well with salt.

Bake in a shallow gratin dish or roasting tin for 20 to 30 minutes until soft and caramelised at the edges. Test with the tip of a knife — they should be mostly tender but offer some resistance. Season with pepper and serve.

Meanwhile, make the avocado and roast hazelnut salsa.

Mix the ingredients for the avocado and hazelnut garnish. Taste and correct seasoning. This mixture will sit quite happily in your fridge for an hour as the oil coating the avocado will prevent it from discolouring.

To serve

When the artichokes are cooked, allow to cool, sprinkle with avocado and hazelnut salsa. Toss gently, taste and tweak the seasoning if necessary. Scatter with sprigs of flat parsley.



Jerusalem Artichoke Chips

We serve these delicious crisps on warm salads, as a garnish for roast pheasant or guinea fowl and as a topping for parsnip or root vegetable soup.

Delicious crisps may be made from other vegetables apart from the much loved potato. Celeriac, beetroot, leek and even carrots are also good.

Careful not to have the oil too

hot or the crisps will quickly turn and be bitter.

Serves 6-8

- 3-4 Jerusalem artichokes
- sunflower oil
- salt

Heat good quality oil in a deep fryer to 150°C.

Scrub the Jerusalem artichokes well and peel if necessary. Slice in wafer thin rounds.

Allow to dry out a little on kitchen paper.

Drop a few at a time into the hot oil. They will colour and crisp up very quickly.

Drain on kitchen paper and sprinkle lightly with salt.



Pan-grilled Scallops with Jerusalem Artichoke Purée

Serves 8

- 8 super fresh scallops
- sea salt

For the purée

- 450g Jerusalem artichokes (weighed after peeling)
- 450g potatoes, scrubbed clean
- 4 tbsp cream
- 25g butter
- salt and freshly ground black pepper (optional)

To serve

- extra virgin olive oil
- flakes of sea salt
- little sprigs of chervil

First make the artichoke purée.

Cook the artichokes and potatoes separately in boiling salted water until tender and completely cooked through.

Peel the potatoes immediately and place them with the hot artichokes in a food processor. Add the cream and butter and season with salt and freshly ground black pepper. Blend until a silky consistency is achieved. Taste and correct seasoning.

To serve, reheat the artichoke purée if necessary. Heat the pan on a high heat, dry the scallops well, drizzle with extra virgin olive oil and season with a little salt.

Pan-grill the scallops for a few minutes on both sides. Put a generous tablespoon of artichoke purée on each small plate, top each one with a pan-grilled scallop, drizzle with extra virgin and sprinkle each plate with a few flakes of sea salt.

February at Ballymaloe

Introduction to growing your own

organic produce, with Klaus Laitenberger

(Series of 10 full days: February to November 2025) at Ballymaloe Organic Farm School in Shanagarry.

This series of one-day courses, from February to November, is designed to teach participants how to grow your own organic produce. The course will be delivered by Klaus Laitenberger, soil expert and renowned educator. Klaus is author of four gardening books: ‘The Self-Sufficient Garden’, ‘Vegetables for the Irish Garden’, ‘Fruit and Vegetables for the Polytunnel and Greenhouse’ and ‘A Vegetable Grower’s Handbook’.

This course, structured across the four seasons, is for those who wish to learn the skills to start and maintain an organic food garden. Best to do the entire course but can be done individually.

Planting and caring for an orchard

Monday, 24th February 2025 at Ballymaloe Organic Farm School in Shanagarry.

This half day course provides step-by-step guidance on how to plan, design and plant a thriving apple orchard. Perfect for beginners and hobbyists, as well as those considering commercial apple production.

The intensive course covers everything from site selection and tree varieties to planting techniques and orchard management. Our tutor Christopher Troy manages his orchards organically and encourages others to adopt these regenerative principals..

■ ballymaloecookeryschool.ie

How to bake...

Raspberry & Coconut Traybake

THIS recipe creates a soft and chewy slice packed with flavour. While the inside is soft, the top is crisp and golden, studded with ruby red raspberries. The coconut adds a beautiful, crisp, fresh flavour to these slices. This in fact is a variation on a coconut macaroon. (I am a huge coconut macaroons fan, in all their forms.) History tells us that macaroons most likely originated in Venice, Italy, and spread to the royal courts of France when the King was marrying Queen Catherine de Medici. They were originally made with ground almonds, but coconut was added

to help preserve them for long journeys. They must have seemed extremely exotic at the time, as coconut would have been a rare delicacy. The whisked egg whites provide structure and help the slices to hold their shape. Eggs are also the only raising agent in the recipe, so the air you whisk in adds a little height and volume. Making these in a tray instead of small individual portions simplifies the making process. You can cut the slices into whatever size suits you and your family. They are easy to transport and are handy for family gatherings, after lunch snacks or weekend treats.

Prep time: 15 minutes
Bake time: 15 minutes
Serves 9

- 100g raspberry jam
- 150g fresh raspberries
- 4 egg whites, beaten until stiff peaks
- 240g caster sugar
- pinch of fine sea salt
- 1 tsp vanilla
- 300g desiccated coconut
- 25g plain flour, sieved

1. Preheat your oven to 180°C/gas 4.
2. Line an 8x12 inch tray.
3. Mash half of the raspberries with the jam and set aside.
4. Mix the beaten egg whites, sugar, sea salt, and vanilla.
5. Add in the coconut and flour and stir well.
6. Scoop half of the mixture into your prepared tray.
7. Drizzle the raspberry jam mixture on top. The mixture will be too sticky to spread the jam so it is nice to try and get it drizzle evenly so there will be some in each slice.
8. Scoop the rest of the mixture on top and spread it with a spatula. This step might be a bit messy but don't worry as the raspberries will mix with the mixture.
9. Bake for 25 minutes. It will be golden on top.
10. Allow to cool in the tin and cut into whatever size squares you wish.
11. Serve with the rest of the raspberries on top.

baker's tips

- When lining your tray, cut a paper rectangle an inch bigger than your baking tray. Cut into each corner at a 45-degree angle and gently press the sheet into the tray. The sides should fold up into place thanks to the corner cuts. If they do not, use your scissors to make another small incision so the sheet sits into your dish neatly.
 - Your mixture should be nice and sticky. If you find the tray-bake is a bit dry, you can use egg whites from larger eggs the next time. You can also look at the date on your desiccated coconut. A bag can be wallowing in the back of a cupboard, drying out over time. Fresh desiccated coconut is full of lovely oils that add flavour and moisture. If your coconut has dried out, it may make the bake dry and will also affect the richness of the coconut flavour.
 - You can make this recipe with half desiccated coconut and half shredded coconut if you wish. It will give you more bite and texture.
 - The salt may seem unnecessary but it enhances the overall flavour of all the other ingredients.
 - When cutting your slices, first allow the traybake to cool completely in the tin. Pull the parchment at the sides to loosen it, then gently lift your bake onto a large chopping board. Dip a long shape knife into warm water and cut directly through the bake.
 - These slices will keep in an airtight container, in a cool place, for about three days. Wait to add the fresh raspberries on top when you are serving them.
- Three delicious variations**
- Pineapple coconut squares**
To make this version, add 70g of dried pineapple in place of the raspberries. The coconut and pineapple combined give a tropical feel to the dessert. You can serve the slices with some diced fresh pineapple on the side.
- Chocolate almond squares**
Replace the vanilla with a teaspoon of almond essence. Replace the raspberries and jam with 50g of finely chopped almonds and 150g of chocolate chips. Add to the mixture when you are stirring in the flour. You can also drizzle 100g of melted dark chocolate on top once the bake has cooled slightly.
- Cherry coconut squares**
In place of the jam and raspberries, stir 100g of glacé cherries into the mixture. This variation also works well with 100g of melted dark chocolate drizzled on top. Again, allow the bake to cool slightly before drizzling the chocolate. You can also add two teaspoons of cherry liqueur to the chocolate if you like an added burst of cherry flavour.



SARAH BUTLER



The Family Cook

One pot dinners with time to spare

SOME evenings are all go! That's most evenings in this house, and I bet your house is the same.

Whether it's the juggle of sports, after-school activities, or work lasting a little longer than expected, dinner can be the last thing on the list. But that's no good when everyone arrives home starving as you stress cook in a panic while checking homework and getting the laundry sorted.

For these days, I have some recipes, like my slow-cooked Guinness stew and

my one-pan curry up my sleeve. It's all in the prep... I take a little time, just 10 minutes the night before and prepare a little for dinner the next day. Even having decided what's for dinner is a relief.

For the stew, peel and chop all the vegetables and place them in a container. Then, marinate the meat with olive oil, salt, and pepper and put it in another container. Refrigerate both.

The following day, brown the beef, soften the vegetables, then add the additional ingredients. Dinner is simmering in about 10 minutes. Pop it into your

slow cooker; dinner is done, no mess.

The same method applies to the one-pan oven-baked curry: Prepare the vegetables and meat on a tray with the spices, cover, and refrigerate the night before.

When you get home, pop the tray into the oven and let it cook—no pot-watching!

This week, take the stress out of dinnertime and make a slow cook or an oven-bake with a bit of prep the night before. You won't believe the time you get back with a little planning.

One Pan Chicken Curry

Oven-baked curry is a game-changer for busy families looking to enjoy a tasty, home-cooked meal without spending hours in the kitchen.

Unlike traditional stovetop curries that require constant stirring and attention, oven-baked curry allows for a more hands-off approach. Simply prep the ingredients, toss them together in a baking dish, and let the oven do the work. This method is a huge time-saver for families juggling busy schedules.

The minimal prep and cook time mean you can start dinner, pop it in the oven, and move on to other tasks, whether it's helping with homework or relaxing after a long day.

Oven-baked curry also works well for batch cooking, making it easy to prepare large portions for multiple meals. You can easily adapt the recipe to suit dietary preferences and use what vegetables your family prefers.

I love that this recipe calls to blitz the softened vegetables with the stock and coconut cream for a smooth sauce. Great for fussy eaters as they have no idea of the vegetables within.

Prep time: 10 minutes

Cook time: 35 minutes

Serves: 4

- 4 chicken breasts, cut into cubes
- ½ inch ginger grated
- 1 tbsp tomato purée
- 2 tbsp medium curry powder
- 2 tbsp garam masala
- 3 tbsp olive oil
- 1 white onion, roughly chopped
- 2 garlic cloves, roughly chopped
- 2 tomatoes, quartered
- 1 red pepper, roughly chopped
- 100g aubergine or courgette, diced (optional)
- ½ red chilli, roughly chopped (optional)
- Handful of fresh coriander
- 200ml chicken stock

Sarah's secrets

- I call this my 'Bag it Curry'. The night before a busy day, I bag the vegetables, chicken and spices so all I have to do is toss them on a baking tray and pop it in the oven.
- You can mix up your spices if you prefer it hot. Try adding some little chilli flakes.
- For a milder child-friendly version, use a mild curry powder.

- 100ml coconut cream or coconut milk
- 20g flaked almonds (optional)
- Salt and freshly ground pepper

Preheat the oven to 200°C/180°C fan/gas 6. Place the chicken in a bowl with the grated ginger, tomato purée, 1 tbsp curry powder, 1 tbsp garam masala and 1 tbsp olive oil. Season with salt and pepper and combine everything.

In a separate bowl, place the onion, garlic, tomatoes, pepper, aubergine or courgette and chilli (optional).

Drizzle in the remaining 2 tbsp olive oil, 1 tbsp curry powder, 1 tbsp garam masala, and coat all the ingredients.

Place the chicken and vegetables onto a baking tray. Keep the meat on one side and vegetables on the other.

Cover the baking tray with foil and bake for 15 minutes, then remove the foil and bake for an additional 15-20 minutes. The chicken should be golden, and the vegetables should be soft and easily pierced with a fork.

Set the chicken aside and place the vegetables into a deep jug. To the jug, add the coriander, stock, coconut cream and almonds. Use a stick blender or food processor to blend into a smooth sauce.

Place the blended curry sauce into a pan and add the cooked chicken pieces. Bring to a simmer and serve with rice.

Season to taste and garnish with fresh coriander.



Pictures: Sarah Butler

Beef & Guinness Stew

I am often asked, is it safe to use Guinness in a stew for children? Yes, of course it is as the alcohol is burnt off during the cooking process.

If you have leftover Guinness, simply freeze in a freezer bag and add to your next stew from frozen so there is no waste. A slow-cooked stew is a game-changer for busy families. First, the convenience is unmatched. You can prep the ingredients in the morning, set the slow cooker, and return home to a hot, ready-to-eat meal. This minimises the need for last-minute takeout or unhealthy microwave options. Slow-cooked stews also provide an opportunity to incorporate a variety of vegetables, lean proteins, and whole grains, ensuring a balanced, nutritious meal. The slow cooking helps break down tougher cuts of meat, making them tender and flavourful without the need for extra fats or oils. Plus, it develops a richer, more satisfying dish. Slow-cooked stews are also budget-friendly.

Prep time: 15 minutes

Cook time: 3-4 hours

Serves 4

- 1.5lb good quality stewing beef, cut into chunks
- 1 beef OXO cube crushed
- 4 tbsp olive oil
- Salt and freshly ground black pepper
- 25g butter
- 4-5 carrots, peeled and cut into large chunks
- 1 large onion, cut into large chunks
- 4 garlic cloves, crushed
- 1 tbsp plain or self-raising flour
- 100ml Guinness
- 1 pint beef stock
- 1 tbsp tomato purée
- 1 bay leaf
- 1 tbsp fresh thyme, finely chopped
- 1 tbsp fresh parsley, finely chopped plus a little extra to garnish

Preheat oven to cook at 140°C/120°C fan/gas 1. You can also use your slow cooker on medium.

Combine the beef, crushed OXO cube, salt, pepper and 2 tbsp olive oil.

In a frying pan on high heat cook beef in batches of 7-8 pieces for 3-4 minutes per batch until all sides are browned. Set aside.

Using a casserole pot, add 2 tbsp olive oil and 25g butter on medium-high heat and fry off the carrots, onion and garlic for 3-4 minutes.

Return the meat to vegetables, add 1 tbsp flour and combine with the ingredients.

Add the Guinness, allow to simmer and reduce down so only half the liquid remains.

Pour in the beef stock, tomato purée, fresh herbs, bay leaf and season with salt and pepper, bring to a simmer. Cover with one layer of parchment paper, then a layer of tin foil leaving some gaps for steam to escape.

Cook for 3-4 hours or place into a slow cooker on low for 3-4 hours. The longer you slow cook, the more tender your meat is and the more intense the flavours.

Be sure to check it regularly, stirring and add water if required to avoid drying out, especially if using a fan oven. If you need to thicken the sauce at the end of cooking just allow to simmer uncovered on a medium heat hob for 5-10 minutes, stirring regularly until sauce reduces.

Once cooked, garnish with finely chopped parsley and serve with potatoes. Remove bay leaf before serving. This dish is also lovely with a puff pastry lid if you have a nice serving dish or individual serving bowls.

Sarah's secrets

- Browning the pieces in small batches creates a crust on the meat that will in turn seal in flavours of the meat.
- Always have your beef at room temperature and add to a very hot pan.
- Remember to support your local butcher. Their meat is often the best quality and don't be afraid of a little fat marbled through the beef. This adds the most amazing flavour to slow cooks.



Seafood Made **Simple**

My hero list of crucial condiments

OPERATING a restaurant with a daily changing menu can be both challenging and thrilling. We rely on a well-stocked larder of pickles, ferments, vinegars, and other condiments to provide us with a little direction and a lot of comfort. Building up that larder during the summer months is always enjoyable. Considering which preservation process suits each fruit or vegetable is something I admittedly lose a little sleep over in the peak of summer gluts.

Drying lemongrass this year worked a treat for us, grown in West Cork by Alex Gazzaniga at Singing Frog Gardens. It's adding a little sunshine to our plates in these early months of the year.

Equally, I depend on a healthy collection of curated condiments when I'm cooking at home. Hero ingredients, with a long shelf life, that offer maximum flavour for minimal effort.

My list of hero condiments includes:

- **Gherkins:** Piquant little weapons that add brininess and sweetness to so many dishes. Chop through salads and salsas.
- **Fish sauce:** A two-ingredient condiment, fish and salt. A staple seasoning in southeast Asian cuisine. Great for finishing broths and sauces, superb with fresh lime juice for dressing salads.
- **Kimchi:** A Korean side dish, typically made with napa cabbage and gochugaru (Korean chilli flakes). Handy for a quick fried rice dinner, excellent in a cheese toasty.
- **Hot sauce:** My favourite accompaniment for oysters. Fabulous with grilled fish and shellfish.
- **Vinegars:** For acidity, I finish much of my cooking with vinegar. My must-haves at home are apple cider, balsamic, black rice, and malt vinegars.
- **Worcestershire sauce:** Made from anchovies, vinegars, sugars, tamarind, and spices. This condiment is an umami bomb. An essential ingredient in a Bloody Mary, a Caesar dressing, and a shepherd's pie in my house.

Fish tales

- If you're buying a whole crab you want to make sure it's still alive and feels heavy for its size.
- For safety make sure its claws are restricted by elastic bands.
- I prefer to steam whole crab rather than boil it. More delicate cooking produces better results.
- When picking the crab meat, I like to do so on a large white plate, so shell fragments are more easily spotted.
- Picking whole crab irritates many people's skin so use a pair of food-safe gloves.
- This butter alsoworks well served over whole grilled dover sole or baked fillets.
- For something a little more substantial fold the crab and flavoured butter mixture through some cooked tagliatelle or linguine/.



Picture: Chani Anderson

Crab toast

Serves 2

- 75g unsalted butter
- 1 garlic clove, minced
- ¼ tsp cayenne pepper powder
- ¼ tsp black pepper
- 1 lemon, juice and zest
- 1 small bunch parsley, chopped
- 1 tsp Worcestershire sauce
- 2 thick cut slices of sourdough
- 200g packet of picked crab meat or 1kg brown crab

To cook a whole crab, set up a steamer or bring a large pot of salted water to the boil.

Dispatch the crab by turning it over and pulling back the flap, where you'll find a small hole. Place a strong knife at this point

and force it through until you hit the other side of the shell.

Steam the crab for 10-12 minutes, and then plunge it into ice water for 30 seconds to stop the cooking. Remove it right after and allow to finish cooling.

Once cooled, break off the claws and legs. Break off the tail flap and press firmly upwards on the body section to remove. Cut the body section in half and use a crab pick to remove the white meat in the crevices.

Discard the gills (known as dead man's fingers). Scoop out the brown meat and set aside. Using the back of a large knife, crack the claws to pick the meat, being careful to remove any shell

fragments.

For the crab topping, heat the butter in a medium sized pan on low heat.

Add the minced garlic, cayenne and black pepper. Cook for 1-2 minutes to soften the harshness of the garlic.

Then add your crab to the pan. If using the whole crab add the brown crab meat you've picked first and warm it gently for a minute, before adding the white meat to the pan to warm through.

Add the Worcestershire sauce and finish with the chopped parsley, lemon juice and zest.

Season with sea salt and serve on top of slices of toasted sourdough bread.



NEWSLETTER



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Irish Examiner



Pearl Brasserie's cosy booths are perfect for small groups.

DINING out with someone you love (or even someone you just 'quite like') is surely one of life's great pleasures. Add in fine food, decent wine, an inviting room and polished service and you have the perfect restaurant.

Pearl Brasserie just might be that restaurant. French chef Sebastien Masi and his wife Kirsten first opened the doors in December 2000, when they were both 25, so this year will mark their 25th year in business, no mean feat.

Pearl is in a basement opposite Government Buildings and they have turned what could be a disadvantage into an asset thanks to clever lighting, quality paintings and furnishings, and warm colours including a large tank filled with colourful, lively fish. Besides the dining rooms there are booths and nooks to add to the romance of the space and make you feel cosseted. I can't think of a better spot for a romantic meal, and don't forget that Valentine's Day is fast approaching.

We visited on a Tuesday following a trip to see the annual Turner Exhibition in the National Gallery, which is just a walk away. While not full, there were enough patrons on the evening to create an atmospheric hum of happy people sounds, impressive for a Tuesday in January.

Pearl offers a 'Surprise Tasting Menu' at €99 per person, but we were happy to stick with the à la carte, where starters ranged from €16 to €25 and mains from €27 to €45.

Crunchy sourdough baguette, served with fine quality butter began the meal, just as it should. The mid-meal 'bread course' was fun when we encountered it first, but I think we are done with it now.

For her starter, the engineer chose that day's special of king scallops (€22) with sweet carrots and a carrot and yuzu purée, not a combination I have ever encountered before but one that worked well. Three large scallops had been correctly cooked, caramelised outside and tender inside, and the sweet tangy carrot knitted in nicely.

My fresh duck foie gras sat on a slice

A heart-warming treasure of a place

LESLIE WILLIAMS

Pearl Brasserie

20 Merrion St Upper,
Dublin 2

Tel: 01-6613572

pearl-brasserie.ie

Monday-Tuesday:
5.30-9pm

Wednesday-Friday:
12-2.30pm, 5.30-
9.30pm

Saturday: 5.30 - 9.30pm

of toasted brioche, and had been nicely caramelised on the outside but remained luxuriously buttery soft inside. The earthy, sweet-savoury foie gras flavours were offset by a lightly sweet cinnamon and apple compote and an almond gel. I took up the option of a small glass of monbazillac wine (€9.50) on the side and it worked brilliantly,

cutting through the fat but also adding honey and lemon flavours.

For mains, the engineer went for halibut (€38), expertly cooked and with a light creamy prosecco sauce and blobs of black garlic sauce to add a spiky tang. Slices of confit Jerusalem artichoke added texture and earthy nutty accents while a crisp chicken skin 'galette' added crunch.

Venison loin (€42) was served pink with a rich dark jus that could have overwhelmed but was tempered by an earthy sweet cauliflower purée and ripe blackberries and a croquette of slow cooked venison shoulder, varying the textures on the plate nicely. In summary, a very well judged winter dish.

On the side, we opted for French fries (€6), which were as thin and crisp as you could hope for. Given the season I would have liked the 'truffled mash' but our waiter told us that truffle oil was an ingredient and there I will not venture, I find truffle oil a harsh and obtrusive ingredient that dominates everything it touches.

The wine list is a good size and primarily French, but not exclusively so. I selected the Pierre Vessigaud 'Saint Amour' beaujolais cru (€60), light enough for the fish and rich enough for the venison, with ripe plum and black cherry flavours. A good wine for a date, I should add, given its name.

The engineer's crème brûlée was as

the verdict

- Food: 9/10
- Drinks: 8/10
- Service: 9/10
- Atmosphere: 8/10
- Value: 8/10

the bill

Dinner for two with starters, mains, sides and desserts, plus a bottle and a glass of wine, cost €225.50.

perfect a specimen of this classic as I think I've encountered. Rich vanilla custard topped with a thin layer of artfully caramelised sugar — a bargain at €8. My pistachio financier (€14) was fluffy and light and topped with a buttery, nutty pistachio cream and (best of all) a bitter sweet Amerena cherry liqueur sorbet.

Service on the night was impeccable, attentive and informative, but not overbearing or intrusive. We loved our meal and yes, we spent a little more than intended by ordering some of the more expensive dishes like foie gras, but this last was an indulgent, classically French starter perfectly executed.

Like the meal in general, it warmed my heart as much as it thrilled my palate. Pearl is an appropriate name

Departure Lounge

Inspiration
for your
next trip...

JILLIAN BOLGER



Michelin-starred manor

If you fancy a culinary pilgrimage, why not plan a visit to England's prestigious Lympstone Manor. Owned by Michael Caines, one of Britain's most celebrated chefs (and mentor to several top chefs now cooking in Ireland) the luxurious country house hotel is surrounded by its own vineyards.

This month, guests can enjoy a romantic one- or two-night getaway at the elegant Devon hideaway. Starting at £1,253 per night (approx €1,494) this special package includes a welcome bottle of Michael Caines MBE Classic Cuvée, a bouquet of red roses, and handmade chocolates. Think of soaking in your own private outdoor tub overlooking the estuary to Lyme Bay, with an exquisite Michelin-starred dinner to look forward to.

■ lympstonemano.co.uk



Laid back Caribbean charm

Reggae, rum, waterfalls and warmth — Jamaica is the perfect island for a fun and enchanting holiday. Staying at Couples Tower Isle at lush Ocho Rios, this all-inclusive, adult-only resort delivers big Caribbean vibes. Picture a wide sandy beach, swaying palms, snorkelling among the reefs, and sunset sails. Book by February 4 to receive two nights free on any 14-night stay between April and October. Seven nights all-inclusive from €2,379 including flights.

■ tropicsky.ie



Dreams come true

A three-night break at Disneyland Paris is more affordable than you might think. Flying from Dublin on February 4, two adults plus one child will stay at the self-catering Staycity ApartHotel, just a 10-minute drive from Parc Disneyland Paris and just 46km from Charles de Gaulle airport.

Three nights from €237.78 per person.
■ cassidytravel.ie



Landmark love affair

Steal away to Cork's Imperial Hotel for 'An Imperial Love Affair' with their new Valentine's offer. For one romantic night at this cosy, 200-year-old South Mall landmark, your room will be transformed with rose petals and a welcoming gift of chocolate strawberries and prosecco. Dinner is included and you can book a couples' treatment at the intimate spa, if you fancy adding pampering to your stay. One night B&B from €315 per couple.

■ imperialhotelcork.com



Deal of the week

Just minutes from Ireland's oldest national park, yet right in the middle of vibrant Killarney town, the Killarney Plaza Hotel & Spa sounds like the perfect spot for a mix of nature and relaxation. The Valentine's Made for Two package includes two nights B&B, chocolate-dipped strawberries and champagne in your room and dinner on one night. Head out to explore the glorious national park before returning for a spa session or downtime in the pool, followed by a rose-petal strewn room. Book February 8-15, from €229 per person.

■ killarneyplaza.com

Me & My Travels

Sean Hammond

ACONTENT creator with over 800,000 followers, 26-year-old Sean is a rising star in travel storytelling. Born in Ireland to Irish and Persian parents, his upbringing spanned multiple continents, instilling a love for exploration and a deep appreciation for diverse cultures. Here, he shares his most memorable travel experiences.

My favourite childhood holiday memory...

is spending Christmas in South Africa when I was 12. It was surreal—swimming outdoors on Christmas Day in the warm weather and going on a safari to see incredible wildlife. That trip opened my eyes to the beauty of Africa and planted the seed for my love of travel. My mum, who has friends in every corner of the world, made sure we experienced different cultures. Trips to Morocco, Dubai, and Finland also shaped my curiosity about the world.

My most memorable trip...

has to be my first big adventure as a content creator in the Philippines. I started with zero followers, no experience making content, and just a rough plan. Three days in, I rented a scooter and rode along a road lined with palm trees, with the sea crashing to my left and the sun beaming down.

It was a moment of pure clarity. I remember thinking, even if this journey doesn't work out professionally, I'm exactly where I'm meant to be. That trip gave me the confidence to keep going, and it's a memory I'll treasure forever.



My favourite city is...

Tours in France. While I'm more of a nature lover, Tours holds a special place in my heart. When I was 12, I lived there for five months as part of an exchange programme. It was where I made lifelong friends, experienced the beauty of French culture, and even had my first kiss! The city has an incredible atmosphere, especially in the summer. There's a spot by the river called Les Guinguettes, where people gather to dance and enjoy live music. Tours' rich medieval history and stunning castles make it a magical place to visit. I've been back countless times, and it always feels like coming home.

I love Mexico City too. It strikes the perfect balance between familiarity and excitement. The public transport is excellent, and the city's layout makes exploring easy. But what truly sets it apart is its vibrant culture — the food, the street art, and the energy. I loved riding the cable cars over the colourful rooftops and visiting unique spots like a library inside a repurposed plane. The juxtaposition of its modernity and tradition makes it endlessly fascinating. One of my favourite experiences was exploring its street markets. The energy, sounds, and flavours were unforgettable.



The most beautiful country I've visited is...

India. Its diversity is astonishing — from the serene backwaters of Kerala to the deserts of Jaisalmer and the snow-capped peaks of Himachal Pradesh. Each region has a distinct charm. One unforgettable night in Jaisalmer, I lay on a sand dune and counted 21 shooting stars. Moments like that remind me how magical travel can be.

India's mix of landscapes, culture, and spirituality makes it truly unparalleled. Visiting Varanasi, where rituals unfold by the Ganges, was profoundly moving and gave me a deep appreciation for the spiritual essence of the country.

My favourite thing to do while travelling...

is get outdoors, especially where mountains and water come together. Indonesia is a dream for that. Java, in particular, offers incredible experiences like hiking around volcanoes and exploring waterfalls that look like they're out of a fantasy world. I also enjoy discovering hidden beaches in Indonesia, where you can swim in crystal-clear waters and feel like you've found a secret paradise.

I don't have a traditional bucket list...

I'm spontaneous with my travel plans, often picking the cheapest flight to a unique destination. But I have a long list of places I want to explore. For me, it's not about ticking off destinations; it's about the journey and the connections I make along the way. If I had to pick one dream destination, Antarctica would be fascinating.

Interview by Jennifer McShane

The contrast between Berlin's turbulent past and vibrant present is intoxicating, writes **Jillian Bolger**

Hope and history rhyme



The iconic Brandenburg Gate, viewed from Pariser Platz.



I REMEMBER the night as clear as anything: November 9, 1989 sitting watching TV as the Berlin Wall was breached and destroyed under cover of night. I was glued to the screen, a 16-year-old studying both German and history for my Leaving Cert and astonished at the drama unfolding. The ultimate symbol of the Cold War, cutting off Allied-occupied West Berlin from East Berlin and East Germany, the impenetrable 12 foot barrier had divided the city politically, socially and economically since 1961.

One of the most significant global events of my teenage life, the Fall of the Berlin Wall began a fascination with Berlin, a city of Eastern socialism and Western affluence, and I grew up wondering what it would be like to visit such a fragmented place.

But Berlin wasn't hip 36 years ago. It was historic. It was intriguing. It was evolving. But it had many years of growth and healing to do before it would ascend the ranks to become Europe's coolest city and a tourist hotspot.

Nowadays, it outranks Paris and London in the hip stakes, a melting pot of vibrancy and creativity where the culture, music, architecture, art and food scenes continue to attract young digital nomads and creatives making the German capital their home.

I couldn't have guessed it in 1989, but I would end up studying German at university and living there for over a year and a half. After five months in Munich, I moved north to Hamburg where I would spend the next four summers working as a student.

Like all ports, Hamburg is a free-spirited city with an edgy, progressive energy that I loved. In the 90s, it was the poster boy for German creativity, its liberal and gritty spirit holding my attention. Never once was I tempted to travel west to Berlin while living there.

Then, for some inexplicable reason, I graduated with a German degree and never set foot in the country again. Until 2024. Where once German was seen as the language of progress and success, I never spoke it again, beyond a few holidays in Switzerland.

Aside from an opportunity to resurrect my questionable language skills, my visit to Berlin is nothing short of

astonishing. The landmark buildings all roll off the tongue with strange familiarity: the Reichstag, Checkpoint Charlie, Brandenburg Gate, and of course the infamous Berlin Wall.

We base ourselves in a cool little boutique hotel, Provocateur, in the upmarket neighbourhood of Charlottenburg, just off Kurfürstendamm, a wide boulevard lined with designer stores, known colloquially as Ku'damm.

It's a perfect spot for joining the City Circle hop-on hop-off bus tour, something I highly recommend. Berlin is famously spread out and a top-floor seat on the yellow double-deckers that ply the route will give you a bird's eye view of the city's architectural treasures — of which there are countless — plus a potted history via your headset as you approach each attraction.

Over a long weekend, we bus one day and walk and use public transport the next, giving us a good feel for the city as we people-watch, refuel with coffee and tick off some of the city's landmarks.

Over the weekend we'll gorge on

nostalgia at The DDR Museum, experiencing life in former East Berlin through realistic sets and interactive displays. We'll marvel at the magnificent Berlin Cathedral, an ornate, light-flooded confection dating back to the 15th century that offers sweeping vistas from its dome high above the city. We'll visit the imposing Humboldt Forum, a striking juxtaposition of Baroque palace and modern architecture that's a hub for art, culture and science. Here, the clever Global Berlin exhibition will immerse us in Berlin's past, present and future, soliciting our opinions as we exit each themed space. As exhibitions go, this one is wildly creative and an irresistible way to connect visitors to the essence of the city.

Our weekend will be underpinned by pleasure and pain as history seeks to challenge us. From Checkpoint Charlie, the notorious crossing point between the city's two sides, and the longest remaining part of the Berlin Wall, all 1.3 kilometres now adorned by murals, we'll step back in time.

Berlin's sexiest hotel

Chic and playful, Provocateur Berlin celebrates Berlin's naughtier side with its glamorous 1920s bordello style decor and quirky bedroom details. Housed in a 1911 Art Nouveau building, the Parisian style is brought to life through rich velvet drapes, dramatic chandeliers and some unexpected extras.

The Provocateur Mode button in the bedroom will project sexy visuals on your wall, complete with music to get you in the mood. A fun 'Time to tease' set by the bed includes sensual toys like feathers. The bordello style is matched by a cool cocktail bar that's packed with Berlin's Bright Young Things at the weekend. Fun and frivolous! Doubles from €121 per night.

■ [Provocateur-hotel.com](#)



Rooms are luxurious and fun with rich colours, playful details and decor influenced by a Parisian bordello.



Left: The East Side Gallery on the Berlin Wall.

Right: The facade of Berlin Cathedral on Museum Island.



Above: An aerial view of the Berlin skyline, with the city's famous TV tower and the Spree river.

Below: An actor at Checkpoint Charlie.



the Michelin-recommended tavern serves delicious, rustic food with great German wines — although take my advice and skip the Hand Cheese with Music. The matured sour milk cheese in caraway vinaigrette dish sounded delicious but it's not something I will be rushing to order again....

Berlin is a city for strolling, for

marvelling, for watching, for lingering, for exploring and for remembering. The weight of its history is as poignant as its energy is electric. It is old and youthful, serious and fun, reflective and dynamic.

I don't know why I waited so long to come, but I do know that it feels good to have Germany back in my life.



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Escape Notes

Berlin has an excellent public transport network of buses, trams and trains. Purchase a Berlin **WelcomeCard** at the arrivals hall in Berlin Brandenburg Airport. This tourist card gives you free public transport, a map, and discounts off 180 major sites and attractions. From €26 for 48 hours.

The **MuseumsPass** offers free entry to over 30 exhibitions and museums. Time slots to the Museum Island and Kulturforum must be booked in advance. Buy your ticket online to avoid queueing, €32, [visitberlin.de](#)

The City Circle bus tour arrives every 20-25 minutes across 20 stops, From €29.75, [city-circle.de](#)

■ Jillian was guest of Hotel Provocateur and Visit Berlin.
■ Plan your trip at [visitberlin.de](#)



The Berliner U-Bahn with the city's famous Oberbaum Bridge in the background.

New York & Nashville

Discover exciting New York and the home of country, Nashville. In New York, immerse yourself in world renowned art at The Met, iconic views from the Empire State Building, bike rides in Central Park and tasty diverse cuisines found on every corner. In Nashville, experience the music city, from the legends of the Grand Ole Opry to the emerging artists found in many Honky Tonks across the city. This will be an unforgettable adventure!

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Travel May 2025 | Ref 53441187

Discover the Deep South Fly Drive

Begin your Deep South Road Trip in Nashville, the heart of country music. Visit the Grand Ole Opry, experience the Honky Tonks of Downtown and the rolling green Great Smoky Mountains. Drive to Memphis, home of Elvis, the iconic Sun Studio and the soul beats of Beale Street! In charming Natchez, sitting along the great Mississippi, discover the history of the south's plantations and original trade routes. Finally, experience New Orleans' vibrant jazz music, Creole culture, and lively Bourbon Street for a truly memorable experience.

10 Nights From €2179pp
Travel Oct 2025 | Ref 53441681

Rhythms of the South Escorted Tour

Discover country music, southern charm and a whole lot of rock 'n' roll on this tour that takes in Nashville, Memphis and New Orleans. In Nashville, discover the legacy of music icons like Dolly Parton and Johnny Cash and the new scene of country music. In Memphis, immerse yourself in Beale Street, visit Sun Studio and enjoy authentic Southern cuisine at Blues City Cafe. Then in New Orleans, explore the downtown area and dance the night away in famous jazz clubs in the French Quarter. Escorted Tours offer you the chance to relax and let someone else do the driving while you experience luxury travel, the best local guides and activities.

10 Nights From €3499pp
Travel May 2025 | Ref 5343583

the Hotel Examiner

NICOLE GLENNON



Location

A short stroll from Iveagh Gardens, the Conrad sits in Dublin's quiet Earlsfort Terrace, just opposite the National Concert Hall. For those looking to enjoy a debauched night-out, Harcourt Street is a five-minute walk away. Here to shop? The green line Luas stop at Harcourt will take you to Grafton St in five minutes.

9/10

Style and design

Conrad's exterior isn't flashy — and notably, for a five-star property, it's missing a doorman. But while first impressions didn't blow us away, there's lots to appreciate inside. Lemuel's bar, inspired by Jonathon Swift's Gulliver's Travels is a delight, with a brass ceiling adorned with a map of Lemuel Gulliver's adventures. The Coburg brasserie — named for the Iveagh Gardens' original name — features clever equine details like intricate leather and brass details that reference the Garden's Royal Horse Bazaar of the 1800s. The Terrace, the most recent fit-out, feels less restrained. A bright, fun space with pink walls and delightful abstract art by Galway's Ciara O'Neill, it brings a welcome hit of dopamine to the hotel's offering.

8.5/10

Service

We don't get off on the best foot. There's no doorman and no one around to offer to take our bags. Check-in is pleasant, but while we are given information about breakfast and check-out time, we aren't given any on the gym (open 24hrs a day) or other amenities.

Welcome aside, service throughout the rest of our stay is warm, friendly, and attentive. In Lemuel's, Katie listens to our usual cocktail order and helps us select one she thinks we'll like from their original menu (she was right). In The Coburg, Marcin is clearly passionate about the food he's serving and

The Conrad, Dublin

This five-star property offers elevated dining, glamorous cocktails and friendly staff but its rooms fail to impress

Our rating
8/10

all the sockets and USB connections one could need. If you don't mind the prices, the mini fridge is well-stocked.

Now, to the gripes. Despite turning up our thermostat to the max, we can't get the room a comfortable temperature. We're disappointed to find the TV isn't a smart one — we imagine most guests would expect to be able to log into their streaming services. The bathroom offers illuminated mirrors, a gorgeous marble sink, and stunning Byredo toiletries but our heart drops at the shower head above a bathtub. Has anyone ever had a comfortable shower in one of these?

7/10

In-room perks

Butler's chocolates, Nespresso machines, and the aforementioned Byredo toiletries in the Mojave Ghost scent are some of the perks here. Neatly packaged dental, vanity, and shave kits are handy, and there's an offer of a complimentary shoe shine too.

8/10

On the menu

From a tasty lunch to a three-course evening meal and the breakfast spread of dreams, the hotel has all options covered.

takes a real interest in getting our thoughts after each course.

8.5/10

Guest rooms

Our king premier room with a large bay window is perfectly lovely — but with rates starting from €387 a night, we were expecting a bit more.

Let's start with the positives — a king-sized bed with 300 thread count sheets and heavy black-out curtains offers a very sound sleep. There's a sizeable desk with adjustable lamp, comfy leather chair and

Despite it being particularly quiet during our visit, we found The Coburg, the hotel's main restaurant, to be a highlight of the stay. Fresh ravioli filled with wild mushroom and goats cheese, a chargrilled Hereford steak cooked to perfection, and slow-cooked lamb ragout are all delicious. For dessert, the Paris-Brest is a monster we feel doesn't belong in an otherwise very sophisticated and elegant dinner, but the brownie is a showstopper.

Breakfast offers some of those extra five-star touches — pre-made green juices and smoothies, prosecco, a DIY Bloody Mary station and raw honeycomb are some of the buffet stand-outs.

9/10

Activities and amenities

Aside from the gym, there isn't much. A pool is never a given in a five-star property, but we did miss it here. There is no spa or thermal suite facilities either.

6/10

The bill

Rooms from €346.

■ The Hotel Examiner was a guest of Conrad Dublin.

Room to improve? Upgrading all TVs to the smart variety seems an obvious one. A small thermal suite with a hydromassage would be a welcome addition to the five-star property's amenity offering. **Accessibility?** One fully accessible room with semi-accessible rooms available offering partial features. Common areas are fully accessible. **EV Chargers?** Yes. **Family-friendly?** Dedicated family suites are themed around fairies and animals. Kids' menus are available, with colouring books and stuffed toys available for purchase at reception. **Dogs welcome?** Guests can bring up to two pets per room (no more than 20 kilograms each). A surcharge of €50 per night applies.

■ Conrad Dublin, Earlsfort Terrace, Dublin 2.
■ hilton.com/en/hotels/dubhcci-conrad-dublin

Screen Time

DECLAN BURKE

Companion ★★★★★

Hard Truths ★★★★★

Blue Road: The Edna O'Brien Story ★★★★★

Film of the Week

At first glance, **Companion** (15A) seems to be an inventive and blackly comic thriller about what might happen if humanity allows technology to escape the firm grip of our guiding hand.

As Iris (Sophie Thatcher) and Josh (Jack Quaid) drive into the remote countryside for a weekend away at the lakeside cabin retreat of Josh's Russian friend Sergey (an hilariously bedraggled Rupert Friend), the feel-good buzz of their quirky meet-cute at a farmer's market gives way to an uneasy sense that Josh is more than a little controlling. Exactly how controlling becomes clear when Iris, desperately defending herself against Sergey's unwanted advances, stabs their host to death — a feat that should be impossible, according to the shocked Josh, because Iris is 'an emotional support robot' who has been programmed to never cause harm to humans.

Having established the movie's essential conflict as that of human and human-like (or artificial) intelligence, writer-director Drew Hancock then springboards us into a story chock-a-block with twists and turns that gradually corkscrews its way down through the cutting-edge sci-fi to get to one of the oldest conflicts of all.

Jack Quaid is strong here as the very embodiment of white male privilege, an apparently amiable and easy-going chap who is secretly — and literally — controlling Iris via the app on his phone (the intelligence level Josh has set for Iris tells us all we'll ever need to know about who he truly is).

Sophie Thatcher, meanwhile, is terrific in the lead; given the very difficult role of fleshing out her mechanical character with nuance and subtlety, she responds brilliantly, and especially in the scenes where Iris is forced to confront the fact that her emotions are simply pre-programmed responses.

Drew Hancock has obviously watched his fair share of classic sci-fi — there are echoes of *Blade Runner* here, along with



Companion, above, stars Sophie Thatcher and Jack Quaid. Below: Blue Road: The Edna O'Brien Story.



Marianne Jean-Baptiste stars in "Hard Truths," directed by Mike Leigh.

The Stepford Wives and *Westworld* — and he has repackaged the most telling elements of those in an entertaining and thought-provoking thriller.

■ **theatrical release**

Mike Leigh's **Hard Truths** (12A) stars Marianne Jean-Baptiste as Pansy, a London woman unable to leave her house and suffering from OCD, depression, and acute anxiety.

Her husband Curtley (David Webber) and adult son Moses (Tuwaine Barrett) resent her aggressive micro-managing of their lives; the only person who reaches out to Pansy with any affection is her sister Chantelle (Michele Austin), but even the upbeat, laughter-loving Chantelle has her limits.

Pansy's self-perpetuating doom-spiral is difficult to watch, mainly because

Marianne Jean-Baptiste is superbly brittle even as her constantly simmering swirl of fear and rage erupts at regular intervals, and she gets terrific support from Michele Austin as the ostensibly level-headed Chantelle, although it's clear that Chantelle has her own issues and that her well of sympathy is running dry.

The word covid appears nowhere in the script, but Mike Leigh is powerfully tapping into a silent epidemic of mental health issues that have yet to be publicly addressed.

■ **theatrical release**

Blue Road: The Edna O'Brien Story (12A) features plenty of footage of the young author in her pomp as her early novels — the Country Girls trilogy, banned here in Ireland — propelled her

into a world of literary stardom and Hollywood glamour. It features some impressive talking heads too, including Anne Enright, Gabriel Byrne and her son Carlo Gébler.

The most compelling parts of Sinead O'Shea's documentary, however, feature the older Edna as she looks back on her life in straight-to-camera interviews, which are intercut with examples of the many obstacles (most of them man-shaped) she was obliged to overcome.

Austere and still impossibly elegant, the grande dame of Irish letters took the Irish novel into places it didn't know it needed to go. To the end she remained a woman who achieved much, regretted little, and played no small part in dragging Ireland kicking and screaming into the modern world.

■ **theatrical release**



PAT FITZPATRICK

Boxing Clever

BOYZONE were always more interesting as people than musicians. So it makes sense to put **Boyzone: No Matter What** on Sky Documentaries, rather than Sky Arts.

This superbly knitted three-part documentary reminds you that Boyzone had a touch of Shakespeare about them. There's fun, rivalry, secrets, all the ups and downs as they soared, split, and reunited more than once. There's the tragedy of Stephen Gately's death from a congenital heart condition. And there's Louis Walsh.

You sit up a bit every time he appears on screen, he still plays the

patronising father figure, pointing out the band started to believe their own publicity even though it was written by him. He wasn't always writing the truth, openly admitting he made up stories (including a plane crash) to keep them in the tabloids week-on-week. It did the job. He took a bunch of Dublin guys with more ambition than talent, got them on *The Late Late Show* doing a half-thrown together dance routine, borrowed 10 grand to record a forgettable cover of 'Working My Way Back to You', and five years later they were a global sensation, performing in front of 100,000 people in Hyde Park.

This London gig was a cliff-hanger for the band. Stephen Gately, the heart-throb and only natural pop star in the band, had been keeping his homosexuality a closely-guarded secret. *The Sun* gave him the classic tabloid ultimatum — come-out as gay in our paper, or we'll reveal it ourselves. So after coming out, he was nervous of the crowd's reaction.

They loved him even more. This part of the story had contributions from all sides — Gately's sister Michelle, the band, Louis Walsh, and the journalist who wrote the story in *The Sun*. The only one missing was Gately, who passed away in 2009.

It's the access that makes this one of the best pop documentaries I've ever seen. Ronan Keating is honest, both unsure of himself and nakedly ambitious. Shane Lynch is worryingly intense but thoughtful with it. Keith Duffy is charming, yet a bit vulnerable. For once, Mikey Graham is the standout performer. The other three are slender, still with a touch of pop-star. Graham is more like your Dad's friend, a pleasant man with something bothering him.

Louis Walsh says he thought Graham was "happy being Michael, the quiet one at the back". He wasn't — and that has clearly taken its toll.

Wedding of the Week

Eve Kelliher

Cork bride and groom Emma and Conor's big day is perfectly pitched

THE first goal for newlyweds with a passion for sport? To sprint off for a kickaround as soon as they've said their "I do's".

Cork couple Emma Farmer from Aghada and Conor Cotter from Kilmichael exchanged vows in St Finbarr's Church in Kilmichael.

The bride and groom "are both GAA-obsessed", says Emma. "Conor plays hurling and football for Kilmichael and I play ladies football for Aghada. We love soccer too — I'm a diehard Man United fan and Conor supports Arsenal."

Emma herself has played soccer for Cork City and internationally and, in GAA, is an All-Ireland-winning Cork senior ladies football star. At club level, just two months before putting her best foot forward down the aisle, the bride kicked three of the points that ensured Aghada won the ladies county championship for the first time.

And despite her protestations — "I'm not into fashion at all," jokes Emma — she looked every bit as elegant when she exchanged her beloved jersey for a designer bridal gown.

"I got my wedding dress from Say I Do in Middleton. It was a Jesus Peiro brand — that's all I can tell you about the dress! — and my shoes were Converse as I don't do heels. Conor got his suit in Suited Menswear in Middleton."

Kilmichael GAA pitch was the picture-perfect backdrop for the post-ceremony photoshoot. "Our photographer James and our videographer Juraj Novotny were absolutely brilliant," says Emma.

The bride, a secondary school teacher in Middleton, and groom, who works in human resources at Cork County Hall, met seven years ago on a night out in Reardens in Cork and Conor proposed on the grounds of the five-star Park Hotel Kenmare, Co Kerry.

They crossed the border again on their wedding day — first stopping off at Ross Castle, Killarney, for some camera-friendly moments before joining their guests again for their reception at The



Conor Cotter and Emma Farmer's bridal party got the ball rolling amid the colours of Kilmichael (left) and Aghada GAA clubs.

Pictures: James O'Driscoll

Heights Hotel Killarney. The newlyweds travelled in style thanks to Cork Wedding Cars and savoured every moment of their big day.

"The lead-up to the wedding was very chill — we had everything organised," says Emma.

Emma had four bridesmaids, Lisa Ring, Laura Burchill, Emma Keoghan, and Brid O'Regan and Conor's groomsmen were Brendan Cotter, Oliver McCarthy, James O'Leary, and Denny Quinlan. The bride and groom were married by a family friend of the Cotters, Fr Joe Coughlan. "The ceremony was lovely and that's all thanks to Fr Joe and Lynda Sloane-Cusack, our wedding singer, whose voice is amazing," adds Emma.

Later that evening, at the reception, wedding band Bog the Donkey kept everyone on the dance floor. "Our first

dance was to The Pogues song 'A Rainy Night in Soho'," says Emma. "We loved every minute of our wedding day. What really made it so special was having all our family, friends and teammates (Aghada ladies footballers and Kilmichael hurlers and footballers) present."

Guests tucked into a delectable wedding cake by The Bake and Bite, Clonakilty/Kilmichael and Nóra Ni Luasa created the floral decor. "My hair was done by the lovely Dawn Monahan and my makeup was by the beautiful Regina from Core Health & Beauty, Middleton," adds Emma.

The Aghada-based newlyweds are now looking forward to their honeymoon.

"The destination decision is still in the works but we are thinking of going to Dubai or Cancún," says Emma.

■ If you would like your wedding featured in Weekend, email eve.kelliher@examiner.ie



Left: Emma Farmer and Conor Cotter, with their daughter Ellie.

Above: Emma and Conor with Eileen and Liam Cotter and Yvonne and Pa Farmer.

Alie Sherlock



My Saturday

07.00

I get up at 7am on Saturdays. It pains me to get up at this time, even after doing it for years. I started busking in Cork but now I have lots of friends in Dublin and my dad has too — we’ve a nice little community in Dublin.

08.00

I’ll get up as late as I can before I have to leave the house. Usually I bring my makeup bag in the car. I am not a morning person even though I really want to be. I’ll have some breakfast and run out the door to the car at about 8am — we aim to get to Dublin by 10.30am. If I wasn’t busking, I’d work out on either Saturday or Sunday. I’d head to the gym and do a mix of cardio and strength training. During the week I set myself the challenge of learning four or five new songs every week. I’ll be working on social media content, doing correspondence and doing the accounts for my company. I always dedicate a day to going out with my friends too.

09.00

When we’re in the car I’ll often make a set list although sometimes when I’m busking on the street or playing on stage I like to diverge from the list and mix it up a bit. You never know what’s going to happen on Grafton Street — it can be a wild place! I love to perform, there’s an excitement with busking in that you have to bring the audience in in a way that you don’t at a concert. You’re doing your best to win people over who are just walking down the street or shopping.

10.30

There are five spots on Grafton Street where people are allowed to busk and there’s a queuing system – I like the spots at Bewleys and at Brown Thomas. I’ll do an hour in the morning and then later I’ll play again. I’m always with friends so the day goes by really fast between gigs. There’s a huge difference between playing covers and playing your own material. People already know the covers, whether they like them or not, but I love playing my own material. I’ve always been super critical of any of the songs I’ve written and I’ll be nervous playing them in public for the first time. If I’ve just written a song and I perform it I’ll always be keen to see people’s reactions. There were really good reactions to ‘How Love Works’ and ‘Ex-Friend’ so we released them.

12.00

When I’m playing to my audience, it’s always such a buzz. You never know what’s going to happen though. It’s not

that common, but sometimes people, especially guys, can be too familiar.

When you’re busking you always have to be aware that anything can happen — on the street people can do unexpected things. It’s great to have my dad chaperoning me, I know other buskers my age who’ve been harassed and had their stuff robbed because they were unaccompanied.

I’m really looking forward to my upcoming tour — I had such a great time in my last run of shows and can’t wait to do it again. I always love to have a chat with the crowd — they’ll shout stuff up and I’ll answer back. I’m looking forward to heading back to the UK — I am playing Glasgow, Manchester and London this time as well as venues across Europe and the US.

18.00

We love to go for dinner when I’m finished performing. I love Thai food in particular. We love to try new places but if we can’t decide where to go we’ll often end up in Nando’s.

22.00

We might go out after we’ve eaten, but usually we’ll be back in our hotel by 10pm. We’ll go through the content that we’ve recorded that day and do some editing. I buzz off the energy of the crowd and performing is so much fun for me — I’m always full of adrenaline after every performance. If it’s been a stressful day, with the shops complaining or another busker arguing then I’ll be drained, but we steer clear of those spots, do what we know best and it’s always great.

22.30

I usually go to bed around 10.30pm. I never bring my phone into the bedroom at night because it’s so addictive and I know that I won’t be able to stop scrolling. I’ll usually read a book or watch an episode of what-ever series I’m following. Once I’m asleep nothing can wake me. I have to set about 20 alarms to wake up in the morning. I always have the best intentions to go to the gym on a Sunday morning, but I usually wake up too late.

■ Allie Sherlock has amassed a global fan base of over 14.5 million followers. The 19-year-old Cork native regularly performs on Grafton Street in Dublin and has just announced a headline tour starting in March and taking in venues in the UK, Europe and the US. Her new single ‘Ex-Friend’, written with her collaborator Ollie Green, is out now. alliesherlock.com

Interview by Ruth O’Connor

The Quiz

Noel Welch

- 1 . How many events in an Olympic Decathlon?

2 . Flemish and Walloon regions are in which country?

3 . Who had a hit in 1972 with ‘Longhaired Lover from Liverpool’?

4 . Who was the former frontman with the Pogues?

5 . In what county is the Inishowen peninsula, the largest peninsula in Ireland?

6 . Who won *I’m A Celebrity* in 2024?

7 . True or false, Bjorn Borg never won the US Open?

8 . How many zeros in one trillion?

9 . Which Martin Handford illustrated character has a red and white jumper and hat?

10 . Sabado is the Spanish word for which day?

11 . What is the missing word in this phrase: ‘Adding insult to.....’?

12 . Antananarivo is the capital of which island in the Indian Ocean?

13 . What is a mallard?

14 . Who wrote *The Chronicles of*

- Narnia*?

15 . Which TD was the first elected to the new Dáil after the 2024 General Election?

16 . Which country’s primary seaport is Durres?

17 . Skopje is the capital of which country in the Balkan Peninsula?

18 . In what film did Daniel Craig play James Bond for the first time?

19 . Which nut is used to make marzipan?

20 . Who is pictured right?



ANSWERS

- 1 . Ten; 2. Belgium; 3. Jimmy Osmond; 4. Shane McGowan; 5. Co. Donegal; 6. Danny Jones; 7. True; 8. Twelve zeros; 9. Where’s Wally; 10. Saturday; 11. In-jury; 12. Madagasgascar; 13. Wild duck; 14. C.S. Lewis; 15. Jennifer Carroll MacNeill; 16. Albania; 17. North Macedonia; 18. Casino royale in 2006; 19. Almonds; 20. Spanish footballer, Nico Williams