

Weekend

Irish Examiner

05.04.2025

Generation overload

Dermot Whelan
on our obsession
with busyness





Esther McCarthy

emc@examiner.ie

It takes grit to start over when you mess up

IT might be hard to believe now, but I was painfully shy as a child — outside the house. At home, I was as brazen as the next kid, but in the glare of the gaze of the general public, I shrank. I hated people looking at me.

I remember the exquisite agony of being ushered out to dance in the Owenahincha Hotel where we used to go for holidays with my aunty. The band playing, everyone swinging, I would refuse point blank to go on the dance floor.

Only my grandad Tom's gentle request to join him would get me out there, where I counted down the seconds until I could flee back to the safety of the tables. I was convinced EVERYONE was looking at me. I've since realised that no one gives a jot about me because they're all too busy worrying about themselves, and now I'll dance literally anywhere, much to my children's horror.

At the sides of pitches to keep warm, a seat shimmy in the car, a boogie in the kitchen, and once, I tried to moonwalk away from a particularly awkward parent/teacher meeting. It just felt like the right move at the time.

I have nothing but respect and admiration for all the children participating in the Feis Maitiú at the moment.

For the uninitiated — or those of you with the misfortune of not being from Cork — Feis Maitiú 2025 is a music and drama festival held annually in the city. It was part of our childhood; if you weren't taking part (shy me) you knew someone who was, usually because they had rags in their hair for a couple of days before their slot, to achieve the fanciest hairstyle possible in 1980s Cork — ringlets.

Usually the reserve of Commu-

nions or weddings, this torturous rite of passage involved sections of hair being wrapped with torn bedsheets and knotted so tight your scalp felt like it was lifting from your skull. No fancy air wrap devices or straighteners for us. Oh no, you suffered for your tight curls back in the day.

Any kid who does drama classes or learns music in Cork can enter the feis. This year, it's running from the end of January to the start of April, and it's been going since 1927. It's a big deal.

Much like my younger self, my older boys would have rather eaten their own toes with a bit of salt than go up on stage and say a poem, but the youngest fella has a bit of flair about him and enters for the first time this year.

We plead him to practice his poem or at the very least, say it for us before the big day, just so we know he knows the words, but no amount of cajoling can budge him.

"It'll be a surprise," he tells us firmly any time we invite him to recite it. His drama teacher is brilliant, they've been practicing for months, sure it'll be grand, his dad and I tell each other. So last Saturday, we are up bright and early, the outfit is ready, the hair is coiffed (fingers racked through it for him, dry shampoo for me), and the entry form is printed and carefully placed in the handbag.

We queue with the other excited parents and the potential future Cork Oscar winners, traipse into the hall, and the kids are called in batches by their number. Our fella is in the second batch, so we know the routine by the time he's called up. There are two poems that the girls and boys have to choose from, so we know them off by heart by the end too. *Samantha Is Sobbing* by Gareth Owen and *Postcard* by Tony Langham.

It's a proper stage, with lights, there are prizes at stake for the winners, with a professional adjudicator in the audience along with all us mummies, daddies, grandparents and siblings.

It's daunting, 10-year-old me would have died a death having to walk out, alone, remembering to stand on the mark, to look at the adjudicator, to smile, make the connection, don't use your hands, take your time, let your face express the emotions behind the words, respect the tempo, don't rush, and that's before remembering the actual words of the poem. One by one they come, each one a warrior, each one a winner.

Then, it's our fella's turn. He walks out, cool enough, he looks calm. He stands bang on the mark on the stage, looks up and out at the adjudicator, waits for the nod, then starts the poem: "I didn't want to come to Spain, But now I'm really glad I came."

He stalls, realising he forgot to say the title and the author, runs his hands through his hair and says, quite clearly for all those in the back... "Oh for fuck's sake."

I hear an audible gasp and realise it's from me.

Then he starts again, from the top, performs it magnificently without a fault or a quiver, and finishes with a little Shakespearean flourish and a bow before walking off the stage.

I couldn't be prouder. He may not have got a certificate or a medal, but the life lesson is a valuable one: You'll mess up in this life, but you can always start again, and that takes grit.

Maybe we'll practice saying fudge or fiddlesticks to express exasperation though. To be fair, he promised us a surprise, and boy, did he deliver.

this week

Features

8 Cover: Dermot Whelan

11 Passing the baton:

Joe McNamee meets Denis Cotter and Dave O'Mahony as a new chapter begins in *Paradiso*

14 Why not her?:

As Linda Coogan-Byrne releases her manifesto for change, Aoife Barry catches up with the pioneering music publicist

Style & Beauty

18 Annmarie O'Connor styles sweet pastels

20 Kate Demolder rounds up the best of April's new beauty buys

Examiner Eats

21 The Menu

22 Darina Allen

24 Michelle Darmody

26 Sarah Butler

28 Aishling Moore

29 Wine with Leslie

Examiner Escapes

32 The world's best walks

35 Me & My Travels:

Pippa O'Connor Ormond



Weekend Editor: Vickie Maye
weekend@examiner.ie
Assistant Editor:
Nicole Glennon
Food & Travel Editor:
Jillian Bolger
jillian.bolger@examiner.ie
Advertising: Conor Brougham
021 4274455
Design: Jay Carcione
Cover: Nina Val

New,
noteworthy
and novel

Desire Lines



The linen collection

Kindred of Ireland, founded by husband and wife duo Joel and Amy Anderson from Tyrone, has just launched its new collection and we're in love. The most striking element is the brat, inspired by a historical garment that was often used as a cloak by day, and a blanket by night. Traditionally made of wool, the Northern Irish brand has reimagined it in linen with this lime green variety a particularly boujee way to embrace a brat girl summer.. Brat top €560.95, and Parachute Skirt, €584.95
■ kindredofireland.com



The designer pop-up

These days, we try to keep the circular economy as much as our wallets in mind when adding to our wardrobe, so news of this latest pre-loved designer pop-up was well-received.
ReRuns will come to Dublin's Fade Street this April 27 and 28 offering up to 70% off designer brands including Prada, Fendi and Chanel. Access to the sale costs just €5, with tickets available from Eventbrite to reserve a time slot in advance.
■ exa.mn/reruns



The hair extensions

Irish brand Cascata Hair has redefined the hair extension industry. Its seamless, luxury clip-in extensions, made from 100% ethically sourced human hair, require no backcombing – and no hair damage.
Founded by award-winning hairstylist Emma King, Cascata Hair, meaning waterfall in Italian, promises 'confidence that flows'. With a diverse selection of 19 bespoke colours, the extensions come in Full Volume Sets and Side Fillers. Available online, or visit Cork's Sobe Brown for advice and a colour match.
■ cascatahair.ie



The Easter decoration

We'd expect no less from the host of At Your Service. Francis Brennan's Easter collection for Dunnes includes a touch of fun – the decorations feature some that are LED battery operated to light up the home too. Every house should have one. Priced from €8 - €15.
■ dunnesstores.com



The gamechanger

It's hard to wrap your head around, but the IDA x Guinness Never Settle boot is the first soft-ground boot engineered specifically for female athletes. It had its debut during the first round of the Women's Six Nations last week with Ireland co-captain Edel McMahon and teammate Neve Jones just some of the athletes sporting this game-changing shoe.
For now, the boots are exclusively available to those competing at the elite level, but a wider public release of the boots is in the works. Sign up to the IDA's newsletter to be the first to know when they launch.
■ idasports.com



The dinner

Last night saw The Station House Hotel in Kilmessan, County Meath kick off the first of three Boyne Valley Tasting Dinners. Recently added to Ireland's Blue Book, the charming converted railway station has always been known for its quality food.
The seven-course tasting menu will showcase fantastic local ingredients, including The Wooded Pig cured meats, vegetables from Swainstown Farm and Boyne Valley Cheeses, all paired with wines. Bookings can be made for April 18 and June 13, for €90 per person (€140 to include wine pairing), or book dinner with accommodation from €215 per person sharing (without wine pairing, €50 pp extra to include wine pairing).
This includes tea and scones on arrival, the tasting dinner, and an overnight stay with breakfast the following morning.
■ stationhousehotel.ie



The festival

Big fan of your coffee? Keep April 12 or 13 free in your diary as Dublin's Coffee Festival returns.
Over the course of the weekend, you can take part in workshops on home filter brewing and latte art (beginners and advanced varieties available), with plenty of interesting talks on topics like fermentation, forging a career in coffee and the rise of coffee alternatives.
■ dublincoffeesfest.com



Addiction can affect anyone
Need help with your
or a loved one's addiction?



Call us in confidence on:
021 4887110
www.taborgroup.ie



Walk the Camino Frances and Experience Fatima

**22nd Sept
1st Oct 2025**
ex Dublin

Contact:
valerie.buckley@msecmissions.ie
Tel: 021 4543988
Fundraising pilgrimage



Compiled by Vickie Maye, Nicole Glennon & Jillian Bolger | weekend@examiner.ie



I hate AI hype in almost every way a thing can be hated

THIS week, the Society of Authors called on the British government to hold Meta accountable for its use of copyrighted works from its members. This followed the news that the tech giant had allegedly downloaded over 7.5m titles from a book piracy website. The protesting authors are accusing Meta of breaching copyright laws to train its language models without compensating the authors responsible.

"I'm a crime writer — I understand theft when I see it" said Val McDermid of the case, joining the ranks of authors like Kazuo Ishiguro, Joanne Harris, Richard Osman, and Tom Stoppard in objecting to Meta's actions. *The Atlantic* published a searchable database of the millions of books stolen, which I promptly used to discover that my own memoir had been included in the heist. I can only presume the Society of Authors did not have my email to hand when they were drafting the letter, and will forgive them for failing to contact me for my thoughts.

I am, famously, not averse to making this issue all about myself. I've written about the dozens of AI clones of my own book available on Amazon — one of which I even bought so I could probe it for hidden meanings. I was the first journalist to publish a thorough digest of the AI-ridden script for the disastrous Glasgow Wonka event in January of last year. More startling still was the reaction to a (relatively mild) piece on AI's deleterious effects on social media last February which, five hours later, resulted in my X account being nuked by the world's most famous free speech absolutist — an event later addressed in an Oireachtas meeting with X executives.

It won't be news to anyone who knows me, or who reads this column with any regularity, that I hate AI Hype. I specify "Hype" because, obviously, there are areas of AI that show promise, and it would be churlish for anyone to claim otherwise.

For everyday people, the basic functions provided by large language models for assembling and editing unwieldy documents or making short work of rote and time-consuming tasks is a real boon. I may not think that these kinds of features — "spicy autocomplete" being my favourite description — are the magical, earth-shattering revelations that Big AI wants us to think they are, but I welcome anything that removes some of the tedious admin that takes people away from their work or passions.

Its use-cases for pattern recognition in science, medicine and linguistics are exciting, and could become more exciting still. And, if you simply appreciate it as a fun little thing to play around with or chat nonsense to, I have no issue with that either.

By AI Hype, however, I mean the opposite. I mean the forward-facing view of AI that rejects these limited, unsexy applications, in favour of literally everything else. The sort of AI that is presented in blustering paeans from every tech conference CEO; every breathless news article that posits it as the answer to all of life's problems; every asinine commitment from a politician, promising to incorporate it into each of our everyday lives and every sector of our economy, because otherwise "we'll fall behind".

All of which leads to a reality where 72,000 companies worldwide now claim to specialise in machine learning, and 82% of all companies say they're making inroads in AI optimisation.

I hate all of this in almost every way a thing can be hated. I hate the factless waffle that surrounds Big AI's every improbable goal. I hate how insipidly stupid, or just plain evil, those goals so often are, and the yawning chasm between them and any form of achievable reality. I hate that Big AI's successes are inflated and

"I hate that writers and artists must suffer the indignity of being pickpocketed by the richest men who ever lived"

its failures ignored — or are even categorised as hilarious mis-steps, like when AI chatbots tell people to eat poisonous mushrooms, put glue on pizza, or make air diffusers from chlorine gas.

I hate that Big AI consumes so much energy that every time you generate a six-fingered portrait of Anne Frank or a scene from the Vietnam war in the style of Studio Ghibli, you might as well just kill a polar bear with a crossbow. I hate that it can run roughshod over every copyright law and environmental protection on the planet in pursuit of the data it needs to continue failing, with no consequences save for the enrichment of the worst people on Earth, who have managed to make all of this magical bullshit seem sensible to an intellectual class comprised of people I wouldn't trust to print an email.

And, yes, I hate what Big AI means for culture. I hate that writers and artists must suffer the indignity of being pickpocketed by the richest men who've ever lived. I hate the constant, deadening marketing of machine-generated slop as a replacement for human thought and creativity. I hate every shiny, godawful image from an "AI artist", and each lifeless line of pilfered prose, Frankensteined into existence by an "AI author", posited as a substitute for illustrators and writers facing pay and working conditions already decimated by assaults on their professions from those self-same Silicon Valley hordes.

For decades now, tech founders have recognised the knowledge gap between themselves and everyone else; their investors, the media, world governments, and the public at large. In that sense, AI was the perfect pitch at the perfect time.

Some years ago, I hoped our recent experiences of speculative tech bubbles for blockchain, crypto, and NFTs, would serve as cautionary tales, warnings to be heeded and learned from. They were not. It turns out they were intelligence tests. And tests that we all, collectively, failed. If we continue to let Silicon Valley's AI hype machine dictate our lives, our headlines, our politics, and our culture, then more fool us.

Increasingly, I find AI's failure to approach the intelligence of a human being more alarming than ever. Because, from where I'm looking, we don't look that smart at all.

The cult of busyness

When it comes to educating the public on the dangers of constant busyness, Dermot Whelan has certainly earned his credentials. The former breakfast radio host talks to **Gemma Fullam** about the road to a calmer life



Dermot Whelan is lending a big hand to his audiences as he raises awareness of benefits of meditation. Pictures: Nina Val

WHEN Dermot Whelan tells me that 67% of men would rather electrocute themselves than sit with their own thoughts, I believe him. Probably because I'd be part of the 25% of women who would do the same. Stand-up comedian may be one of multi-hyphenate Whelan's many hats but this is no joke. He's quoting stats from a 2015 study at the University of Virginia in which scientists found that quietly entertaining our own thoughts is shockingly difficult for many of us.

The former *Dermot & Dave Show* co-host didn't let those stark percentages throw him off his mission to bring meditation to the masses, though. Aware of the practice's perception as "very serious" and "deep" and marketed more towards women, he came up with the genius hack of combining it with comedy to make it more palatable to all.

He seems to have hit on something with his bonkers mash-up — "like mixing MMA with flower arranging" is how he puts it — and has just concluded a three-month run of his *Busy & Wrecked* tour, playing to audiences who are, he says, "about 60/40 women to men".

Women are always surprised by how many men come to his shows — albeit some are dragged along — and it thrills him that he's reaching the guys.

"I get such a wonderful buzz when I look out into the audience and see so many men," he says, adding that one of the things he's asked the most is, 'How do I get my husband into this stuff?' Whelan freely admits his wife, artist Corrina Earlie, "was into this stuff long before me". He thought he was open, he says, but he wasn't really. "I was quite cynical about it."

He's long since done a 180 on the cynicism and, when he meets me on a sunny Friday in Dublin, his warm, calm vibe is testament to the fact that he practises what he preaches. His first book, 2023's *Mind Full*, an "incense-free" guide to meditation, was peppered with anecdotes of his journey from stressed-out to zen, and *Busy and Wrecked*, the book, takes up where that left off. It promises to help the busy-and-wrecked (all of us?) "create space and energy for the people and things that really matter". Whelan says he wrote the book "I wish I could have found".

For much of his career, the Limerick native could have been the poster boy for 'busy and wrecked' — working seven days a week for five months straight at one point; at another, doing three hours of radio in the morning, touring a live show with Dave Moore at night as well as "doing all the other things I normally do" and keeping his head above water with "disco naps" in his car. It wasn't sustainable and he was, as the poem goes, not waving but drowning. He just needed to realise it.

The youngest of six, he'd been an anxious teen, although he hadn't the vocabulary to identify it as that back then as neither anxiety nor depression were part of the lexicon of 1980s Ireland.

"I had no self-awareness," he says of his younger self. "I thought everybody felt like that. I thought everybody had a racing heart and sweated all the time. Or if they didn't, I thought just that was... actually, I don't even think I thought about it that deeply. I just knew I was uncomfortable at the time." A self-confessed "doer", he spent his early 20s working behind the scenes in film and TV until getting his break on radio at 27. At 31, he began moonlighting as a stand-up comedian.

Listening to Whelan list off the various hats he's worn simultaneously throughout his career makes me feel exhausted. All the busy and wrecked-ness was bound to catch up with him. And in his 30s, it did.

On his way to perform at Kilkenny's Cat Laughs, he had such a severe panic attack that he thought he was going to die. It took him a few more years, a drunken fall — alcohol had become a crutch; after a few drinks, his "critical inner voice would get really quiet" — and a serendipitous encounter with a meditation teacher before he finally began to learn the lesson the universe was trying to impart.

He began meditating and took to it like a duck to water. "It felt very natural to me, and I was able to go quite deep very quickly. I realise that doesn't happen for everybody." He practised meditation on and off until the disco-nap phase happened — "I was just in survival mode" — and he found himself crying in a GP's office. She told him she was at breaking point too, and the realisation that running on empty wasn't sustainable or healthy proved a catalyst for change for both of them. His GP went part-time and he decided to commit to what he knew worked and trained as a meditation teacher. Wasn't that just adding more busyness, though?

"If you're doing something that is just for you and for your self-care, it's a little bit different. And it was at a pace, over a year, that I could work into my schedule."

Davidji, his teacher, appealed to Whelan because he was funny and because meditation was "being presented in a way that didn't seem like it was up its

“I do hear a lot of the time that it’s my approach that is the missing piece. It’s the playfulness, humour, and accessibility that brings a lot of people to the table

own arse”. Native New Yorker Davidji had reconnected to his own meditation practice — which he’d replaced with a morning commute and an evening Scotch — through what he calls “a holy moment”. Post 9/11, he was walking past a group of homeless people when a man grabbed his leg, looked him squarely in the eye, and said: “What’s gonna be on your tombstone?” Davidji quit his corporate job, reconnected with meditation, and now teaches it to millions.

Whelan studied with him, qualifying as a masters of wisdom and meditation teacher, and began teaching meditation himself, even though that hadn’t been his original intention. “I just knew that if I did teacher training, it would force me to really immerse myself and commit to this stuff that I knew helped me.” That commitment also eventually put him in touch with his “inner potato” — his gut instinct — which told him it was time to jump ship from the day job. Having spent 23 years on the radio, 21 of those as foil to Dave Moore on their hugely successful Today FM show, quitting seemed like madness. The ‘potato’ kept telling him to go but logic was saying ‘stay where you are’.

“I did, for the first time in my life, really listen to my gut and not try to cover over the uncomfortable feelings that I was having sitting in a radio studio,” Whelan says. “I took a pause long enough to ask myself, ‘OK, what’s important to you? What do you want to do for the next 10 years? Are you just doing things now because this is what you-10-years-ago wanted?’”

A chat with his financial adviser helped him make the leap. “I thought he’d go, ‘You’re nuts. What are you doing? You’re 50 and you want to walk away from this and you’re the sole breadwinner in the home? Three kids. One starting college, none of this looks right on paper.’ That’s what I was thinking he’d say. And he was the person who convinced me to do it. You should never assume that you know what people are going to say.”

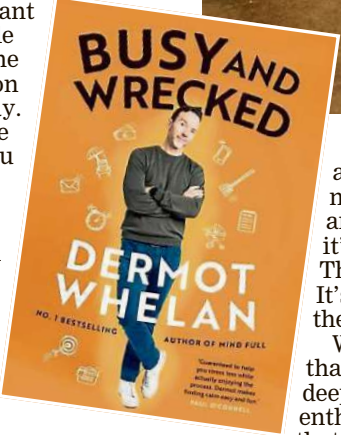
He hasn’t looked back since he quit in August 2023 and he’s started *The Mind Full Podcast* — season three kicked off on March 24 — toured his show, and written his third book. He’s busy, yes, and might still find himself feeling wrecked on occasion. But his meditation training and practice has given him a coping toolkit that’s proved a gamechanger.

“Self-awareness is something I have now and an understanding of stress and my stress response and that it is genuinely trying to help me. Before, I would’ve either pushed back against or ignored a lot of the signs or symptoms of stress.

“I have an understanding that my natural wiring is to be hyper-vigilant of my surroundings. And instead of me seeing that as a negative, actually it’s a super-useful tool, particularly in performance, because it means I can read a room really quickly.”

He also has much more compassion for himself. Previously, his internal monologue would continually tell him “you’re terrible” and berate him for not achieving. “I always thought it was important to hold yourself to account. I learned that all that is just really tiring. Self-compassion is one of those kind of airy-fairy terms but I think it’s the greatest road-block for a lot of us. Wherever we go, we’re there. We might as well make friends with ourselves.”

In a full-circle moment, he says that what



Dermot chills out at the Moxy in Dublin.

attracted him to Davidji is what people now tell him attracts them to his shows and books. “I do hear a lot of the time that it’s my approach that is the missing piece. That it’s the playfulness, it’s the humour. It’s the accessibility that brings them to the table.”

Whelan is a thoughtful interviewee and that rare thing: a good listener. He has a deep knowledge of his subject and is enthusiastic to share simple techniques that work, emphasising the value of creating little pockets of space in every day, even if it’s just for a single moment. It’s important to find the tools to deal with the busyness, he says, because while writing the book, he learned that a lot of the busyness and overwhelm and burnout people experience isn’t their fault.

“The world is set up for busyness like never before. There’s so much new science around the fact that we are constantly signalling and rewarding busyness in all our interactions because it gives us a higher social status. And science shows the more we demonstrate that we have less time for our personal lives and the more busyness we can demonstrate, the more important we are. That’s a dangerous place to be because our worlds will get smaller and we will get busier and busier.”

We’ve talked for almost two hours and Whelan isn’t remotely watching the clock, despite the fact

that he’s imminently due on a podcast. Before he has to go, I ask him for a top tip to deal with overwhelm.

“For me, it just always comes back to space. If all you have is the length of one conscious breath, start there. If you look at the Irish rugby team, when they’re in the middle of a game, part of their huddle is one conscious breath.” This is news to me.

“They have to find recovery in a very challenging situation. And what they’re gonna do is they’re gonna hit that reset button, one conscious breath.” They actually do that?

“Yeah. They’re trying to release the overwhelm at that moment. They’re trying to bring their minds out of the past, what’s not gone their way. They’re trying to bring their minds out of the future, what could go wrong?” An overwhelmed mind, he tells me, will bounce between the past and the future. So that one conscious breath can create the space for recovery and a tiny but invaluable reset.

“You’ve come out of the future. You’ve come out of the past and you’ve broken that sense of overwhelm for just that length of time. And that’s what the athletes know.”

And with that, Whelan gives me a warm hug goodbye and heads off, leaving a trail of calmness in his wake.

■ *Busy and Wrecked* by Dermot Whelan, published by Gill, is available now. Season three of *The Mind Full Podcast* is available wherever you get your podcasts.

Changing of the guard

Heir apparent Dave O’Mahony with founder Denis Cotter at Paradiso on Lancaster Quay, Cork. Picture: David Creedon



After more than three decades running his groundbreaking Paradiso in Cork, Denis Cotter has begun the process of ceding control to two protégés — head chef Miguel Frutos and incoming owner Dave O’Mahony, writes **Joe McNamee**

THE average life span of a restaurant is just three years, about as long as it takes to determine whether a fledgling hospitality business has a viable financial future. Many fail long before the three-year mark.

In October this year, Paradiso, one of the world’s most renowned vegetarian restaurants, celebrates its 32nd birthday, its longevity but one testament to the Cork restaurant’s unique qualities.

Paradiso joins a rarified club in passing the three decade mark but all good things come to an end. Restaurant work is among the most demanding of all professions and there is a finite life to a career in the kitchen.

Even if, as chef/proprietor Denis Cotter and so many of his peers elsewhere have done, you step out from behind the stove and into an executive head chef role, there comes a day when it is time to hang up your toque. This summer, Cotter turns 66 and feels his time in Paradiso is drawing to a close.

Occasionally, a transfer to a new ownership regime — such as Ross Lewis passing the Chapter One baton to Mickael Viljanen — can work out well.

However, though we cherish the food of beloved restaurants, hospitality is as much about people and relationships and, in most cases, when the founding owner/operator of a successful restaurant finally leaves the stage, they invariably take with them that indefinable magic that made their business so beloved and the restaurant shuts up shop for good.

Another option is to pass it on to the next generation of the family but neither of Cotter’s two sons followed him into the business. Instead, Cotter looked to another ‘family’ member, Dave O’Mahony, of the Paradiso ‘clan’. O’Mahony grew up doors away from Cotter’s young family, best friends with Cotter’s sons since he was six, often with the boys as they ran in and out of the newly-opened restaurant and, at the age of 15, O’Mahony started his first job — dishwasher in the Paradiso kitchen.

Denis Cotter and his then partner, Bridget Healy, opened Paradiso in 1993 and it was a smash from the very beginning. First of all, this was no hippie outpost but a fine dining restaurant that just happened to be vegetarian. In addition, it eschewed the usual approach of simply ‘replacing the meat’ and serving ‘meat alternative and two veg’. Furthermore, Cotter

banned the usual ‘wholefood vegetarian’ suspects of the time — pulses, rice, meat substitutes etc — and instead chose to bore down deep into the potential of the vegetables themselves, which traditionally had always received second billing on restaurant plates, even in vegetarian restaurants.

But it was the beginning, in 2001, of a collaboration with growers Ultan Walsh and Lucy Stewart of Gort na Nain Farm, in Nohoval, Co Cork, that turned Paradiso into a globally unique restaurant.

Cotter and Walsh sat down each year at the start of the growing season and plotted out the year ahead as to what would be planted and how this hyper-local, chemical-free, seasonal veg of sublime quality, often featuring produce or varieties never before grown in Ireland, would fit into Paradiso’s seasonally changing menus.

This was pioneering stuff: It was eight years after Paradiso opened that renowned Parisian chef Alain Passard gambled by converting his three-Michelin starred restaurant, L’Arpège, over to an entirely vegetarian menu with a primary focus on vegetables.

In 2019, Cotter’s and Walsh’s symbiotic and globally groundbreaking partnership was honoured

“What has always been brilliant about Paradiso is how it continues to evolve and no doubt there will be change – to keep it going for another 30 years would be a huge achievement



Denis Cotter says of Dave O'Mahony: 'It is amazing just how much he 'gets' Paradiso and the ethos.' Pictures: David Creedon

with the Collaboration of the Year prize at the inaugural and highly prestigious World Food Awards. These days, with the kitchen now led by head chef, Miguel Frutos, guided by Cotter as executive head chef, the Paradiso offering is as vibrant and contemporary as it has ever been.

“I started hanging around with Tom [Cotter] when I was about 5 or 6, even earlier, which was about the time the restaurant opened,” says Dave.

“They lived in No 4, we were in No 10, the two families probably the only kids on the street. From around 7, 8, myself and Tom were just spending every waking moment together. Sleepovers, going to the beach. When we were 11 or 12, we were drafted in to iron napkins for the restaurant.

“In summer 2000, after my Junior Cert, I asked for a job and became a dishwasher.

“I was put on the second evening shift, starting at around 9pm, and I strolled in during service and the girls on the floor were like, ‘where are you going, little fella?’ They knew me as a friend of the family but they were wondering where I was going at that time of night.

“I started giving it hell for leather and worked my absolute ass off at the dishwasher. We finished really late and I was asking, ‘was that alright, is this the time we usually finish?’

“The head dishwasher said, ‘yeah, it’s about an hour and a half after we’d normally finish.’ It’s like, ‘fuck, I have to get better at this!’

“I would come out thinking I’d done a class job but everyone was going, like, ‘Jesus Christ, the floor is soaking, he’s soaking!’

“I always wanted to work my absolute bollocks off here. Impress the [fellow staff members]. I thought

that they were the coolest people ever, all about five or six years older than me, very cool, handsome, beautiful, super cool people.”

“Every year,” says Cotter, “the entire Paradiso crew would go away for a weekend somewhere, rent a house or go out on a boat. All the staff’s kids would come as well and Dave was there as Tom’s buddy. So, before he was working there he was part of the fabric of Paradiso.”

With the restaurant menu also available for staff dinners, Dave was soon intimately acquainted with the food offering. His wine knowledge also developed apace.

“My family were always very into food,” says O’Mahony, “although maybe more conventional mainstream dishes and wine is my dad’s passion, he has a very good palate, and in the early days, he would have helped tasting to put together the wine lists.”

By the age of 17, O’Mahony had badgered his way into a job working on the floor.

“I loved it, I loved chatting to people, I loved learning. I love to learn. It’s funny, but I’d never have a 17-year-old on the floor now.”

O’Mahony, however, was obviously a precocious 17-year-old and, by the age of 21, was working as a floor manager before heading off to Australia with his now wife, Brenda Long.

In Australia, a country with a hugely progressive, innovative, and vital hospitality scene, he worked in some very high-profile restaurants.

He also began formal wine studies in earnest. (He qualified at WSET Level 4 a number of years ago, achieving the industry standard expert level and is now one of the best sommeliers in the country.)

WHEN HE and Brenda returned to Ireland in 2013, he resumed his position as manager of the restaurant.

About two years ago, Cotter began to consider him as a potential successor and new owner of the business. O’Mahony took all of a minute to agree but when he takes over later this year, it will mean stepping into a less familiar general manager role.

“It’s all about getting a sense of how the business is running or what you need to do or change, simply by looking at the numbers. It is tricky but interesting.

“Then you put the pieces together, what Denis calls the anecdotal information and the actual information; so the month felt really busy, but the numbers don’t say that, but that’s a bit weird. Or everyone’s saying we’re really quiet, but the numbers are good. That’s weird. Sometimes they match up, sometimes they don’t. But understanding both sides is crucial. It’s learning to read the restaurant’s progress through numbers which I never would have before, it’s a language I’m learning.

“I’ve always had huge respect for Denis as a real balls-to-the-wall chef, a real taskmaster and the continuous emphasis on quality, on the plate and on the floor, but now I’m seeing him as much as a mentor.”

Cotter says: “About a year and a half ago, when I decided that it was time to move on to the next stage of my life, I began to look at Dave as a serious prospect to take over — it is amazing just how much he ‘gets’ Paradiso and the ethos.

“Having Miguel in the kitchen was the other important part of the jigsaw for me. Miguel is a brilliant chef but, more than that, he gets Paradiso, he gets the ethos, this is not just another job for him

— he is in it for the long haul.

“I will continue as executive head chef until Miguel feels ready to take over that role and when Dave is ready for the general manager role, then it will be time for me to move on to the next chapter in my life.

“I will be able to carve out more structured time for my writing [five bestselling cookbooks to date] and of course I’ll still be working in Maureen’s [the bar in Cork City’s Shandon area run by his wife, Maureen McLaughlin].

“Paradiso is a fucking brilliant place and it’s not vanity for me to say that, but it takes a ferocious energy to maintain those standards and it is now time for me to direct that energy in other places.

“Paradiso wasn’t the first thing I did in life and it won’t be the last.”

And what of O’Mahony’s vision for the future of Paradiso when he takes over as the new owner?

“Day one, O’Mahony’s Steakhouse,” he chuckles, as Cotter raises his brow, a glimmer of a wry smile — when you’ve run a vegetarian restaurant for over three decades, you’ve heard all the carnivore jokes in existence.

“What has always been brilliant about Paradiso,” says Dave, “is how it continues to evolve and no doubt there will be change, changes that we make and also changes in direction for hospitality and in diners’ tastes and preferences.

“But wherever we end up, with Miguel leading on the food and my feedback and me guiding the business, we will never lose the Paradiso ethos.

To keep it going for another 30 years would be a huge achievement and, whatever it looks like in the future, it will always be Paradiso.”

On Denis Cotter and Paradiso...

Ross Lewis, Chapter One

“Denis Cotter is a maverick chef who quite smartly understood there was an alternative way to cook... Way before his time, he took vegetarian cooking into the mainstream ahead of any of his peers in Ireland and the UK. His first cookbook was a turning point in bringing his style of cooking into the mainstream and beyond. Ireland has a lot to be thankful for, his lifetimes work and contribution to our culinary shoreline.”

Darina Allen, Ballymaloe Cookery School

“I’ve always had huge admiration for Paradiso and Denis, when they opened I ate there twice before the penny dropped that it was a vegetarian restaurant. His food was always so multi-ethnic and with such delicious combinations, that it completely bypassed me that it was vegetarian. It is the ultimate compliment, that a meat eater didn’t miss the meat.”

Rory O’Connell, Ballymaloe Cookery School

“Paradiso has always had style – from the Boho chic interior of the early days to the super smart chocolate box room of the present. I love it. The food opened minds, set a trend with the unerring vision of Denis

and his magic and magnificent basket of vegetables. What a gift to Cork and the country. It is a globally important restaurant.”

Andy Petrini, Food critic

[Speaking to this writer at the time of the award] “Paradiso seems to me to be one of the most interesting places in working for the future, a future with closer and more prolific collaborations between chefs and suppliers.”

Miguel Frutos, Paradiso

“Moving to a new city always comes with challenges, but starting out in such a creative and high-quality restaurant has been an amazing experience. Paradiso isn’t just a place to eat — it’s all about innovation, creativity, and a deep respect for local ingredients, which are values I completely connect with. Denis’ vision and pioneering spirit made Paradiso what it is today.

Way before plant-based cuisine became a trend, he was already pushing boundaries and redefining vegetarian dining with passion and dedication. His guidance and commitment have been invaluable. My Mediterranean roots have found their place here. The love for real, honest flavors, the respect for seasonal ingredients, and the pursuit of balance in every dish fit perfectly with Paradiso’s philosophy”.

Changing the tune

A stalwart of Ireland's music scene, publicist and manager Linda Coogan-Byrne has made it her mission to call out the structural sexism and racism she sees in her field. As she releases her first book, she shares with Aoife Barry her manifesto for change



Linda Coogan-Byrne is now a proud feminist.



Some of Coogan-Byrne's favourite Irish female artists include, left to right, Winnie Ama, CMAT, and Jazzy.

MANY years ago, music publicist, consultant and label manager Linda Coogan-Byrne didn't think of herself as a feminist. But now she has published her first book, *Why Not Her? A Manifesto for Culture Change*, which calls for a reckoning with structural sexism in the music world, as well as with other prejudices, like racism. To Coogan-Byrne, now a proud feminist, the issues seen in the music industry show us exactly what the wider world is dealing with on the road to equality.

After starting to work in the industry, she says "it was impossible not to see the nuances of sexism and the nuances of misogyny". In her book, she details the challenges faced by women to reach gender parity on music festival line-ups and radio playlists and why it's important that not just a few voices are heard.

She writes that culture change "starts with a willingness to evaluate ourselves, our systems, and the underlying injustices that shape our world", and that the manifesto "is more than a call to action — it's an invitation to reflect, a challenge to confront systemic bias, and a roadmap for meaningful, lasting change". She looks at some of the roots of sexism in the music industry, the work she has done with the organisation *Why Not Her?*, and how readers can do their own work of resistance in order to help break the cycle.

Why Not Her? began surveys of gender balance on radio in Ireland in 2020. Overall, the reports made for depressing reading. While RTE Radio One consistently showed gender balance in terms of the ratio of male to female artists it played, many other stations didn't. Some stations have improved over the years, others haven't.

The roots of the *Why Not Her?* surveys and this latest book lie in the covid lockdowns, when Coogan-Byrne began attending feminist lectures and seminars online by the likes of British music consultant Vick Bain.

One night she was using the industry platform Radiomonitor, which provides data on what bands are played on the radio, and realised this data would give an insight into gender balance in the Irish radio world.

"I just said, right: I'll just do a ballpark, five-year period of looking and seeing who's played most on the radio," she recalls. "I just went down a data rabbit hole... my jaw was to the floor. I was just looking and I had to keep refreshing, going 'this couldn't be it'. It couldn't be what I'm looking at." She was seeing "zero female artists" played on some stations, "year in, year out". When her

eventual report into 2019 and 2020 Irish radio play was published, it "just blew up".

"A lot of the female artists felt validated. Especially women that had flown abroad to pursue careers outside of Ireland... they suddenly had this viable, tangible thing in this report where they were saying: This is why we had to leave," says Coogan-Byrne.

Soon the report was gathering international attention. "But with that, there was a lot of naivety," she says. "Because I was thinking... once people have this data, they're all going to change. It did not happen that way."

"By the second year, in the UK I'd had conversations with the BBC and with other major radio sector companies and outfits, and they were just fantastic. They'd listen to you, and they'd go through the data and have all these important conversations, and then they'd put me through to their diversity department teams. But in Ireland, it was tumbleweed."

While the reports were widely shared and supported, she says she also received some negative feedback from people in the industry. Comments such as, 'We don't have the budget,' 'It's the record label's fault' and, shockingly, 'men make better music than women'.

By 2021, Coogan-Byrne had a team of people involved with *Why Not Her?* and its reports. Now, she says, she will be taking a step back from the reports in a personal capacity.

"I've left it to the team to decide whether they want to continue," she says. "That's what this book is about — the necessity of other people continuing on and carrying the baton, if you will."

"I'm not going to continue doing reports in Ireland when there's no reaction, no change, no onus from the

Government or from people in leadership in the broadcasting sector, to want to change."

But, there has been some policy change regarding gender balance on air. In 2022, the Online Safety and Media Regulations Act allowed media regulator Coimisiún na Meán to create codes to promote balanced gender representation of participants in news and current affairs programmes. As with music radio play, the gender balance in this area was also dire, as shown by the 2015 National Women's Council of Ireland *Hearing Women's Voices?* report. Last year, the commission published the first gender, equality, diversity and inclusion strategy for the Irish audio and audiovisual sector.

"It's great to have policies in place, but unless people actually put their action into the policies, the policies just remain policies," says Coogan-Byrne.

Many international female artists are played on the radio, but a particular block seems to be with Irish female artists, she adds. This is despite the fact that the country is home to many talented women, like CMAT, Jazzy, and Muireann Bradley. Over the past few years, groups like FairPlé and MiseFósta have also been set up to raise awareness of issues around gender balance across different genres of music.

Why hasn't change happened to the degree she hoped it would?

"We do scratch our heads in the team here, because I don't know why Irish radio doesn't make the change, or why it doesn't feel it's even important," says a clearly baffled Coogan-Byrne.

More than three million people listen to the radio every weekday, meaning what's played on air can have an impact on people being exposed to new music. This raises the question of who isn't getting heard on Irish radio, and what that means for both listeners and artists.

"There's devastating effects on so many levels to female creatives, where they're getting this message that they don't matter, what they have to say isn't important. If they can't see it, they can't be it. I hate using clichés and that, but it's true," she says. "So it's a detrimental cultural, societal damage that it's doing to female creatives and not only that, but on an economic level as well."

She believes that the men who are heavily playlisted on Irish radio, while "brilliant", are "given opportunities that women just are not given", and don't receive the same kind of criticism female artists do. Why is this, does she think?

"I think it stems from a vast ecosystem, on a societal level, on a cultural

level... I'm sure any woman that has existed will have been told this whole thing like 'little children should be seen and not heard', but it's usually young girls that should be seen and not heard. Boys are listened to."

The conversation within her book about misogyny feels all the more urgent at a time when there is a lot of discussion around the impact of online toxic masculinity on young men — particularly how this is explored in the Netflix show *Adolescence*.

"My God, we need to see more male allies that call [sexism] out. But we're living in a time of Andrew Tate and Elon Musk," says Coogan-Byrne.

WHILE the book outlines how people can start to challenge this sort of culture, it also contains a reality check section.

"It isn't a walk in the park, speaking up and demanding change. It's a very difficult thing to do, and it's a very difficult thing to continue doing," says Coogan-Byrne.

She describes the book as a roadmap for people.

"I'm just a normal person. I'm just someone who's seeing, OK, this is possible. I can actually get in touch with my local TD, or I can get in touch with the Taoiseach, or I can write a letter to the President."

The book contains many depressing statistics, like the fact that 71.1% of top 10 singles over the past two decades were released by Irish male artists and bands. Yet Coogan-Byrne finds hope in the change that has taken place.

"There's an urgency and a necessity for things to change in Ireland. Because what the reports in the UK have shown us is that change is completely possible," she says, noting that women overtook men for the first time in airplay in Britain last year. "If they can do that and turn it around in a short period of time, Ireland is completely capable of doing it."

She plans to send the new arts and culture minister, Patrick O'Donovan, a copy of the book.

Her aim with the book is "to cause some sort of a conversation", she says, though she maintains "conversations are empty without action".

"People-powered campaigns are huge. They have been through all of history. If we get enough people having the conversations, it can't be ignored. That's the hope that I have," she says.

■ *Why Not Her? A Manifesto for Culture Change* is published on April 11

Why not her?

A selection of songs by Irish artists to add to your playlist now, curated by Linda Coogan-Byrne

- Fever - Winnie Ama
- Golden - Shiv
- Running/Planning - CMAT
- The Vow - RuthAnne
- Unconditional - Sinéad Harnett
- Sunny - Biig Piig
- Weekdays - Aby Coulibaly

‘I’ve been in training for this for 25 years’

Every so often, a debut novel stands out from the pack. This year, that book is ‘Fair Play’, says **Aoife Barry**. Cork author Louise Hegarty talks growing up in Glanmire, learning her craft from Agatha Christie, and the joy of being a debut novelist in her 30s



Author Louise Hegarty in Henchy's Bar, St Lukes, Cork.
Picture: David Creedon

LIVING in Ireland, we get used to great books being produced by debut authors. But every now and then a debut comes along that stands out from the pack. This year that book is *Fair Play*, the first novel by Cork author Louise Hegarty.

Anyone who's been following Hegarty's writing in the various journals she's been published in over the last few years, such as *Banshee* and the *Stinging Fly*, will know that there's something singular about her work. Her prose is never showy, her ideas can be a little quirky, and she loves to play around with form. We get all of this in *Fair Play*, which takes inspiration from Golden Age murder mysteries — think 'queen of crime' Agatha Christie — but spins out a modern tale of grief amidst the search for answers after a sudden death.

Here's Hegarty on the book's plot, which centres on a brother and sister named Abigail and Benjamin: "A group of friends are in an Airbnb, New Year's Eve 2022. They're eating and drinking and playing a murder mystery game devised by Abigail. Next morning, everyone wakes up except for Benjamin, and then Abigail finds herself in a murder mystery of her own while she's trying to unravel the details of her brother's death."

Not only does the book take inspiration from Golden Age murder mysteries, it also plays around with the tropes of this genre. It moves from a contemporary setting to a classic murder mystery after

Benjamin's death, when a detective called Auguste Bell arrives on the scene. The narrative then moves between the two styles for the remainder of the book. There are even several pages that outline the rules of solving mysteries, breaking the fourth wall a little. It takes skill to make this all work, and the effect for the reader is thrilling.

Growing up in Glanmire with her parents and younger sister, Hegarty, aged 35, was always a big reader. Her parents were also crime fiction fans, and this led to her loving Christie books and crime novels in general. Yet she never guessed she'd end up writing a novel inspired by this herself.

"I've been telling people that I've been training for this for 25 years," says Hegarty over lunch in Dublin's Westbury Hotel (pear and brie salad for her).

"It is a funny thing, how the things that you're reading or watching when you're young, they do come up later on."

Benjamin's death is a tragedy, and his sister Abigail seeks solid answers. Without spoiling things, it's perhaps enough to say that the ending of Hegarty's book isn't exactly what we've come to expect in classic murder mysteries.

After planning out the story, Hegarty wrote it in three months on evenings and weekends, while working an admin job. Now that she has the book deal — and a second book, a collection of short stories, due out next year — she is able to write full time.

The writing process was "a lot of fun", says Hegarty, who was inspired by the likes of the film *The Last of Sheila*, which is a schlocky 1973 murder mystery written by Anthony Perkins and Stephen Sondheim, and the 1970s TV series *The Singing Detective*. She was also inspired by an episode of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* in which Buffy's mother dies.

"That's a great episode [showing] how you deal with genuine emotion and a sudden death in a genre setting," she says.

She wanted to subvert some of what goes on in murder mystery narratives. "In Agatha Christie books, people are dying everywhere and no one seems to be overly upset," she points out. "Looking at the effect of sudden death, and grief, I think when someone dies suddenly, you are trying to frantically find clues and trying to find a very easy narrative of what happened." But there's not always going to be an easy narrative, she points out.

There is something comforting about a whodunit, she says.

"It's very familiar, it's a very safe world. In the last couple of years, there's been a huge increase in cosy crime and people looking towards those familiar narratives."

She says that between the First and Second World War, there was a "fever" of interest in crossword puzzles and games like bridge, perhaps as a way of engaging the mind and ensuring "everything's

gonna be OK in the end — which, of course, then is not what real life is like".

While Hegarty wasn't directly inspired by a real-life experience to write this story, she was interested in how people approach grief. There's a scene in the book where Abigail feels her friends don't understand how upset she is.

"I think people deal with grief in different ways. And I think if you're not maybe always crying, people think 'Oh, you must be better'. Of course, she's not. But it's just the way people react, and it's just different for everyone," she says.

While at school in Coláiste na Phiarsaigh in Glanmire, Hegarty was big into reading and writing. She started to take her writing seriously in her late teens and early 20s, and began submitting to journals such as the *Stinging Fly*.

"I was just submitting stuff for ages before I was published," she says. How has she changed since her early days?

"My writing is a lot better, and I figured out what it is that I'm interested in, and what I'm good at. And a lot of it is structure, working with form, genre."

"A lot of it is problem solving, I think. And I like trying to figure out: OK, my character is here and they need to get here, and how do I get them from A to B? So there's that form of creative thinking. It's more



mathematical than anything else. I like pursuing certain ideas."

Fair Play was the first novel-shaped idea she came up with, and she thinks part of the inspiration was the grief narratives that emerged in popular culture during the pandemic. When an agent got in touch after reading her short stories, she was able to send them her novel draft too. That was followed by signing with the agent and sending her book out on submission to publishers.

"Everything happened very quickly, after a lot of nothing happening," says Hegarty. Though she had "absolutely no expectations" for her novel, several publishers wanted it before Picador won out. Her book is great, but she says she worried it might be a bit too niche or unusual. "I hope people enjoy it," she says modestly.

Outside of books, she's very into music (recent listens include the Viagra Boys and rapper Mike). "I'm big into music. I mean, I don't have any skill. I play a bit of piano, but I have no real talent or anything. I'm very interested in films as well."

She's currently working on her second novel, and is settling into a routine as a full-time author.

"I go to the library, write for a few hours, have my lunch, and then in the afternoon I might go for a walk, I might read, I might do something else. You're

preparing for the next day's work as well," she says. "And I always found as well, when I'm stuck with something, you go for a walk, and then suddenly you find a solution for that."

DOES Cork serve as inspiration? "Definitely. There's a lot of writers in Cork," she says, describing Cork's literary history as "quite diverse — I don't know if I can necessarily think of a single voice, or style of writing even."

She has several writer friends in the city. Would she ever move to somewhere else?

"No, I've always lived in Cork," she says, noting that she lives near the city centre now. "I just really like the area. I wouldn't be against the idea of living abroad for a little while, but I like having that base."

There can be a rush in the publishing world to bring out your first book while very young. But being a debut novelist in her mid-30s suits Hegarty. She's put years into improving her craft, and feels the benefit of this. Now that her debut is about to hit the bookshelves, she can rest knowing that a lot of hard work is about to pay off.

"I feel pretty confident with my writing now as well, which is a big thing," she says gently. "In some ways, I think if I'd written something a number of years ago, maybe I wouldn't have had the ability to make it what I wanted it to be, and I wouldn't have had confidence about it."

■ *'Fair Play'*, published by Picador, is out now.

ANNMARIE O'CONNOR



Trend of the week

Pastels

Colour therapy: fashion woo-woo or feel-good philosophy? Discuss. Here's the thing. I'm typically clad in black until the mercury matures to its early twenties, even then my preferences lean towards neutrals. However, at ieStyle Live 2024, I wore a buttermilk yellow beaded gown from Cork's vintage haunt, Miss Daisy Blue. Associated with happiness, optimism, and well-being, the soft hue made me feel like a summer's day on a rather cold October evening. Here's why. Research suggests that when our eyes connect with a particular colour, the brain releases a cocktail of feel-good chemicals that can potentially impact our bodies and minds. Pale pink, soufflé-light lilac, sweet peach: if pastels are said to allude to new beginnings, why not emerge minty fresh from the doldrums of sartorial hibernation? Where to start is the question, especially when finding the right colour. A simple tip is to put the garment next to your complexion in the mirror. If it washes you out rather than warms you up; then you've got your answer. That's not to say, baby blue is out of the question. Layer your favourite hue with a neutral like this season's earthy brown or autumn's promise of cherry red for a juicier vibe. Alternatively, go a shade darker than usual – for example, swap pistachio for sage green - which gives a grounding warmth with high-contrast white and black or when worn head-to-toe. Sinead Keary's satin suit separates are a great place to start. At minimum introduce a pop of pastel with a well-chosen accessory. Easy and breezy, that's how we like it.



Lightweight waterfall necklace, Sandia Dublin, €110



Tailored longline waistcoat, M&S, €65



Elisabetta Franchi cocktail dress, Zalando, €600



'The Sarah' wrap blazer, €198; 'The Sandra' satin trousers, €135, Sinead Keary The Label



Denim ballet flats, Ganni, €395



Autograph suede top handle grab bag, M&S, €82



Lace trousers, River Island, €49



Chunky rectangle sunglasses, M&S, €22



Flounced maxi dress, & Other Stories, €179

How to wear it

Swap your jeans for a pair of denim Bermuda shorts. We've got three ways to wear them.



BOHEMIAN ACCENT

Find your 'fit with signature accents like wicker fabric, strappy sandals and paisley prints. Horn hoop earrings, Zara, €17.95 V by Very printed waistcoat, Very.ie, €58 Rita Ora denim jorts, Penneys, €18 Pavers woven bag, Next, €35 'Exclade' strappy sandals, Russell & Bromley, €235



ELEVATED DENIM

Create symmetry with a co-ordinating denim top and contrasting tailored gilet. Add heels. Longline wool waistcoat, COS, €99 V by Very denim bandeau waistcoat, Very.ie, €38 Rita Ora denim jorts, Penneys, €18 Split suede braided mini bag, Massimo Dutti, €149 'Edgebold' heels, Russell & Bromley, €295



MODERN MINIMALIST

Smarten up with an oversized blazer in trending yellow and luxe accessories. Victoria Beckham sunglasses, Zalando, €439 Longline linen blazer, COS, €175 'Ounlo' leather belt, By Malena Birger, €190 Rita Ora denim jorts, Penneys, €18 'Amara' leather sandals, LK Bennett, €225

KATE DEMOLDER



The best
of April's
new
beauty
releases



Sunday Riley Aquamarine Melt Hydrating Gel-Balm Cleanser (€48, Brown Thomas)

The first Sunday Riley new formulation in 18 months (!), this glossy, blue gel balm is all about hydration. Melting into a silky cleansing oil as it hits the face, this product dissolves makeup, nurtures dry patches and leaves the skin feeling both clean and hydrated. Formulated with evening primrose oil, a hyaluronic acid derivative and cocoa butter – this is the product you will see people rave about in the future.

Bioderma Sensibio H2O x Victoria Beckham (€18, millies.ie)

Who else but VB would be worthy of giving Bioderma's iconic Sensibio a makeover? Marking 30 years of market pioneer Sensibio – one bottle is sold every second worldwide – Victoria Beckham has come along to create a limited-edition bottle of the legendary micellar water. Catch this in a bathroom or a makeup kit.

Charlotte Tilbury Limited Edition Pillow Talk Beauty Soulmates Collection (€36 - €53, Brown Thomas)

The queen of glamour, Charlotte Tilbury, has continued on the Pillow Talk hype with the new Beauty Soulmates Collection. Inspired by love and punc-



uated by the same formulations that made Pillow Talk a household name, the new collection debuts four new lipsticks in both her Matte Revolution and K.I.S.S.I.N.G formulas, as well as two powder-blush duo palettes that feature the award-winning Airbrush Flawless Finish powder. The lipsticks – which come in nude, a dewy pink, a muted mauve and strawberry red – are hydrating and juicy, while the palettes pack a punch with intense pigment.

No7 Pro Artist Collection (€16.99 - €19.99, Boots)

No7 Pro Artist has expanded its line with the launch of five new products; That's A Wrap! Tubing Mascara, Colour & Glow Lip & Cheek Multi-Stick, Luminous Lip Glow Shine, Runway Radiance Primer, and No7 Pro Artist Eye Palette. Building on the success of existing favourites like the Soft Glow Cream Bronzer, the No7 Pro Artist collection is continuing to provide excellent formulations for a more affordable price tag. My favourite? The multi-stick, which makes no fuss makeup truly no fuss, whether you're at home or on the go.

K18 AstroLift™ (€48.95, Cloud10 Beauty)

Haircare heroes K18 have just released a volumising spray designed to deliver

fuller, healthier hair while also repairing it from within. Addressing volume loss at its root, AstroLift is clinically proven to deliver up to 2.5x more volume across up to 48 hours, without adding weight or residue. Ingredients centre around K18PEPTIDE™, which repairs protein loss and chemical damage in all hair types, while a naturally derived seaweed and amino acid complex boosts volume. For anyone with damaged or fine hair this is something I would definitely try.

Trinny London Trinity (€44, Brown Thomas)

No better woman for a multitasking product, Trinny London is back at it again with a lip, cheek and eye product that will save ample space in your carry-on. Creamy formulas with flattering shades, these products give a beautiful wash of colour to the entire face in a matter of swipes.

Use the glow end to add glass-like highlight wherever you want it, whether layered over the matte colour, or on its own across the cheek, browbones or lips. Consider it a capsule wardrobe for your makeup bag.

POCO Beauty Skintuition Foundation and Concealer (€32 + €23, Brown Thomas)

POCO's first foray into complexion is



here. Skintuition, a hero launch, featuring a foundation and full-coverage concealer, marks the brand's most significant release to date. Though skin tints are all the rage at the minute, Skintuition brings a genuinely different approach to the genre. Light yet covering – a little goes a long way – a watery formula that can only be used on perfect skin, this is not. The concealer, on the other hand, is full coverage – meaning both products work brilliantly in tandem. A radiant, natural skin finish while also covering anything you want to be covered.

Haumea RF Supersculpt Pro (€275, haumeaskincare.com)

Haumea, the award-winning Irish brand acclaimed for its at-home skincare technologies, has released a new product, just in time for summer. The RF Supersculpt Pro is a powerful device which integrates proven scientific therapies – Radio Frequency (RF), Electric Muscle Stimulation (EMS), Red LED Light Therapy and Multi-Frequency Vibrations – in one tool, from home. As a result, it stimulates collagen production, visibly tightens contours and unlocks a renewed complexion. Easy to use and focused on results, this is a product you would struggle not to love.

JOE McNAMEE



The Menu

Get back to cooking with recipe kits

THE Yellow Bittern (TYB) is a nondescript 18-seater London restaurant that opened last October offering old school bistro-and-Irish menu. All bookings are by phone and only cash is accepted in payment. Yet, thanks to the online provocations of the chef/proprietor, Belfast-man Hugh Corcoran, it is already one of the most controversial and talked about restaurants in hospitality, garnering astonishing coverage, including a recent feature in *The New York Times*.

Corcoran is a staunch Republican and communist. His business/life partner is Lady Frances Armstrong-Jones (daughter of Princess Margaret's former husband), a romantic juxtaposition of 'blueblood' and 'Republican/communist' further spicing the pot.

Though I suspect Corcoran isn't blind to the bums-on-seats benefit of his online shenanigans, TYB appears an honest endeavour founded on integrity. But what intrigues me most and has inflamed so many critics is that TYB is only open on weekdays for just two sittings, 12pm and 2pm, serving dinner including dessert, none of your 'brunch' nonsense, and bonus points for guzzling back some very fine wines.

A veteran of Cork's South Mall once wistfully recollected for me his office dinners in the old Oyster Tavern, when Friday was the only day you'd stretch to two G&Ts before a three-courser with wine. That's definitely no longer the norm and while I enjoy the occasional midday splurge, I generally save my appetites for evening.



DropChef co-founder and chief operating officer Roman Grogan; many DropChef customers value the service for enabling their own return to cooking from scratch.

These days, the concept of 'dinner in the middle of the day' is rarely anything more than rural populism from Danny Healy Rae et al. The shifting of Irish society from a rural agrarian population to a predominantly urban one and the evolving necessity of becoming a two-income household that saw mothers having to go out to work as well, means most Irish households eat dinner in the evening.

I prefer it. The act of cooking from scratch each evening is my meditation, a boon for body and mind after a hard day, capped by sharing it around the table with family and friends, one of humanity's greatest acts of social communion, across all creeds and cultures, no matter what time of the day you have your 'dinner'.

But, for many, cooking has become another chore to be crossed off before flopping in front of the TV until bedtime. We increasingly rely on prepared and processed options, supple-

mented by Deliveroo or takeaways. Just three in 10 adults now cook from scratch in the evening. 'Pleasure' derived from cooking is reserved for weekends.

Especially alarming is how communal dining, even a quick meal of pasta with a jar of sauce (number one meal consumed by children; 14% of Irish evening dinners), is also gradually unravelling. Many meals are now consumed in separate parts of the house. Worst of all, seven in 10 are eaten in front of a digital device or TV. We are fast achieving peak 'mindless eating', growing further from the primal relationship we have had with the food since the first plate of hairy mammoth and two veg.

This disconnection, an ignorance around the provenance of our food, how it is prepared, and even its consumption is giving rise to grave diet-related consequences.

Non-communicable diseases (heart disease, stroke, cancer, chronic respiratory diseases,

A Rare Chestnut

Some collaborations are more about commercial opportunities than culinary creativity but I fancy an alliance of the sublime talents of Michelin-starred Rob Krawczyk of Restaurant Chestnut with Meeran Manzoor of Rare at Blue Haven, in Kinsale (April 13) has all the potential to give rise to some truly special cooking of finest, local seasonal produce.

■ Tickets €125. Accommodation packages also available. Book with rare1784.ie

diabetes), are the leading cause of mortality in Ireland and the world — poor diet is a primary culprit. Only 40% of the Irish population is at a healthy weight and we are now the second most obese nation in Europe. As a nation, we have gone from famine to feast and right back again to a crisis of food-related fatality.

I recently met Roman Grogan of DropChef (dropchef.com). Sign up and DropChef delivers to your door each week the precisely measured and well selected ingredients required to create tasty meals from scratch. There are more than 350 recipes to choose from and prices are reasonable. The notion of someone else shopping for my ingredients and weighing them out is anathema to me, the beginnings of disconnection from my food. But I only learned that connection when I left home and many DropChef customers value the service for enabling their own return to cooking from scratch, finding it hugely beneficial for physical and mental wellbeing.

So, even if you want to roast a chicken at 3am in the morning, knock yourself out. The important thing is to maintain or regain that vital connection to the essential act of eating.



TODAY'S SPECIAL

Yes, I know this section is all about Irish food and Mariam Mariatsvili is Georgian-born and Greek-raised but the food she cooks and serves up in her charming little deli-shop on Cork's South Main St, using

fine Irish produce supplemented by judicious imports (and some cracking Georgian wines!) is a) absolutely delicious and b) only adding to the ongoing evolution of contemporary Irish food.

■ Instagram @GeoFoodCork



In Tagalle I watched fishermen haul in their horseshoe nets

ALL OVER the world there are food festivals. Some principally focus on food and invite guest chefs from across the globe to share their creativity and skills.

Others, like MAD in Copenhagen (coming up in May), focus on food, farming and environmental issues and try to come up with solutions to remedy our deeply flawed food system.

JR Ryall, pastry chef at Ballymaloe House, and I recently travelled to Sri Lanka to participate in the Gourmet Galle festival which is now in its second year. It was originally created by the legendary Geoffrey Dobbs who also initiated the Galle Literary Festival in 2005. This was my second time as a participant.

We created a Taste of Ballymaloe Dinner at the chic Charleston Hotel. The menu was a fusion of Sri Lankan and Irish ingredients. A beautiful side of Belvelly smoked salmon from artisan fish smoker, Frank Hederman, came all the way from Ireland. We served it with a fresh cucumber pickle, devilled eggs and freshly baked Ballymaloe brown yeast bread.

There were lots of beets in season, so we made a chilled beetroot soup drizzled with Sri Lankan buffalo curd and fresh coriander, very welcome in the Sri Lankan heat. Main course was roast free-range Sri Lankan pork with crackling, aubergines in the pickling style and rustic roast potatoes sprinkled with fresh rosemary.

Guests particularly loved JR's sweet trolley and each and every one of the guests tucked into a taste of absolutely everything on offer. Sri Lanka grows wonderful

cashew nuts, so the praline ice cream was made with cashew nuts instead of almonds. JR layered up the panna cotta with a Sri Lankan espresso coffee jelly, a huge success. Little coconut meringues were topped with the sweetest Alfonso mango and a spoonful of tangy passion fruit and finally there was a wobbly, gooey chocolate tart.

All the recipes came from JR's *Ballymaloe Desserts Cookbook*, which we later found on the shelves of a fantastic independent bookshop in Unawatuna called Wild and Sage. It's also got a sweet little café so put it on your Sri Lankan list if you're planning to head that way.

We stayed in The Charleston in Galle Fort for several days, so had the opportunity to do a bit of exploring. Of course, we visited the fish market on the edge of the lagoon plus the fruit and veg markets and lots of spice shops in the Muslim quarter where we learned how to source the very best Sri Lankan cinnamon, peppercorns, cardamom, nutmeg and mace.

Out in Tagalle, I watched the fishermen laboriously hauling in their horseshoe nets and sharing the catch. One of the traditional Sri Lankan Orrou boats sustains eight to 10 families. It was really an honour to observe this time-honoured sustainable practice, most of the catch was whitebait. Occasionally, they caught a couple of sear fish which was like winning the lotto for them — I long to return to Sri Lanka, and loved the food, the traditions, the countryside and the friendly people.

A special thank you to Ivo Richli at The Charleston in Galle Fort for sharing these recipes for this week's column.

Ceylon Chicken Curry

Curry leaves are an essential ingredient in many Sri Lankan dishes. Fresh are best but if you don't have an Asian shop close by, use frozen or dried. In both Sri Lanka and India, sauce is referred to as gravy.

Serves 8

- 900g whole chicken, cut into small portions
- 2-3 tbsp coconut oil or vegetable oil
- ½ onion, diced or sliced
- 4 garlic cloves, finely chopped
- 2.5cm piece of ginger, finely chopped
- 2 ½ tbsp roasted Sri Lankan curry powder (available in Asian shops)
- 1 tsp chili powder
- 1 cinnamon stick (preferably Ceylon cinnamon)
- 6-7 fresh curry leaves
- 2 serrano green chili
- ½ tsp salt plus more to taste
- 2 medium-sized tomatoes
- 110ml full-fat coconut milk
- 110ml water

Prepare the bone-in chicken by cutting it into smaller pieces. Each piece should be fairly small but not bite-sized.

The larger the chicken piece, the longer it will take to cook through, so it's important to keep the pieces fairly similar in size.

Add the coconut oil into a large saucepan and heat the oil over medium heat. Add the onion and cook until it starts to soften. Add the garlic and ginger to the softened onion, and sauté until the garlic starts to soften. Make sure it doesn't burn.

Add the curry powder, chili powder, cinnamon, curry leaves, and mix to combine. Cook for a few minutes until you start to smell the spices.

Add the chicken, green chili, salt, tomatoes, and mix



to coat.

Cook for 10 minutes with the lid off, on medium high heat. Frequently stir to make sure the chicken or the spices don't burn.

Add coconut milk, water, and bring the curry to a boil. If you want less gravy, add less liquid.

Lower the heat and let it simmer with the lid on for about 20 minutes, stirring occasionally. Leave the lid off if you want to reduce the liquid content in the curry.

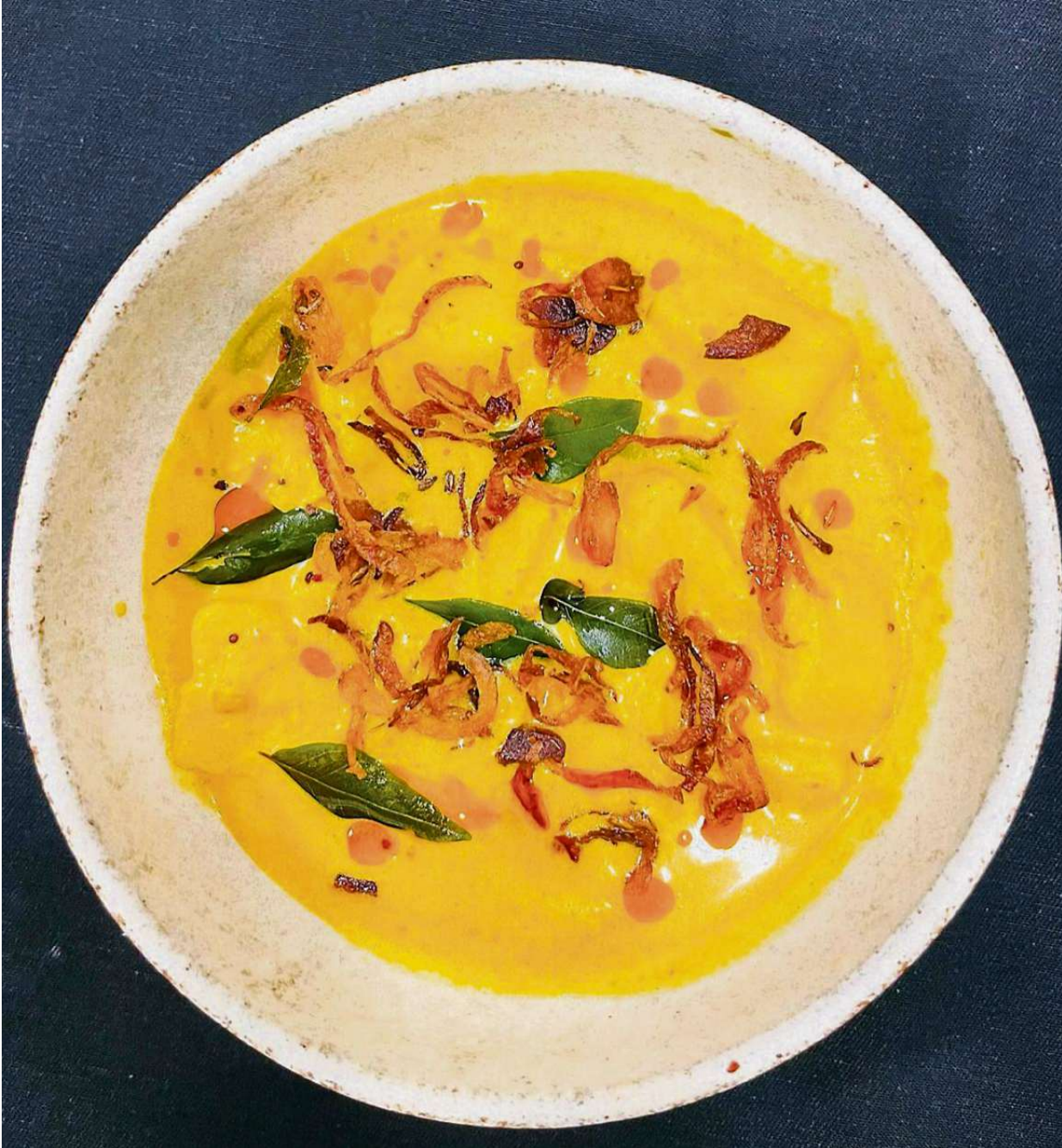
The chicken should be completely cooked by this point. This will depend on the size of the chicken

pieces and the stove you use.

Taste the curry and season with more salt to taste if needed.

If the chicken curry gravy is too thin, or there's too much of it, uncover and simmer the curry for a further 10 minutes or longer.

This step is optional, but it allows the water to evaporate and for the gravy to thicken. If you want more gravy, you can add more water or coconut milk, but you will need to adjust the flavour accordingly. Turn off the heat and let the chicken cool down slightly. Serve with rice or roti.



Sri Lankan Potato Curry

Curry leaves particularly are an essential ingredient in Sri Lankan cooking. Neither fresh pandan or curry leaves as yet are available in supermarkets but are now widely accessible in Asian shops. Buy extra and freeze a few.

Serves 4

- 4 medium potatoes – 600g approx
- 3 tbsp onions or shallots, finely chopped
- 1 large garlic clove minced
- 3 pieces of pandan leaves (about 10cm each)
- 1 sprig of fresh curry leaves
- 1 green chili sliced
- ¼ tsp turmeric powder
- 12 tsp curry powder* (see recipe)
- 1/8 tsp fenugreek seeds
- 3/4 tsp salt (adjust to your taste)
- 225ml water (you may need more or less)
- 350ml thick coconut milk
- 3 drops of freshly squeezed lime juice (optional)

Wash and peel the medium size potatoes (a waxy type like Yukon gold potatoes is preferred). Cut them into quarters or to 6 pieces of your potatoes are on the bigger side. Make sure all the potatoes are roughly equal in size.

Then put them into a deep saucepan. Add all the ingredients except the water, thick coconut milk, and lime juice.

Then add your water and mix

well. You might want to adjust the amount of water depending on the vessel and the number of potatoes you use.

Cook covered until the potatoes are fork-tender. This means you should be able to poke the potatoes with a fork without much resistance. It's okay to have about 50ml of water left.

If you have more water than that then increase the heat and leave the pot uncovered and let the water evaporate.

If your potatoes are still not cooked and all your water has evaporated then add some water, cover the pot, and cook until potatoes are tender.

Do **not** overcook your potatoes otherwise, they will become mush. So, keep an eye on them and check the doneness of your potatoes from time to time.

Now lower the heat and add your thick coconut milk.

Mix gently without breaking your potatoes. Bring the coconut milk to simmer. And then keep gently mixing the curry continuously for about 5 mins without breaking the potatoes so your coconut milk wouldn't curdle.

Make sure you taste the curry and adjust the salt too. Turn off the heat and keep stirring it gently until the curry cools down a little bit.

Squeeze a few drops of lime juice

(This step is totally optional. It thickens up the curry just a little bit more, helps to cut through the creaminess.)

Sri Lankan Curry Powder

It's worth making your own batch of Sri Lankan curry powder. It takes ten minutes and will keep in the fridge in a jar for three months.

- 30g coriander seeds
- 15g cumin seeds
- 15g fennel seeds
- 15g black peppercorns
- 2 tbsp coconut or vegetable oil
- 8-10 fresh curry leaves
- 70g dried Kashmiri or medium hot red chillies
- ¼ tsp ground turmeric

In a dry pan over a low-medium heat, roast the coriander, cumin, fennel and black peppercorns for 1-2 minutes, stirring regularly, until they begin to be really fragrant, then pour them into a bowl.

Add the oil to the pan and cook the curry leaves and dried chillies for 2-3 minutes, stirring often. Remove from the heat and when cool, blitz in a spice grinder or food processor until fine – blitz in batches if needs be.

Stir in the turmeric and store in a sealed jam jar.



Sawborow

These delicious crunchy biscuits were in our room as a welcome treat on our arrival at The Charleston in Galle Fort. Remember sago? It gives a delicious crunchy texture to the Sawborow. Sawborow keep really well in an airtight container for up to one month.

Makes 100 approx.

- 1kg sago
- 1.4kg freshly grated coconut
- 1kg sugar
- 40g breadcrumbs
- 20g fennel seed
- 50g coconut butter

Preheat the oven to 120°C. Line a baking tray with parchment paper.

Combine all ingredients and mix with your hands until the mixture sticks together, adding 1-2 tablespoons of water if necessary. The moisture in the coconut will determine if you need the additional water. Place a cookie/biscuit cutter (7.5cm approx.) on the baking sheet.

Add a few tablespoons of the mixture and using the back of a spoon, press down until tight and compact. Carefully remove the cookie/biscuit cutter.

Repeat until all of the mixture has been used. Bake for 45 minutes until pale golden, turn over and bake the other side for 15 minutes.

Note: When you remove the sawborow from the oven, they will appear to be soft, but they become very crispy as they cool.

April in Ballymaloe

Kitchen Confidence, The Most Important Skills at Ballymaloe Cookery School, April 22-24

Sometimes it's just a matter of knowing a simple little technique that makes all the difference to your confidence in the kitchen. This two and a half day course will teach you some of these Ballymaloe basics and give you confidence to have fun cooking for yourself, friends or family. Many of the recipes use delicious, seasonal ingredients from the school's organic farm and gardens. We'll show you how to make a delicious loaf of crusty bread and share a selection of appetisers, starters, mains and puddings.

Live Stream: Ballymaloe Breads with Darina Allen, April 24

Darina loves baking and in this afternoon class, she's determined to take the mystery out of bread-making, sharing many of the favourites in her repertoire from soda bread, yeast bread, flat bread – some of which are made in minutes. You'll learn how to make the famous Ballymaloe brown yeast bread – no kneading and only one rising. When Darina released the New Ballymaloe Bread Book in 2023, the original was already a classic, many new recipes were added to the new addition. Copies of all recipes included. ■ ballymaloecookeryschool.ie

Wild Food of the Week: Alexanders

Still time to enjoy alexanders (Smyrniolus olustrum), the native plant with pale yellow green leaves growing along the roadsides in the countryside at present. It's over 1 metre high.

Boil the thick stems of this umbelliferous plant for a few minutes until tender. Alexanders have a mild celery flavour slightly like sea kale, delicious served on toast with melted butter or hollandaise sauce. Use as a vegetable accompaniment or tossed through pasta.

Every part of the plant is edible, roots, flowers and seeds. The young leaves are good in salads. They are best harvested just before the buds burst into flower. Otherwise, like many plants, they become bitter.

How to bake...

Citrus Oat Slices

THE scent of toasting oats helps to cheer up the duller days. Oats are a staple Irish ingredient and are wonderfully satisfying when used in baking.

They not only add structure and flavour but have the added bonus of being packed with soluble fibre and a wide variety of minerals and vitamins. These slices are a blend of the nutty sweetness of the crumble, and the citrus filling that seeps into the outer layers.

Porridge is served daily in our house during the colder months but at this time of year I start to make batches of granola or even a dish of baked oats that can be kept in the fridge and scooped out as needed.

The addition of vanilla and cinnamon, and even a whisp of orange zest, help to elevate the baked oats to a real morning treat. I also stir in a little maple syrup before baking.

Making your own granola is also far cheaper than buying it by the bag. For every 400g of oats I melt 50g of peanut butter and 50g of honey into 100g of olive oil and stir this through the oats before allowing them to gently heat in a low oven until dry and crisp. Stir whatever combination of dried fruit, nuts and seeds that you wish, and you will not look back.

Whether it is the zesty oat slices, baked breakfast oats or homemade granola, you will have a tasty family treat and a deliciously smelling kitchen.

Prep time 20 minutes
Bake time: 35 minutes
Makes 9

- 125g self raising flour
- 100g butter, soft
- 125g light muscovado sugar
- 90g porridge oats

For the lemon layer

- 350g condensed milk
- 85ml lemon juice
- Zest of 2 lemons

1. Line an 8-inch square cake tin with parchment.
2. Preheat your oven to 180°C/gas mark 4.
3. Sieve the flour and set aside.

4. Cream the butter and sugar until light and fluffy.
5. Add the flour and oats to the butter mixture and combine to make a crumble.
6. Press just over half of the crumble into the base of your tin, pressing it down firmly.
7. Bake for 12 minutes until lightly golden.
8. While it is baking whisk the condensed milk with the lemon juice and zest.
9. Pour the lemon layer over the crumble after you have removed it from the oven, you do not need to let it cool first.
10. Spread the rest of the crumble on top and very gently pat this layer down.
11. Bake for a further 23 minutes or until the edges are golden.
12. Allow to cool in the tin before slicing.

baker's tips

- When lining the cake tin it is best to leave a little extra parchment on each side so it can be used to pull the slices from the tin after they have been baked. After baking and cooling, you can then lift the tray bake out using the parchment paper on either side and place onto a chopping board.
 - You will get the best results if the ingredients are at room temperature, particularly the butter, which will combine with the sugar with more ease.
 - To ensure that the butter and sugar are evenly mixed, stop your mixer every now and then as you are creaming and scrape down the sides and around the base of the bowl with a rubber spatula.
 - The mixture will appear dry and be crumbly when it is all combined, but this is the correct texture. The bottom layer will need to be compacted quite a lot to ensure it forms a solid layer in the base of the tin, like when you are making the base of a cheesecake. This layer will provide structure when you cut your slices at the end.
 - When using citrus zest it is worth trying to source unwaxed fruit. If this is not possible you can place your lemons or other fruit in some warm water and quite vigorously dry them with a clean towel to remove the layer of wax that is added to the skins.
 - When slicing, I use a hot knife which allows for a cleaner cut. For ease, I mark the tray into slices while still warm and fresh out of the oven. Simply indent them with a knife and then fully cut when they have cooled.
 - The slices will keep for two days at room temperature in an airtight container or for about five days in the fridge.
 - These slices can be frozen. It is best to make sure they are fully cooled before freezing. I place a layer of parchment between the slices before putting them in a freezer-proof container.
- Two delicious variations**
- Mixed seed and chocolate**
Add two teaspoon of chia seeds and two teaspoons of ground flax seeds to the oats. The lemon juice and zest are omitted, and the juice can be replaced with 85ml of orange juice, or juice strained from a rhubarb compote is also nice at this time of year. Sprinkle 100g of dark chocolate chips onto the condensed milk layer before adding the topping.
- Lime and pistachio**
Substitute the lemon juice and zest with equal amounts of lime juice and zest. You can then add 50g of finely chopped unsalted de-shelled pistachios and reduce the amount of oats to 60g. The nuts can be added at the same time as the sieved flour and oats.





SARAH BUTLER

The Family Cook

A pair of firm family favourites

THIS WEEK, I have two delicious recipes that are quick to make and sure to impress, even in a rush. Spaghetti carbonara’s recipe is always up for debate: egg yolks only or whole eggs; which bacon is correct? Should you add cream? (No!) As you know, I like to keep food easy, so use whatever bacon you want. I am

partial to egg yolks over whole eggs on this one; they give a lovely colour to the sauce and are less likely to scramble when the pasta water is added. Homemade garlic bread is one of my favourite things. Its key ingredients are real butter, fresh parsley, and crusty bread. There is never enough — it vanishes. For a cheesy edition, grate a little parmesan into the garlic butter

mixture. Once you make homemade garlic bread, you will never have it any other way. It’s the perfect side to many dishes and so simple to make well. It’s great to make up slices, freeze them uncooked, and then pop them in the oven when you need them. Enjoy these two recipes this week and add them to your collection of family favourites.



Garlic Bread

Such a simple recipe and a million times nicer than pre-made and frozen. Be sure to use real Irish butter, fresh bread, fresh garlic and fresh parsley for the best results.

- 1 baguette
- 120g softened butter
- 4 cloves garlic, minced
- 1 tbsp fresh parsley, finely chopped
- Pinch of sea salt

Optional:
■ 50g freshly grated parmesan or mozzarella

Preheat oven to 220°C/ 200°C fan/gas 7. Line a large baking sheet with parchment or foil. Cut the bread into slices and place on a large baking sheet. Mix the butter, garlic, parsley and salt in a bowl until well combined. Spread evenly over the bread. Bake for 10-15 minutes or until golden brown. If you want to add the cheese, add it in the last 2 minutes of baking.

Sarah’s secrets

To make ahead, slice a loaf and spread each slice with garlic butter. Freeze them on a tray. Once frozen, transfer them to a freezer bag and cook from frozen anytime you want.

Spaghetti carbonara

This is my version of the Italian favourite. I know there are many variations of this popular dish. I always have pancetta lardons in the fridge for those days when I have few ingredients or time for dinner. It’s quick, easy, and tasty. What’s not to love?

Prep time: 10 minutes
Cook time: 15 minutes

Sarah’s secrets

Watch the sauce carefully. It only takes a minute to scramble, which you don’t want to happen, so keep the pan on a low heat.

Serves 4

- 300g spaghetti
- 100g pancetta lardons
- 1 garlic clove, minced

- 4 eggs yolks
- 150g parmesan, finely grated
- Salt and freshly ground pepper
- 1 tbsp fresh parsley, finely chopped

Cook the pasta in salted boiling water until al dente. Fry the pancetta in a pan until golden, adding in the minced garlic for the last minute of cooking. Leave the bacon in the pan for now. Whisk to combine the egg and parmesan in a bowl. Once the pasta is cooked, keep 100-200ml of the pasta water for the sauce. Strain the pasta and add to the frying

pan with the bacon over a medium heat. Combine everything. With the pan on medium to low heat, pour the egg mixture into the pasta, followed by the pasta water. Combine the pasta with the sauce to coat it entirely — this will only take a minute or so. Remove from the heat and be careful not to cook it too long or the eggs will scramble. Season liberally with freshly ground black pepper. Serve a portion of pasta on a plate and spoon some bacon lardons on top. Garnish with fresh parsley and some grated parmesan.



Pictures: Sarah Butler



Seafood Made Simple

More flavour, less effort

THE KEY to producing excellent seafood dishes is all about the procurement and handling of the fish. The preparation and treatment of the species beforehand is the most crucial part of the whole process. The cooking often being the quickest part of the operation.

It can be laborious when dealing with large quantities in professional kitchens, but I like to keep it as simple as possible when I'm cooking at home. Maximum flavour for minimum effort.

A whole baked fish fits this brief. For this weekend's recipe, I'm using an often-overlooked flat fish; brill, which is in season now. A wonderful substitute for turbot, it's sweet and subtle in flavour and much leaner on the pocket.

This method of baking whole fish also works with plaice, megrim, witch, and a lemon sole that's on the larger side. The blood orange and chilli butter it's served with has so many uses. It's fabulous with irony brassicas like cavolo nero or purple sprouting broccoli. I also love adding a teaspoon of this butter to a shucked oyster and baking in a hot oven until blistered and bubbling, a delicious start to any meal.

Baking a fish whole has lots of perks, producing a moister and a deeper flavoured result, with better heat retention which is handy when you're entertaining and worrying about keeping the food hot. There's no dilly-dallying around with different-sized and shaped fillets in a pan you just pop in the oven.

Removing the cooked opaque flesh from the bone is a breeze if you approach with a delicate hand, a knife and a spoon: use the frame and bone structure of the fish as a guide. The skin on brill can often be bitter so I'll usually bake it with skin on and remove it after cooking.

Fish tales

- Depending on how hot the chillies are, sometimes I will leave the seeds in. It is important to taste the tiniest sliver of the chilli first to gauge the heat.
- If you'd be more comfortable avoiding preparing the whole fish for baking, ask your fishmonger to do this for you.
- Use a shallow fish for this recipe. It makes it much easier to access and remove the fish after cooking and will speed up cooking time.
- I like to use a mandolin for shaving the fennel and garlic. You could use a food processor or a very sharp knife.
- The best way to check that the fish is cooked through is by using a thermometer. Always insert it into the thickest part of the fish.

Picture: Chani Anderson



Whole baked brill with blood orange chilli butter

Serves 2

- 2 blood oranges, zested
- 2 red chillies
- 60g unsalted butter
- 1 tsp rapeseed oil
- 1x 600g-800g whole brill
- 1 bulb of fennel, shaved or finely sliced
- 2 cloves garlic, finely sliced
- 200ml dry white wine
- Sea salt flakes
- Parsley, to garnish

To make the blood orange and chilli butter

In a medium-sized mixing bowl place the unsalted butter and the zest of both blood oranges.

Finely chop and mince the red chillies, add to the butter and orange zest. Mix well to combine. Season with salt to taste. Set aside.

To prepare the brill

Preheat oven to 200°C. Place the whole fish on a well-secured chopping board.

Pat dry using some kitchen paper to remove excess moisture or any slime that might be present on the surface of the fish

Using a pair of sharp scissors, remove the skirt of the fish, carefully working around the frame of the fish.

Remove the head of the fish using a sharp knife. At this point, pat dry again.

Using the rapeseed oil, grease a large roasting tray or dish that's big enough to fit the whole fish comfortably.

Place the shaved fennel and finely sliced garlic on the tray. Season the underside of the brill generously with sea salt and

place on top of the fennel and garlic; this will act as a trivet, preventing the fish from sticking to the tray.

Spread the blood orange and chilli butter all over the exposed surface area of the fish. Pour the white wine over the fish and bake in the oven for 15 minutes.

Remove from the oven and baste with the white wine, flavoured butter and cooking juices released from the fish. Return to the oven and cook for a further 5 minutes. Until the fish is cooked through and the thickest part of the fish flakes when pressed with a fork.

Remove from the oven and rest for a couple of minutes before serving. Serve in the roasting tray and finish with fresh parsley and a few blood orange segments.



Wine
A glass for those warmer days

AS THE weather slowly warms and I dare to think of summertime and warm days spent outside, my wine consumption has changed in recent weeks. I'll still open the odd Rhône Syrah, young ripe Bordeaux red, or Mendoza Malbec should I need them to match a steak or stew.

But in the last two weeks it has been lighter wines on the table such as Valpolicella and Refosco from Northern Italy, Beaujolais and Pinot Noir from France, and Spätburgunder from Germany.

For whites it has been richer grapes from Southern Italy such as the Pipoli Greco-Fiano blend from Basilicata, Verdicchio, Vermentino, and some inexpensive Grillos from Sicily (a former Marsala grape much improved thanks to modern production methods).

The sunshine even had me digging out rosés from my stash. It may not always be warm enough to drink in the

garden just yet, but you can look out the window at the daffodils and camellias and think of warmer days.

The Provençal rosé below is from Donnybrook Fair (DF), who have revamped many of their stores and are always a pleasure to visit. DF have a range of exclusive wines not found in other Musgrave Group stores so are worth a visit. (They just need to hurry up and open a couple of stores in Munster.)

Also below is a Salento Fiano, new to Lidl and an old favourite from Sicily, surely the island that evokes the Mediterranean spirit best of all. Sicily frequently offers remarkable value and is often a safer bet than Puglia which has too many wines made in a sweet style often from dried grapes. Watch for wines from the Mandrarossa Co-Op (independents), look for Nero d'Avola, Nerello Mascalese, and floral Frappato in red, and in white, Grillo, Cattarato, Inzolia, Fiano, and Carricante.



Masseria Metrano Fiano Salento, Italy €9.99

Fiano is probably the best white grape of Southern Italy (maybe all of Italy) and deserves to be better known, even Pliny the Elder was a fan (possibly). I love its combination of floral honey aromas and tropical fruit flavours balanced by texture and spice. This version from Puglia has ripe pear with a touch of pineapple, texture, tang and concentration combined with length and not a little complexity.

■ Lidl



Saint Max Côtes de Provence Rosé, France €21.99

This is appropriate for Easter as it is named for a Provençal bishop St. Maximin d'Aix who was exiled in the Holy Land and became a friend of Mary Magdalene and Lazarus.

A blend of 50% Grenache plus some Syrah, Cinsault, Carignan and others, this is prototypical with a salmon pink hue, floral red fruit aromas, a berry-fresh palate and a tang of citrus and chalk.

■ Donnybrook Fair



Vigneti Zabù 'Il Passo' Nerello Mascalese, Sicily €19.95

Nerello Mascalese is more commonly found on the volcanic soils of Mt. Etna which transfer a salty intensity to the grape, but they come at a price as they are rarely under €35.

This version shows off the more floral, juicy side of the grape with violet scents mixed with ripe blackberries. It is supple, elegant and delicious.

■ Bradleys; Matsons; O'Briens; World Wide Wines; 64 Wines; TheAllotment.ie; Donnybrook Fair; Independents

SPIRIT OF THE WEEK



Boann Single Pot Still Marsala Cask, 47% ABV, €70

In keeping with this week's Mediterranean theme, this is finished in Sicilian Marsala casks (initially aged in ex-Bourbon barrels). Boann are really coming into their own and I have loved all their recent releases, including the Cork Whiskey Fest special (in Palo Cortado casks) as well as the Madeira and PX releases. Honey and spice, supple and complex with lingering citrus, dried berries and golden sultanas dipped in peppery honey.

■ Bradleys; Celtic Whiskey; Molloy's; Boann Distillery; Irishmalts.com



Lena restaurant in Portobello, Dublin. Picture: Moya Nolan

Touch of dolce vita to Lena restaurant

AN ITALIAN friend of mine, long resident in Ireland, avoids talking about food with fellow Italians as it always leads to arguments. Everyone's mamma or nonna cooks better than everyone else's; in Italy food is never fuel, it is culture, it is everything.

So, can three Irish people open an Italian restaurant in what used to be Locks? Of course they can if they are Liz Matthews, Simon Barrett and Paul McNamara, who already run Uno Mas and Etto, two of Dublin's best-loved restaurants.

The space has had a revamp and seems cleaner and lighter toned with painted wooden panelling and simpler wooden furniture than in its previous incarnation. Our welcome was warm and we were seated canalside by the window, always the best spot.

Lena's menu is split in Italian fashion into Antipasti, Primi and Secondi, with bites and snacks in the antipasti section (olives, suppli etc.), and pastas and small plates in the primi section. We began with anchovy and sage leaf fritti (€8), a dish that went viral within hours of the restaurant opening. I can see why.

As simple as it was profound, an anchovy had been sandwiched between two sage leaves and fried in an airy light tempura batter, the crisp exterior hiding an explosion of flavour from the salty anchovy cut by the green-bright sage. Sourdough focaccia (€5) had been fermented for 72 hours and was nutty and textured with a fruity-bitter olive oil for dipping and a delightfully sticky honey glaze was a welcome addition.

Cacio e pepe (€16) is one of those dishes that restaurants outside Rome offer at their peril, such is the mystical reverence that surrounds it. Lena uses thicker hand-rolled pici pasta rather than spaghetti, but successfully recreates the lubricious peppery intensity of flavours.

The portion isn't large but the richness of the dish more than compensates; it is so well executed that it could calm a Lazio Ultra supporter following a three-nil defeat by Juventus.

LESLIE WILLIAMS

Lena

Our rating

8.5/10

1 Windsor Terrace, Portobello, Dublin 8

Dinner for two with wine cost €167

Pumpkin and ricotta-filled mezzaluna (€16) were similarly silky, topped with thick grated parmesan cheese and luxuriating in a brown butter sauce which was nicely cut by fried sage leaves and crunchy walnuts. These two pasta dishes were so good

they felt like statements, as declarative and precise as clarion horns commanding a Roman legion to advance, the chefs at Lena know what they are doing, you might as well surrender.

We opted to share a main course and could have gone with barbecue pork chop with white beans, cod with artichokes and vermouth sauce, or maybe a shared Delmonico steak. But we had chose osso buco (€33), arguably the most famous Italian meat dish of them all.

The disc of veal shank had been slowly cooked for around 46 hours, our server told us, topped with a herbal and distinctly lemony gremolata to contrast the meaty richness and sat on a decently creamy saffron-infused Milanese risotto whose spikes of earthy smoky saffron flavour also added contrasts.

Best of all (for my taste), the rice grains retained some bite, and I loved that we were provided with a spoon to better extract the wobbly sweet marrow from the centre of the bone.

You might not think crispy garlic potatoes (€6) would work with risotto but of course they did, potatoes like this work with everything.

Hispi cabbage (€6) was a full quarter cabbage that had been char-grilled and drizzled with tonnato sauce (as found

in vitello tonnato). The cabbage offered some bitter sweet notes while the tang of the tonnato lifted the flavours further.

The drinks list is Italian focused, as to be expected, with a fine selection of aperitivos (e.g. cherry negroni, limoncello sour, peach spritz), and a solid representation of wines mainly from Italy, including skin contact wines (e.g. La Stoppa).

I opted for Trediberri Dogliani Dolcetto (€56), cherry scented, bright and fresh, and with enough bitter notes to cope with both the creamy pasta dishes and the osso buco.

For dessert we went for light and dark. A rum baba (€10) made with a pleasingly fluffy sponge solidly infused with rum and topped with cream, pistachio pieces and a bonus slice of rhubarb to herald springtime.

Better still was the lush chocolate olive oil cake (€11) with full-on bitter chocolate flavours doubled down upon with the addition of lots of peppery olive oil and given extra bitter notes from an espresso ice-cream, the core of sweetness ensuring the bitter notes did not overwhelm.

So, the trio behind Lena have done it again. Lena has been executed with acuity and focus but also with a sense of joy and of dolce vita. Viva Lena.

Departure Lounge
Inspiration for an Easter trip...

JILLIAN BOLGER



Kerry favourite

The Beara Peninsula's Sheen Falls Lodge is a family favourite, with pretty Kenmare town on its doorstep. Check in for a memorable five-star Easter stay between April 12 – 26 and enjoy a selection of complimentary Easter activities. The Easter Egg-stravaganza package includes a two- or three-night stay, dinner at The Stables Brasserie, breakfast each morning, access to Easanna Wellness and Spa, and complimentary Easter activities, including treasure hunts, cupcake decorating, movie nights, falconry displays, horse and carriage rides, and a visit from the Easter Bunny on Easter Sunday. Two-night package from €710, three-nights from €990.
■ sheenfallslodge.ie



Killarney is calling

The recently refurbished Hotel Killarney has a full spread of family-friendly activities on site this Easter. From a kids club with soft play, teen zones with arcade games and movie nights, a children's swimming pool and sensory hub, plus outdoor games and trails, mini golf and a playground, all on the hotel's grounds it's a great base for a family stay. Just one mile from Killarney town, you are close to Killarney National Park. Two nights B&B for two adults and one child from €164 per night with complimentary access to children's zones and the hotel's swimming pool.
■ hotelkillarney.ie

Riverside bliss

Take the family to Wexford and enjoy a riverside stay at the four-star Ferrycarrig Hotel. On the edge of Wexford town, the hotel's bedrooms offer soothing views over the Slaney River, its babbling water and bird song enhancing a relaxing break. Enjoy a two- or three-night stay in a spacious room with breakfast each morning, access to the hotel's leisure facilities, including a swimming pool, a baby preparation room, and outdoor playground. Included in your stay is a family pass to the Irish National Heritage Park — Ireland's largest outdoor museum — where history and nature come to life. Two-night stay for two adults and two children (up to age 15) from €400, three nights from €600.
■ ferrycarrighotel.ie



Pleasure of Portugal

We love the location of Albufeira's The Patio Suite Hotel, sitting between a fragrant pine grove and famous Praia da Falésia beach. Newly refurbished, the family-focused retreat features well-equipped and spacious suites and apartments, all with pool views. A peaceful natural setting, there's two pools and a sun and roof terrace. Guests can explore the nearby fishing village of Olhos de Água, the marina of Vilamoura, and lively Albufeira and there's a handy beach transfer service for guests, with exclusive sun loungers. One week's accommodation over Easter from €665 for a family of four with Booking.com. Dublin-Faro flights from €370, ryanair.com

Deal of the week

Kilkenny is a fun spot, and doubly so with the kids. This Easter stay at the four-star Hotel Kilkenny for a two- or three-night stay, where two children under 12 stay and dine for free. A 10-minute walk from Kilkenny's city centre, you'll stay in spacious rooms and enjoy a full Irish breakfast each morning, dinner on one evening in the refurbished Rosehill 1831 Bar, with full access to the hotel's new Technogym, pool, and dedicated family swimming and play areas. Two-night break from €445, €665 for a three-night stay for two adults and two children.
■ hotelkilkenny.ie





Left, The Camino, the most famous walking holiday of them all; right, the Nakasendo trail in Japan.



The world's greatest walking trails

Pack your hiking boots and set off on an epic walking adventure this year along one of these memorable routes, writes **Thom Breathnach**

Inca Trail, Peru

Length: 42km | Duration: 4 days

Difficulty: strenuous

Arguably one of the most bucket-listed backpacking hikes on the planet, Peru's iconic Inca Trail, set high in the Peruvian Andes, lives up to the lofty hype. The legendary trail takes you through some of the civilisation's incredible archaeological ruins, with a large portion of the stairs still intact. You'll get your steps in — there are said to be over 70,000 steps on the trail alone. For a more off-the-beaten-track route, I'd recommend the Lares Trail, which takes you through remote mountain valleys dotted with grazing llamas and traditional Quechuan hamlets. The ultimate crescendo for either option is arriving at Machu Picchu, with many trips reaching the breathtaking lost city at sunrise.

■ **Book it:** G Adventures offer four-day guided Inca Trail trips from €739 (excl. flights); gadventures.com

Sentier des Fromageries, Switzerland

Length: 15km | Duration: 5hrs

Difficulty: moderate

Switzerland may be chock-a-block with heavenly hiking trails, but a deliciously bite-sized one to consider for your next Alpine visit is this charming

Cheesemaker Trail at the famous town of Gruyères. Wanderers can choose between two equidistant routes, which lead from the dairy-obsessed town up through lush alpine meadows, evergreen forests and valleys, peppered with bell-clanging cows. Hikes are self-guided and reach their peak at mountaintop dairy, where you can enjoy a ttour and tasting. Wrap up back down in the castellated old town of Gruyères, where local menus of raclette awaits.

■ **Book it:** Check out myswitzerland.com for more.

Camino de Santiago, Spain

Length: 780km | Duration: 30-35 days

Difficulty: moderate

The most famous walking holiday of them all, the very word camino has lent itself to the tourism lexicon for any overnight walk in Ireland or beyond. There are myriad iterations of the route nowadays, from the original Primitivo pilgrim route from Oviedo to the Portuguese camino, but all trails ultimately lead to the shrine of Saint James in Santiago De Compostela. Most popular is the "Camino Frances" from Jean-Pied-de-Port in the Pyrenees through Basque country and northern Spain's rugged coast to Santiago. Most tourists tend to take it in chunks over the years. Either enjoy it DIY or join guided tours where accommodation — and crucially,

baggage transfers, are all included.

■ **Book it:** Six-night trips including breakfast, accommodation and luggage transfers from €525pps; shandontravel.ie

Mount Kilimanjaro Trek, Tanzania

Length: 64km | Duration: 7 days

Difficulty: strenuous

Discover Africa's most famous summit via Rongai route, the northern route of the mountain known for its drier, kinder climate. Starting from your gateway base of Moshi, trekkers will zigzag up to the 5895m summit as spectacular savannah scapes and sunsets spill around you.

■ **Book it:** Trailfinders offer a seven-night guided Kilimanjaro Route from €2,354pps (excl. flights) which includes meals, hotels and full-service camping en route. trailfinders.ie.

Nakasendo Trail, Japan

Length: 540km | Duration: 20-22 days

Difficulty: moderate

Think of Japan and you might think of millions of commuters zipping through the Shibuya Crossing but there's a far more serene side to traditional Japanese life and the Nakasendo Trail is one of the best ways to experience it. Self-guided tours along



Above: Giraffes in Kenya's Amboseli National Park with Kilimanjaro in the background. Below, Machu Picchu, on the Inca trail in Peru.



Setti Fatma in Morocco's Atlas Mountains



Manarola village in Cinque Terre National Park, Italy; Below: Tatranska Magistrála Trail, Slovakia.



the 400-year-old route which connects Tokyo and Kyoto, where you can wander from village to village staying in traditional shukubo temple lodgings or ryokan inns along the way.

■ **Book it:** Responsible Travel offer a two night self-guided Nakasendo Trail experience from €1,250pps (excl. flights) which includes accommodation, train transfers and a step by step itinerary. responsibletravel.com

Appalachian Trail, USA

Length: 3,536 | Duration: up to 200 days

Difficulty: moderate to strenuous

Claimed to be the world's longest hiking only trail, the "AT", taking in 14 states along the US East Coast, is one of America's true outdoor paradises. Campsites and primitive shelters are the most popular bases to overnight but you can also do back and forth trips from some of the trails most popular hunts from Hot Springs, North Carolina to Damascus, Virginia. Route highlights include the Great Smokey Mountains and Shenandoah National Park while the 100 mile wilderness which leads to the northern terminus of the trail, Mt Katahdin in Maine is a dream section to take a chunk out of, not least in the fall. Just mind the moose.

■ **Book it:** See appalachiantrail.org for infinite trail inspiration.

West Highland Way, Scotland

Length: 154km | Duration: 6-8 day

Difficulty: moderate

Arguably the UK's most beloved hiking route, the West Highland Way winds hikers through some of Scotland's most spectacular scenery, sandwiched between the towns of Milngavie to Fort William. Though a week is required to take in the full trip, many hikers take a night or two and you can even pick up an official passport to log your progress. Highlights include Loch Lomond and traversing the wild expanse of Rannor Moor while being wowed by stunning sites such as the peak of Buachaille Etive Mor. Great public transport also makes this a fine option for those who fancy a few days in the great outdoors via Glasgow.

■ **Book it:** Seven day self-guided trips with B&B

hotel accommodation from €885pps (excl. flights); orbisways.com

Cinque Terre, Italy

Length: 40km | Duration: 5 days

Difficulty: moderate

To give your hiking boots the bella vita treatment, lace up for a trip to Cinque Terre, Italy's exquisite urban Unesco site perched along on the Ligurian coast. You'll wander along the cliffs, beaches and cobbled streets of the five towns of Monterosso al Mare, Vernazza, Corniglia, Manarola and Riomaggiore, breathing in some of Europe's most romantic trails.

■ **Book it:** Seven-day fully guided trip based on half board accommodation from €1,759pps (incl. flights); tdactiveholidays.com

St Olav's Way, Norway

Length: 643 | Duration: 32 days

Difficulty: moderate

When Norwegians ditch the snow shoes for the hiking boots they are spoiled with some of Europe's most incredible hiking terrain. St. Olav's Way is the country's most significant pilgrim route and follows nine different routes from capital Oslo to Nidaros Cathedral of Trondheim. Today, the 600km stretch between Trondheim and Oslo is the most popular, particularly in summer when you can enjoy great scenery under (almost) midnight sun, where you can visit some charming sites like a medieval pilgrim farmstead and where you can soak in the heritage while fuelling up on moose tacos.

■ **Book it:** Plan your DIY trip via pilegrimsleden.no

Tour du Mont Blanc, France

Length: 170km | Duration: 10-12 days

Difficulty: strenuous

What was originally formed by shepherds moving their flock from valley to valley, is today one of Europe's most epic outdoors experiences. Trails to circumnavigate Europe's highest mountain typically start at the French village of Les Houches in the scenic Chamonix Valley and border hop into both Italy and Switzerland before looping back.

The blockbuster route is certainly one for the

more sure-footed (you'll need to scale fixed ladders on occasion, for example) but there are also few options to leap-frog sections via cable car.

■ **Book it:** Hike with macsadventure.com from €1,035pps (flights excl.) for a four-night tour.

Oukaimeden to Tachdirten, Morocco

Length: 8km | Duration: 5hrs | Difficulty: moderate

Don't overlook Morocco's Atlas Mountains if you're looking for a walking getaway with sunshine, culture and spectacular vistas guaranteed. Guided tours across the range are increasingly popular and take the heat out of map reading and orientation in the North African sun.

Some of the best routes include the Tizi n'Addi mountain pass which you'll discover after meandering mule paths through traditional Berber villages. At an altitude of over 2,000m, a decent level of fitness is required for these routes, but refuelling on hearty tagines along the way will aid any recovery.

■ **Book it:** TD Active Holidays offer a seven night guided Atlas Mountain walking tour on a half board basis from €1,699pps (incl. flights); tdactiveholidays.com

Tatranska Magistrála Trail, Slovakia

Length: 72km | Duration: 7 days

Difficulty: moderate

Slovakia is one of the lesser-trundled walking destinations for Irish travellers, but with some excellent mountain ranges and great budget airline connections to Bratislava (and nearby Krakow), the country should certainly be on everyone's rambling radar. The country's High Tatras mountains, which form part of the greater Carpathian range and fold into neighbouring Poland, are a hiking paradise in summer and feature a well developed hiking infrastructure for tourists. The trail is the country's most beloved route which can be discovered by hotel-to-hotel hiking or overnighting in traditional mountain huts.

■ **Book it:** Local specialists Slovakia Explorer offer guided treks in the range with rates from €599pps B&B for a three night trip (excl. flights). slovakia-explorer.com.

Me & My Travels

Pippa O'Connor

ENTREPRENEUR Pippa O'Connor knows how to build from the ground up, whether it's her fashion empire, beauty brand, or a growing list of travel tales. She's as excited about her newest beauty venture as she is about her next getaway. But when it comes to travel, it's her personal memories that stand out most.

Favourite childhood holiday memory

I'm the youngest of three, and my brother and sister are five and seven years older than me, so I always felt like the baby. My mum was a single mum, and when my brother and sister were in school, she and I would often go on little holidays, just the two of us. We had great family trips too, but I have strong memories of visiting Nerja in Spain together. It was a quaint little Spanish town, and I remember eating paella there for the first time. We'd always go to the same restaurant and the little local market. It was such a lovely, quiet place, and we went back year after year. Those trips really stuck with me.

Most memorable trip

Bringing our boys to Lapland. We've only done it once, but we managed to keep it an amazing surprise. Louis was six, and Ollie was nine at the time, and it was just magical. You have this idea in your head of what it will be like, and you wonder if it will be that magical – and it really was.

We stayed in this gorgeous place called the Arctic Tree-house Hotel, like little tree-houses on stilts in a forest. It was just so well done, and I always recommend it to friends who haven't been yet. It's one of those trips I'll never forget.



Most surprising destination

Every time I go to Italy, I'm surprised. It's such a big country, but there are so many different elements and places to explore. Lately, I've been going for work, and I've ended up in these tiny little villages that I probably wouldn't have chosen to visit myself. It's incredible, because you're experiencing the real Italian culture and seeing a side of Italy that's not as well-known. I love that feeling of being transported to a different time.

I've been lucky enough to meet local manufacturers for work, and you get to see the heart of the country, the parts that feel completely different from places like Rome or Milan. Italy keeps surprising me – just when I think I've seen it all, I discover something completely new.



Favourite cities

I love London. I go there a lot, and every time, it feels different. There's always a new restaurant, a cool vintage shop, or a new cocktail bar to check out. I think I still get that excitement every time I visit because I'm not living there. I love going to shows in the West End, and there's just always something happening. It never feels the same twice.

If I'm going on a city break, whether it's with my husband, Brian, or a friend, it's usually London or Paris. Paris is so special to me. We've been there for baby-moons, we've celebrated big birthdays there, and it just has this romantic, timeless feel. I love visiting galleries, discovering little vintage shops, and just wandering the streets. I always wish I spoke French! My mum was fluent, and I really regret not learning it properly when I was younger.



Favourite thing to do while travelling

Because I'm always on the go, I love to do as little as possible when I'm away. I'm not someone who wants to go on a hike or do a big tour – I just want to switch off. It's probably the only time I get to actually sit and read a physical book! At home, I listen to a lot of audiobooks when I'm in the car, but when I'm on holiday, I try to switch off properly. If I'm with the kids, it's obviously different, but even then, I consciously put my phone away and just be in the moment. I also love beautiful scenery and taking photos, so I gravitate towards visually stunning places.



Most beautiful country

There are so many, but Greece stands out. Santorini, in particular, is breathtaking. Brian and I have been a couple of times, and the quieter parts of Santorini, perched on the cliffs, are just incredible. Every time I've been, I've had that moment where I stop and just take it all in. The views don't even look real; they're that beautiful.



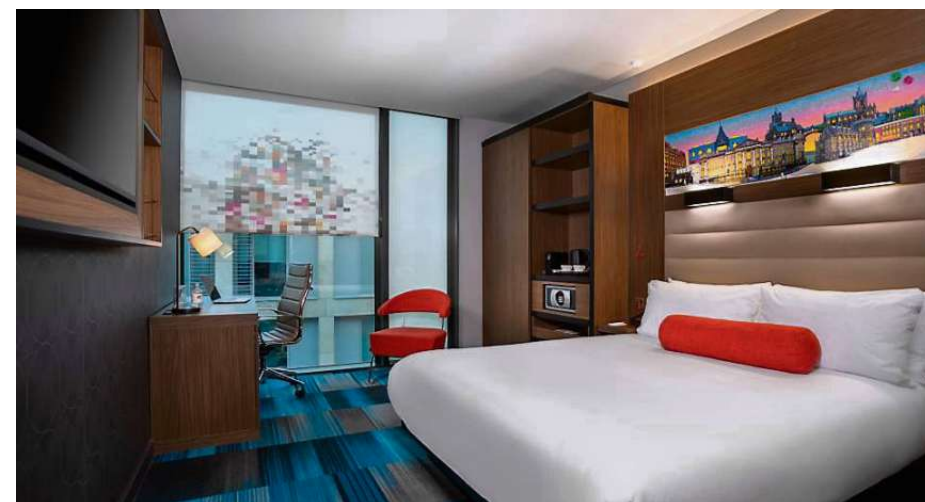
Bucket list trip

As a family, we've been talking about going on a safari. None of us have been, so it's something we'd love to do together. Billy is three now, so maybe in another year or two when he's a little older. I need to do more research, but it's definitely on our list as a big family adventure."

Interview by Jennifer McShane

the Hotel Examiner

NICOLE GLENNON



Location

Situated in Dublin's Liberties, Marriott Bonvoy-operated Aloft sits in an area of Dublin that may not be the first port of call for many travellers.

That's a shame, because there is plenty to explore here; a number of distilleries (their neighbours, Teeling, are well worth a visit), Dublin's oldest library, Saint Patrick's Cathedral, and speciality coffee shops around every corner – there's even a vegan bakery on the hotel's doorstep. You're about a 20 minute walk from many of Dublin's other selling points, from Temple Bar to Grafton Street.

Style and design

With an exterior not too dissimilar to one of UCD's main campus accommodation buildings, it's giving student accommodation from the off – and that does prove to be the case throughout the majority of our stay. The WXYZ rooftop bar is a clash of bright pinks and reds, with the oft-repeated neon signage, 'This must be the place'.

A ticker tape displaying Reuters news alerts and American football fixtures is in full view, complete with a pool table and board games like Cards Against Humanity. When we see 'You need to report to reception to get a cue for said pool table', we're honestly getting déjà vu.

Later, however, we explore the hotel's new events space and bar and the difference is jarring. Here it's all low lighting, slick marble and wood paneling, with seating that is designed for privacy. It feels like an entirely different hotel, and leaves us a bit confused about who the hotel is trying to target.

Service

The receptionist takes a call mid-check-in without acknowledging us. Other than this one blip, service is

Aloft Dublin

A stand-out meal and friendly service endear us, but who is Aloft Dublin for?

Our rating
7/10

8/10

swift and friendly throughout our stay.

7/10

Guest rooms

Student accommodation vibes continue. Bright orange chairs, a blue carpet and a blind with a pixelated design. A cityscape of the capital by Dublin-based Sketchy above the bed is nice, with a comfortable working desk and a large smart TV also part of the room's make-up.

Unfortunately, none of the channels work and we can't connect to our Netflix account.

The bathroom, all white and grey, is basic and doesn't provide any of the small touches we've come to expect from a four-star (vanity kits, brand-name toiletries). But there's one major gripe that stands above the rest. The bathroom has a sliding door which doesn't click in place to shut. That means, every time you try to close it, it slowly slides back open. You wouldn't want to be staying with someone you aren't very, *very* comfortable with...

6/10

In-room perks

A mini fridge is fully stocked with fizzy drinks, beers (and plenty of non-alcoholic varieties), with some Teeling whiskies too. All the basics, from ironing facilities to a kettle and Nespresso machine are provided. The two takeaway cups next to a generous selection of coffees and teas are a nice touch – we immediately wonder why more hotels don't do the same.

7/10

On the menu

The hotel's restaurant, Tenters Gastropub, is unquestionably the highlight of our stay. On a Thursday night, the place is hopping. With F.X Buckley meat on the menu, warm service and an unobtrusive musician playing a mix of pub classics and rebel songs, it has everything we suspect both tourists and locals

want from a gastropub. We sample the burger, Tomahawk steak and one of Tenters classic pies on the night, and would easily order all again.

Breakfast the next morning, we wouldn't do again. A help-yourself buffet, there's nothing pleasant about lukewarm scrambled eggs and bacon. However, the server checking our room number did say we could request items from the kitchen, so perhaps those with more gumption than ourselves might be cheeky enough to request a plate directly from the chef.

7/10

Activities and amenities

A small gym provides the basics. The panoramic views of Dublin from the rooftop bar is the standout amenity here.

6/10

The bill

Starting from €189 B&B based on two sharing.

■ The Hotel Examiner was a guest of Aloft Dublin

Room to improve? Aside from gripes in the bedroom (bathroom door, smart TV etc), our main feeling was the hotel needs to decide what it wants to be. A low-cost, budget hotel aimed at younger travellers makes sense, but if the new function room and bar suggests a move to attract the corporate market, the rooms will fall short.

Accessibility? Accessible rooms available with all public areas wheelchair accessible.

EV chargers? No.

Family-friendly? The hotel offers a Family Camps option where you can avail of an extra air mattress and a tepee along with treats and board games to enjoy.

Dog-friendly? Aloft operates an ARF (Animals Are Fun) programme. Beds, cages, bowls, food – all can be arranged once you let the hotel know in advance you have a furry friend coming along.

Aloft Dublin City, 1 Mill St, The Liberties.
■ marriott.com/en-us/hotels/dubal-aloft-dublin-city

Screen Time

DECLAN BURKE

Mr Burton ★★★★★

Four Mothers ★★★★★

A Minecraft Movie ★★☆☆☆

Film of the Week

IN 1942, your prospects as a working-class teenage boy growing up in the Welsh industrial city of Port Talbot were pretty grim: you were destined for the mines or donning a uniform to fight the Nazis.

The young Richie Jenkins (Harry Lawtey) got lucky: abandoned by his alcoholic father, raised by his sister Cis (Aimee-Ffion Edwards), Richie bonds with his English teacher **Mr Burton** (12A) over a love of Shakespeare, and glimpses an opportunity to escape, via a scholarship to Oxford, the grinding hardship his family has endured for generations.

But even the supportive Mr Burton (Toby Jones) baulks when Richie confides his dream to become an actor: Richie is simply the wrong class, with a working-man's diction, and a name that reeks of functional poverty.

Written by Tom Bullough and Josh Hyams, and directed by Marc Evans, *Mr Burton* is a stirring account of how the gauche Richie Jenkins became Richard Burton, the most promising British actor of his generation and, eventually, Hollywood royalty.

The story beats are as expected as the clumsy, mumbling Richie graduates from muddy rugby fields to local am-dram and gradually develops that wonderfully distinctive voice and stage presence, but the film's real strength is in the power of the performances.

Lawtey is excellent as the crude young man dazzled by Shakespearean rhythms (his mimicking of Burton's resonant tones is impressive), while Toby Jones is superb as the creatively frustrated Svengali who is subjected to a whispering campaign that suggests his interest in the younger man is not entirely pure.

Meanwhile, Lesley Manville provides fine support as Mr Burton's landlady and conscience, as does Aimee-Ffion Edwards as the older sister who was effectively the young Richie's mother too.

Four Mothers (15A) stars James McArdle as Edward, a middle-aged gay



Toby Jones as Mr Burton and Harry Lawtey as Richie Jenkins in a scene from 'Mr Burton'; below: Fionnula Flanagan steals the show in 'Four Mothers'.



Despite the best efforts of an endlessly game cast, the plot of 'A Minecraft Movie' feels cobbled together from far more enthralling epic adventures.

man living at home and caring for his aging mother, Alma (Fionnula Flanagan), who has recently had a stroke and can only communicate, courtesy of a program on her iPad, in a metallic voice.

With his debut novel being published in the States, Edward needs to focus on himself for once — but when his friends take off to Spain for a Pride weekend, swiftly followed by his therapist Dermot (Rory O'Neill), Edward finds himself caring for their mothers too (Stella McCusker, Dearbhla Molloy, and Paddy Glynn).

Darren Thornton's remake of *Mid-August Lunch* (2008) is a charming affair that somehow manages to be a gentle comedy that's laugh-out-loud funny.

The story charts Edward's emotional and creative frustrations, but it weaves

them into a host of sub-plots as the older women come to terms (some more successfully than others) with the loss of their independence and agency.

McArdle is a poignantly comic presence at the heart of the action as Edward's dutiful self-sacrifice starts to fray at the edges, and there's excellent support from Rory O'Neill as the self-involved therapist, Dearbhla Molloy as the deliciously cynical Jean, and especially Fionnula Flanagan as the mute Alma, who steals the show with a series of robotic-sounding zingers.

A Minecraft Movie (PG) stars Jack Black as the genius designer Steve, whose vivid imagination has created a cubed paradise in the Overworld dimension. But when the evil Malgosha (Ra-

chel House), the gold-digging ruler of Nether, steals the Orb of Dominance, Steve finds himself joining forces with a group of dimension-busting humans — Garrett (Jason Momoa), Natalie (Emma Myers), Henry (Sebastian Hansen) and Dawn (Danielle Brooks) — to save the Overworld from an invading horde of piglins, zombies, and skeleton assassins.

A blend of live action and animation, *A Minecraft Movie* promises Jumanji-like thrills and spills as our heroes navigate a computer game world, but despite the best efforts of an endlessly game cast (Jack Black at his most bug-eyed manic; Jason Momoa heroically spoofing his macho persona) the plot feels cobbled together from far more enthralling epic adventures.

■ All on theatrical release



PAT FITZPATRICK

Boxing Clever

DYING for Sex (Disney+) would be LOST without Michelle Williams. She plays Molly, a woman trying to figure out what she wants to do with her remaining days after getting a terminal cancer diagnosis.

Molly tells her counsellor she has never had an orgasm with someone other than her husband. The counsellor tells Molly that she enjoys being hog-tied during sex. (Look it up. Actually, don't look it up.)

This doesn't seem very ethical from the counsellor. In the next scene, Molly tells her friend she is leaving her husband Steve because she doesn't want to die with him.

We've seen this coming because Steve is the classic useless husband. You know the type — weak, faux-feminist who is really only concerned about himself, telling Molly he is taking her off caffeine and sugar because he wants her to live as long as possible.

There is a lot of chest-beating about toxic masculinity after *Adolescence* on Netflix. Maybe it's time to stop putting the useless husband character into so many shows — it's not helping anyone.

Anyway, Michelle Williams. We spend a lot of time looking at her face while listening to her internal dialogue. It works because Michelle Williams has a brilliant face for light comedy, lighting up and

shutting down at will as she tries to figure out the many ways she wants to have sex before she dies.

A note for people who are looking forward to non-stop sex action. There isn't much. It's mainly Molly and her friend Nikki bantering about life in that over-crafted way you get in American comedy-dramas, where the dialogue is all about showing us that the writer is just brilliant at writing.

There is a sign of life in episode two when bad people blackmail Molly after a compromising video on a hook-up website falls into the wrong hands. But then it just goes back to over-crafted banter between Molly and Nikki.

The cast list promises Rob Del-

aney will turn up at some point as 'Neighbor Guy'. He eventually appears in episode three, as the slob of a guy next door who makes a lot of noise when he's masturbating. Molly barges in on a whim and insists on watching him pleasuring himself while showering him in verbal abuse. It's a nice deviation from the light entertainment. But the scene peters out into slapstick.

Dying for Sex is based on a podcast, where the presenter told the story of her real-life friend Molly. So somebody really died. The shame is that the TV version never lets the characters get beyond the banter, so it's hard to feel anything really, despite the best efforts of Michelle Williams' face.

Wedding of the Week

Eve Kelliher

First date is the perfect brew for Sarah and James's special day

SARAH MEANEY and James Murphy have one tasty piece of advice for other brides and grooms-to-be planning a church wedding.

Sarah and James, from Ballynacally, Co Clare, exchanged vows in the Church of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary, in the bride's native Milford, Co Cork, and after they were married, by Fr Peter O'Farrell, they motored across the border to Kerry for their reception at the Ballygarry Estate Hotel & Spa, Tralee. "Take your time on the drive to the venue. It's nice just to have a quiet moment and chat together — and make sure you have tea and sandwiches ready in the car!" says Sarah.

Another journey set the scene for the couple's first meeting, as Sarah had recently arrived from the other side of the world when they initially spotted one another.

Sarah moved home to Ireland from Melbourne in August 2020, having lived in Australia for over six years. "It was covid lockdown, so I had to isolate for two weeks in my grandad's old house, in Curra, Milford," she says. "Out of boredom, I would go for a walk every day and James would coincidentally drive by in his jeep, going to the farm he manages."

They got chatting and an invite from Sarah to James "for a socially distanced date of tea and biscuits" followed. "It took James two weeks to reply — and even then he thought it wasn't a date," she says.

But James made up for it by cooking dinner for Sarah on their second rendezvous. "He finally got the message," she adds. "The rest, as they say, is history."

They got engaged on Christmas Day 2023. "Every Christmas morning we



Love lifts you up...Sarah Meaney and James Murphy on their wedding day.

Pictures: Natalie Maher

walk down to the river on the farm so it was a perfect place for James to go down on one knee," says Sarah.

Not even the weather gods could play spoilsport on their big day. "It poured rain but that didn't dampen our spirits. From start to finish the day was everything we could have wished for and more," says Sarah. "Our little boy Billy, who was 11 months old at the time, made the day extra special. His smiles and cuddles bring happiness to everyone."

Sarah was super-chic in her dream wedding gown, sourced in The Little White Dress Bridal Salon, Limerick, and James was kitted out at Esquire Formal Wear, Limerick.

Leighanne Shanahan created Sarah's

upstyle and Niamh O'Dwyer was the makeup artist.

Aisling McGraynor and Ciara Meaney were the bridesmaids, Brian Murphy was the best man and Cormac Murphy was the groomsman.

Photographer Natalie Maher (natalie-maherphotography.ie) was behind the lens.

Maura Sheehy of Maura's Cottage Flowers created the dazzling floral arrangements and the wedding band Upbeat Generation had everyone on their feet.

Sarah's parting words to others setting a date? "Soak it all up. The day flies!"

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



Sarah Meaney and James Murphy with their wedding party.





My Saturday

08.30

I get up and feed our seven cats and the dog. For us, it's normal but anyone who walks into the house might think: 'That's a lot of cats!'. Our Golden Retriever has no idea what size she is and will try to jump up on the arm of the chair like a cat. To be animal lovers and to have the opportunity to have pets is an absolute pleasure – they offer so much joy every day.

09.00

I'll have Greek yoghurt, fruit, seeds and nuts for breakfast.

09.30

I'll go to the office where my eldest cat will sit on my chest for 20 minutes. I'll play a podcast for the amount of time that it takes the cat to get bored because I can't work or check emails while she's sitting there.

When I'm driving or walking I can't listen to podcasts. I cannot fill my time with other people's words. I need silence. Within those moments, within that silence, that's when my imagination activates.

For any writer, silence is essential – you have to allow yourself to be bored in order to daydream. I am making my way through a series of interviews with horror writers while the cat sits on me. When I go to conventions I don't get a chance to listen to other writers because I'm always talking at them myself.

As the wonderful writer Garth Marenghi would say: 'I'm one of the rare writers who has written more books than they've read'. For years I couldn't read a book while I was writing. Some of my favourite writers have very distinct voices such as Elmor Leonard, Joe Lansdale and Steven Graham Jones. I had to stop reading them because I couldn't allow myself to be influenced by their rhythms.

At one point a few years ago I realised that I had broken that cycle, so now when I write I need to be reading. That ball of excitement in your chest when you read a book you adore – that's a feeling that I want to pass on to other people through my books.

10.00

If I'm in the middle of a book I'll go straight into it. If I'm still feeling my way around I will go onto social media (as much as I despise it) and ease into work by 10.30am. If I'm not solidly into work by 11am I'm procrastinating.

Deadlines are hugely important to me. No matter how 'not into it' I might feel, I open the documents, start writing and within 15 minutes it doesn't matter how I was feeling because things are moving.

13.30

My girlfriend will demand that I get her a coffee so I will pop down to the local coffee shop for a welcome break. I'll walk the dog and I might go to the gym for an hour. I don't mind taking time off during the day but if I had my way I would stay at the desk until 10pm. The reason I have a crushing workload is because I work such long hours. I might be writing one book and my editor will go 'How about writing two Skulduggery books and a podcast story and...?' or Marvel comics might ask me to write Doctor Strange. The reason I say 'yes' to most, if not all things, is because I work long hours and I know I can get the work done. The work doesn't lead me to long hours, long hours lead me to the work.

17.00

We will take the opportunity to relax. We'll potter around. I don't visit anyone until Sunday when I'll visit my folks or spend time with my siblings and nieces.

20.00

We don't go to the cinema at the weekend because it's too crowded and noisy. At the moment we're watching *Severance, Paradise, Our Flag Means Death* and are going back over *It's Always Sunny in Philadelphia*. I'm also rewatching *Star Trek Brave New World* to be in sync with my mother who has just started watching it.

I used to drink alcohol but I stopped going out after Skulduggery kicked off because I would go for pints and have an awful hangover the next day. I have done martial arts for years and there is no point in learning how to avoid fights and to defend yourself if you're going to get drunk, lose your inhibitions and your guard, or be in a position where you have to defend yourself or disrupt someone else's night.

23.30

We will realise it's time for bed at about 11.30pm. My girlfriend will head upstairs with most of the cats. I'll stay downstairs with some of the cats and the dog.

01.30

I'll go to bed at around 1.30am and will fall asleep at the drop of a hat.

■ Derek Landy has just published, *A Heart Full of Hatred*, the 17th book in his Skulduggery Pleasant series, published by HarperCollins. Fans can catch Landy today in Eason Dundrum from 12pm and tomorrow in Kennys Bookshop in Galway from 1pm. skulduggerypleasant.co.uk

Interview by Ruth O'Connor

The Quiz

Noel Welch

- 1 . Who released 'You've Lost That Loving Feeling,' in 1964?
- 2 . The town of Crossmolina is in which county?
- 3 . Which was the only English Premier League club to go undefeated in a season?
- 4 . Helena is the state capital of which US state?
- 5 . What was singer and model, Dame Lesley Lawson's nickname?
- 6 . Which mountain is known as 'Savage Mountain'?
- 7 . Who played Popeye Doyle in the

1972 film, *The French Connection*?

- 8 . Who was the first weather anchor when TV3 launched in 1998?
- 9 . Which country is the largest gold producer?
- 10 . Who, last month, succeeded Justin Trudeau as leader of the Liberal Party in Canada?
- 11 . Irish international rugby player, Jamison Gibson-Park, was born in which country?
- 12 . In which county is the source of the River Swilly?
- 13 . Who wrote, *Sense and Sensibility*?

14 . *The Feud* TV series featured the rivalry between Bette Davis and which other actress?

- 15 . Which film won Best Picture at this year's Oscars?
- 16 . What is featured on the Saudi Arabia flag underneath Arabic inscription?
- 17 . In what city did Oscar Wilde die, on Nov. 30, 1900?
- 18 . What colour do you get when you mix red and yellow?
- 19 . How many teams in the League of Ireland Premier Division?
- 20 . Who is pictured right?



ANSWERS

- 1 . The Righteous Brothers
- 2 . Co. Mayo
- 3 . Arsenal
- 4 . Montana
- 5 . Twiggy
- 6 . K2
- 7 . Gene Hackman
- 8 . Martin King
- 9 . China
- 10 . Mark Carney
- 11 . New Zealand
- 12 . Co. Donegal
- 13 . Jane Austen
- 14 . Joan Crawford
- 15 . Anora
- 16 . A sword
- 17 . Paris
- 18 . Orange
- 19 . Ten
- 20 . Singer, Charli XCX