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INTERNATIONAL



INSIDE!

Seven Celtic Chefs
Máirtín Ó Muilleoir
Celtic Surfing

A Taste for Travel

Northern Ireland's Year of Food & Drink

UrbanKelt, Peter Kirby, Daimh
Winter Fashion, Evans & Doherty

Display in Lifestyles
Display until April 2016

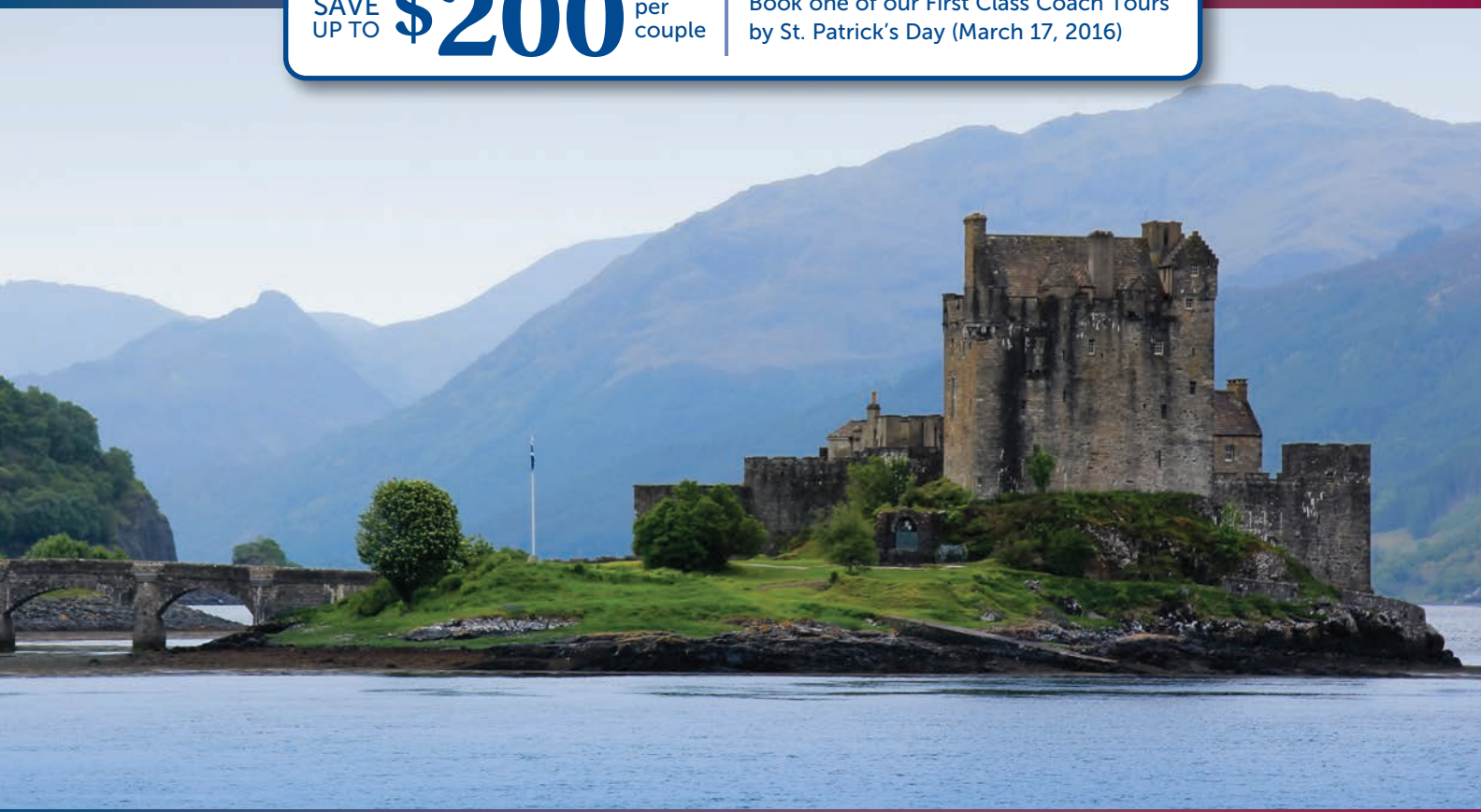
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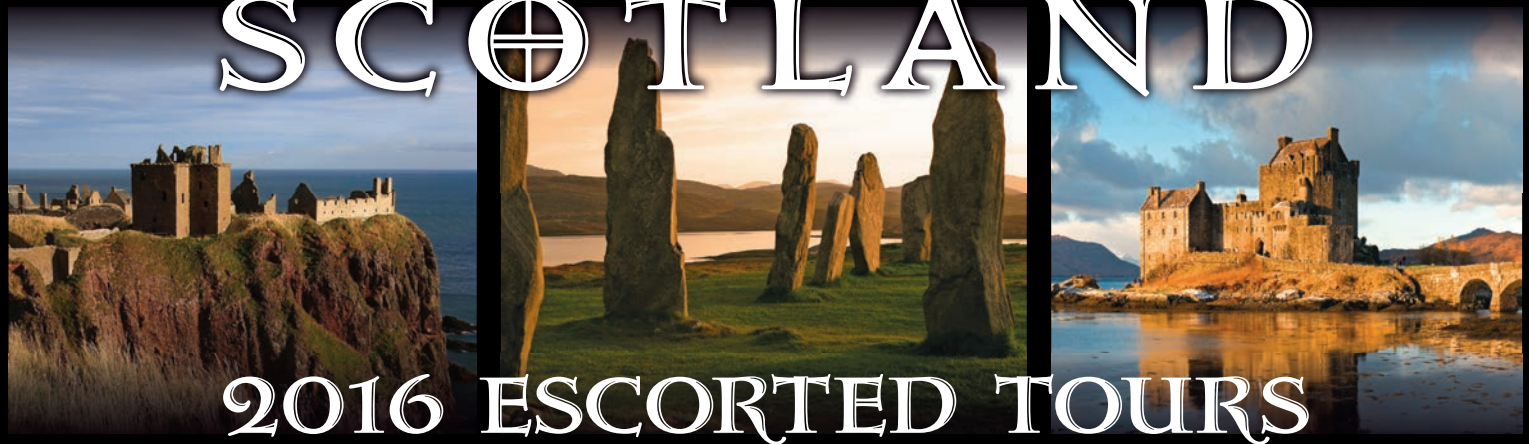
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Angus M. Macquarrie, Publisher
Stephen Patrick Clare, Managing Editor
Rosalie MacEachern, Editorial Assistant
Rebecca Dingwell, Editorial Assistant
Michelle Brunet, Senior Writer

Celtic Life International Office
Phone: 902-835-CELT (2358)
Toll-Free: 888-215-6850
Fax: 902-835-0080
Email: info@celticlife.ca
Website: www.celticlife.ca

Subscriptions
Phone: 902-835-CELT (2358)
Toll-Free: 888-215-6850
Fax: 902-835-0080
Email: subscribe@celticlife.ca

Advertising
Toll-Free: 888-215-6850
Fax: 902-835-0080
Email: sales@celticlife.ca

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Contributors
Alf Alderson
Veronica Breen-Hogle
Michael Davies
Andrew Ferguson
Maurice Fitzpatrick
Tom Langlands
Cabrini Macquarrie
Eimear O'Callaghan

In our December 2015 edition, we accidently forgot to credit photographer Kris Kesiak for the Style section images. Celtic Life International regrets the omission.

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Fáilte!

Come hungry and thirsty

What do Argentina, Azerbaijan, the United Arab Emirates, Mongolia, Russia - and of course Ireland - have in common? They all have Irish pubs. No matter where in the world you step off a plane, you are likely to find a cozy Irish pub and the warm hospitality of the Irish.

It all goes back more than a millennium. According to Irish folklore, an Ulster warrior named Blai Briugu - who believed in "complete hospitality" - operated the first Irish drinking establishment. Then came the Shebeen or Sibin - hostels which were more of an illegal drinking den - offering food, drink and music. The rest is history. What makes an Irish Pub so unique today is a magical mix of a great bartenders, good conversation, fine food, friendly atmosphere, and, of course, a large selection of spirits - all a part of the welcoming experience that Blai Briugu first made famous.

In 2016, Northern Ireland celebrates the Year of Food and Drink. "Come Hungry and Thirsty" is the message. Irish Pubs have always celebrated good food and drink, and in 2016 they - along with the great residents of Northern Ireland - welcome the world to enjoy that hospitality, and to meet the people who make their food heritage so unique. Amazingly, each month has its own theme, beginning with January as "Breakfast Month" and ending with "Christmas and Premium Foods" in December.

In planning your vacation, make Northern Ireland a priority and remember, "come hungry and thirsty" and share in the cultural legacy of Blai Briugu.

Well deserved

Earlier this year a significant cultural event took place in Halifax, NS. Recording artists Anne Murray, Rita MacNeil, Portia White and John Allan Cameron, together with Brookes Diamond Productions, were inducted into the Nova Scotia Music Hall of Fame. All of these artists made enormous contributions on the world stage and deserve the utmost of recognition. Two of the inductees, in particular, made significant contributions to Celtic music.

John Allan Cameron has been referred to as the "Godfather of Celtic Music." John Allan broke Celtic ground long before the internet and social media opened the world to our cultural identity.

Brookes Diamond Productions paved the way for aspiring artists, and no other organization has done more for Celtic music artists. Brookes may not be able to play the bagpipes himself, but he and his wife Fiona have certainly put the pipes and many other forms of Celtic music center-stage - the couple gave our young Celtic artists exposure, and thus hope. In particular, their production "DRUM" provided performers with a platform to showcase their talents, also demonstrating how different cultures come together to reflect the history of our peoples through the common bond of music. We tip our collective hats to all of the inductees.

Enjoy and May God Bless!
Angus M. Macquarrie, Publisher

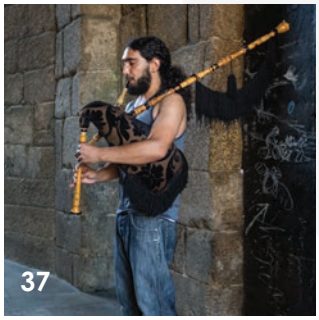
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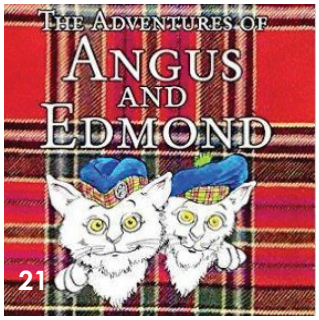


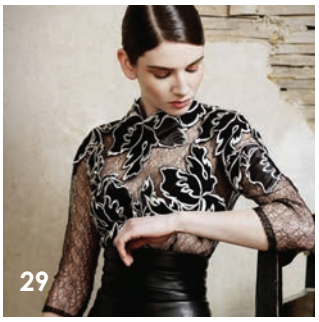


















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Our February cover shot features a young girl at St. George Market in Belfast, Northern Ireland



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DE tha DOL



The Cornish language may be on its way to a revival

Lowena dhywgh! Do you speak Cornish? The language was widely used throughout Cornwall up until the nineteenth century, when it just about disappeared. In 2002, it was recognized under the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages. More recently, the few fluent speakers who remain voiced their concerns with the possibility of Cornish becoming "extinct." Cornwall Council officially announced their support for efforts to revive the language in November, creating the Cornish Language Plan which will encourage those living and working in Cornwall to use the language on an everyday basis. The plan includes bilingual street signage, pushing the use of Cornish greetings by reception staff, and encouraging schools to teach Cornish. The plan is long-term, but keep your ears open – we might start hearing Cornish spoken in the country's pubs sooner than we know.

Manx dog and owner duo compete at London's Olympia

When Justin Keegans first met his dog Leia, she had already seen her fair share of neglect. Thanks to Keegans' love, patience and encouragement, however, Leia was re-trained, and the team of two were given the chance to partake in one of the most prestigious agility competitions in the UK. To compete, Keegans traveled from his home in Governer's Hill on the Isle of Man to London's Olympia. He prepared for the event by training for eight or nine hours a week with his three dogs: two Border Collies, Ned and Leia, as well as a Papillon called Tank. Traditionally sheepdogs, i.e. Border Collies, are ideal candidates for agility competitions. Since Keegans has no sheep for his new best friend to herd, training is a great way to keep Leia fit by giving her regular exercise.





Outlander Season One captured in trading cards

Fans of the Outlander book and TV series have a new way to flaunt their love for the Scottish tale: trading cards. The trading cards focus on the first 16 episodes of season one, drawing images and plot highlights from select parts of the series. Based on books by Diana Gabaldon, Outlander tells the story of a World War I nurse named Claire who travels 200 years back in time to a period when the English and Scottish were in conflict. The show's second season is currently in production, while Gabaldon's most recent book was released in late October. Those interested can find the trading cards through the Cardboard Connection website.

United States "foodies" ask Department of Agriculture to lift haggis ban

Americans are calling on the U.S. Department of Agriculture to "Free the Haggis." The traditional Scottish dish has been banned in the United States since 1971. Haggis is made from sheep organs, onions, spices and oatmeal. One key ingredient – sheep's lung – is not allowed to be prepared locally or brought in from overseas for human consumption. Some say the rule is outdated, given it was put in place to combat the spread of a disease called scrapie. Reportedly, there's no scientific evidence to suggest scrapie poses a risk to human health. The ban on Europe-imported beef was lifted earlier in 2015, but will sheep follow suit? There's an online petition that suggests it should. Until then, American residents will have to travel elsewhere if they want to sink their teeth into a the classic Scottish meal.



Have an interesting tidbit to share with our Celtic community? Drop us a line anytime at editor@celticlife.ca



Photo by: Scott Anna

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first word

Recently, Veronica "Vonnie" Breen Hogle celebrated fifty years of living in the United States. She will never forget the people who reared her in Bagenalstown - a little market town on the Barrow River in County Carlow, Ireland.

Last month, I celebrated the fifty years since the late Seamus Somers and Michael Walsh of Bagenalstown drove me to Shannon Airport for my first flight to America. I was leaving the little town I loved to marry a Canadian man I had met in France. He greeted me at the Houston Airport and drove me to his mother's house where I lived until our wedding in September. Then his work required a move to Buffalo, New York, and our first child was on the way.

Mrs. Esther Joyce had a business in Bagenalstown, making gowns and veils. My mother, Eileen, ordered a christening dress for our baby. Back then, we could not tell if it would be a boy or a girl. The bone-colored satin dress was adorned with Limerick Lace flowers - perfect for a baby girl I thought. Our first-born was a bouncing boy. I put the dress on him anyway, and he was christened Brian Edward.

Twin girls, Jill and Lisa, were born in 1970, and suddenly I was busy taking care of three very young children. I found the sixty inches of snow that fell in Buffalo every winter hard to deal with.

My mother and I wrote to each other often, and she often sent me newspaper clippings from the local Bagenalstown papers.

After eleven years, my marriage ended. I got a job and purchased a home of my own. However, my children had no grandparents, aunts, uncles or cousins nearby, and the absence of an extended family was a big loss.

When I was a child in Bagenalstown, I lived in the Soldiers' Cottages with my Grand Aunt Christina Fitzpatrick, who was disabled, and her husband, Jim, who worked in the goods department of the Bagenalstown Railway Station.

The Clarke family across the road had fourteen children. They treated me like I was child number fifteen. I became friends with Amanda Stevenson, a protestant girl. Sometimes her mother let me into their house and Amanda and I played "Pop Goes the Weasel," for four hands on the piano. I noticed Amanda didn't have a picture of the Sacred Heart or a little red light on the mantel piece and I tried without luck to get them for her.



Ann Farrell was my best friend. Her family owned a grocery shop on Main Street. We loved to swim in the Barrow River until our teeth chattered and our skin became blue. Then a swimming pool was built beside the river. Ann and I swam in competitions. She'd come in first and I'd be second or third. She often treated me to homemade ice cream in fancy glass bowls in Slater's Ice Cream Shop.

Bagenalstown was lively. Browne & Crosswaite Flour Mill employed men who came home from work with their eyelashes heavy with flour. Once, Keenan's Foundry had a strike and extra Gardai were dispatched to quell the disturbance.

On Fair Days, Main Street and the Market Square were packed with farmers in their best suits, with crates of squealing bon-hams, cows and horses for sale. When they reached an agreement on price, the men spat in their palms and shook hands.

My mother and Dottie Walsh operated a restaurant and catered the Firemen's Annual Christmas dinner, organized by the late Jim Butler. The firemen bought drinks at Duffy's pub and brought them to the restaurant. After dinner, someone would play jaunty tunes on the piano, while another played reels on a fiddle. Dottie sang, "Beautiful Dreamer." Through thick clouds of blue-gray cigarette smoke, eyes misted over.

Every morning, John McCormick's horse charged out of Cleary's yard, pulling a cart loaded with sacks of coal. After the coal was delivered, the horse thundered down Main Street. McCormick stood in the cart, his overcoat billowing out behind him.

When Dottie Walsh died in 1982, Mom closed the restaurant. But she needed to cook for someone. Noel Farrell remained her sole customer for a long time.

The memories of the caring, warm-hearted people of Bagenalstown who helped rear me keep me connected to my childhood.

"Don't tell me you put me in that flowery dress!" Brian said to me recently, looking at his Limerick Lace christening gown. "Yes, I did, and you turned out grand." I said to my 47-year-old son who stands at 6'2", wears a size 13 boot, and works in construction.

Now I have a three-generation family living near me in Buffalo. This past December 6, they joined me, along with many friends, to celebrate my fifty years in America.

All in all, everything in my life is grand.



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UP FRONT



Past, present and future are woven together in a personal Celtic knot for Belfast's Máirtín Ó Muilleoir, but it is the future that commands his passion

A publisher, politician and tireless promoter, Ó Muilleoir is determined to "change the narrative" of his city.

In the 1980s, he was a flak jacket-wearing Sinn Féin councilor, barred from the Lord Mayor's parlour, yet he went on to become Lord Mayor of Belfast in 2014. He followed that up by becoming a Sinn Féin member of the Northern Ireland Assembly. He also stood, unsuccessfully, as the Sinn Féin candidate in the 2015 United Kingdom general election. If that setback slowed him down, there is no evidence on his Twitter feed where he is constantly sharing information of economic development, tourism and social reform.

An Irish speaker, he credits the Irish language movement in the late 1970s, and later "the life-changing hunger strikes of 1981," with awakening him to his heritage and sparking his activism.

"If you don't change over 40 years of activism there is something wrong with you," he shares about his evolution. "But while I don't have the same reckless exuberance I had as a teenager, I am more convinced than ever of the need for all Irish people of all religions to be sovereign and independent. Equally, I believe in a vision of a fairer and more equal world where social justice is paramount."

Whether in business or politics, Ó Muilleoir is driven by a vision of a new Belfast, transformed from "a city of division and warfare to a city of unity and peace." He speaks constantly of "editing out the negativity."

As chairman of Belfast Media Group, he publishes four weekly newspapers, including New York's Irish Echo. "It is a commercial business which has been at the heart of the community it serves since 1972, when it was set up to provide a voice for the voiceless."

He is equally comfortable posting selfies and comments on Twitter, writing heartfelt or analytical blogs, posting Facebook updates and presenting his views in e-zines."Social media is priceless," he notes. "We get to give our unfiltered view of the world and our audiences can add that view to the mix and make their own mind up."

Ó Muilleoir's own mélange of heritage informs his vision of international connectivity. "I have always presumed the Millar side of my family was Scottish and my mother was a McKeown, so I'm a mongrel. I had a great-grandfather who died in a British uniform during the Great War, and on the McKeown side a grandfather fought with the IRA and was a victim of a sectarian shooting."

He believes that the soul of a people lies in its languages and culture. "I look forward to the day when pro-British unionists in the North of Ireland will end their veto over an Irish language Act and accord to citizens here the same rights enjoyed by the Welsh and Scots, as well as our sisters and brothers across the border in the South of Ireland."

Ó Muilleoir delights in hearing Irish spoken, whether on radio and television or person to person, and constantly encourages its practice.

"Speak Irish, send your children to Irish medium schools, listen to Irish language radio, watch Irish language TV, visit Irish language websites and be a positive ambassador for Irish as a bridge between all our peoples."

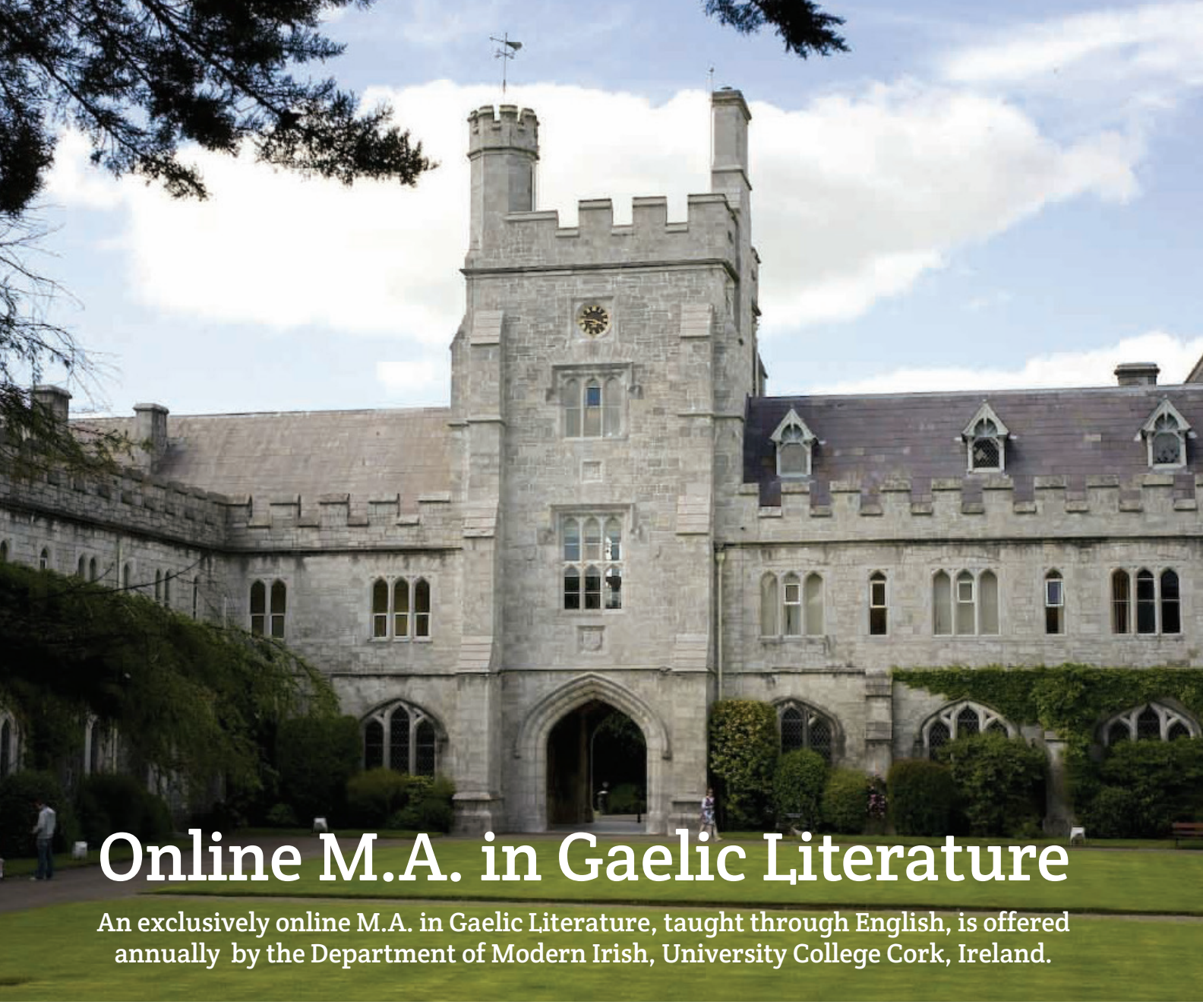
He points to tourism statistics to back up his contention that Northern Ireland is on the move, and he supports Belfast's political tourism economy. "I prefer to call it cultural tourism. I think it is authentic, has integrity, and is fun and exciting. Heritage, history, 'Troubles' is a key part of that mix."

Growing the population will be the key to Belfast's future, he contends. "We need to ramp up the growth by drawing talented people from every corner of the globe and making Belfast a cool place for visitors, newcomers, immigrants, business travelers and tourists, as well as for those who have always called Belfast their home."

During his year as Lord Mayor of Belfast, Ó Muilleoir urged the global Irish Diaspora to connect, engage and invest in his city.

A married father of four, he was also recently named a Paul Harris Fellow by Rotary International for "the furtherance of better understanding and friendly relations among peoples."

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Phil Gawne is Minister for Infrastructure on the Isle of Man, and also chairs the Government's International Development Committee, the cultural funding organization Culture Vannin, and the country's Manx Gaelic Primary School. Recently he answered our seven Celtic questions.

SEVEN CELTIC QUESTIONS

What are your own Celtic roots?

My mother's family is from the north east of England but my father's family is solidly Manx going back as far as records allow. My surname Gawne, which means son of the smith, is among the oldest family names recorded in the Isle of Man. Celtic for me is about the language, culture, attitude and way of life of the people and community in which I grew up. I feel comfortable and at home in the company of fellow Celts.

Why are those roots important to you?

The Isle of Man had massive immigration during the 1960s and 1970s when I was growing up, and now Manx born people are outnumbered by people born outside the Island. One of the great riches of humanity is the mesmerizing diversity of our cultures and communities so, as a minority in our own land, it is important that we retain our strong Celtic identity. My Celtic roots provide me the confidence and certainty I need to allow me to venture out and do good in the world.

What does it mean to you today to be of Celtic heritage?

I am proud to have played a part in reinvigorating the Manx language and passing on the language, culture and traditions that I grew up with to the generations that follow. My Celtic heritage allows me to demonstrate that I am unwilling to be absorbed by the imperious mass that is mainstream Anglo-American culture. I do not accept that the future of humanity is one in which variety and diversity are condemned to history, and active promotion of my Celtic heritage bears witness to my view.

How are you involved with the Celtic community?

I am Chair and founding member of Mooinjer Veggey and Bunscoill Ghaelgagh, the Manx language preschool and primary school movement. I am a fluent Manx Gaelic speaker, I sing with traditional music group Skeeal and Gaelic choir Caarjyn Cooidjagh and have regularly performed at Celtic festivals in Scotland, Ireland and Brittany with these groups. I write, speak, perform and promote my Celtic culture on all possible occasions.

Why is it important to keep Celtic culture alive?

Our Celtic culture is what defines us as a people. It influences the way we think, act and live and without it we are much the poorer. The loss of a language and its associated culture is as tragic as the extinction of species of animals or the loss of life through the atrocity of war. Cultural diversity like the variety in landscapes makes our world a more interesting place. Our Celtic culture has been built over millennia and we owe it to past and future generations to protect and nurture it.

Is enough being done to preserve and promote Celtic culture generally?

We can always do more but certainly in the Isle of Man our language, music and heritage are well resourced. It is difficult for politicians and decision makers to justify spending more on this without a corresponding demand from the people. We also must accept that with much more accessible communication our generation is going through the biggest cultural change humanity has ever encountered, so we face an immense challenge in ensuring our culture is not lost.

What can we be doing better?

The biggest disappointment to me has been the inability of language and cultural activists to capture the imagination of the masses who seem content to access culture through a handful of dangerously influential national and international media groups. Our greatest achievement would be to create the opportunity for all people living in Celtic countries to be captivated by the words, songs, stories, tunes and histories, and use their past to create strong Celtic futures.

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Dàimh

Three intimate, acoustic gigs on three picturesque Scottish islands in six unforgettable days and the end result is Dàimh's The Hebridean Sessions – a dazzling new album as full of energy, art and historical drama as the rugged islands themselves.

"We are never a band for doing things the easy way," declares Dàimh's piper Angus MacKenzie.

Dàimh (pronounced Dive) comes from the Gaelic word for kinship. The five member band, which Irish Music Magazine calls "one of the most exhilarating acoustic bands on the Celtic map," has been making friends around the world with its contemporary and traditional takes on Highland and Gaelic music.

All band members live on, or within sight of, west coast islands; so they gathered on the islands of Mull, Skye and South Uist to record music and songs reflecting the hardship of the croft, dancing, drinking, courtship and unrequited love, which, to Mackenzie's mind, covers the full range of the known "Gaelaxy."

"We wanted to record the traditional tunes that we have been playing for years at wild dances and ceilidhs across the west coast and islands. The best way to capture the feel and spirit we were after was to take the recording studio with us rather than to go to the studio and to try to make it feel like an island."

While touring the length and breadth of the United States last fall, they took the island theme a wee step further and arranged an American launch of the album on Lake Michigan's Beaver Island. The response to the tour was so favourable, the band is already booked to be back in the north-eastern U.S. and beyond this coming February and March.

"There's a trend these days to try to make things cool," explains MacKenzie, "but we think our music, the Gaelic music of the West Highlands of Scotland, is strong enough on its own and doesn't need to be made into something it is not."

MacKenzie's pipes and whistles, Gabe McVarish's genius with the fiddle, and Ross Martin's dynamic guitar playing are all complemented by two new additions to the band, both of whom MacKenzie and Martin encountered and taught in music programs at Sabhal Mòr Ostaig, the Gaelic College on Skye.

Murdo "Yogi" Cameron of Glenelg is a multi-instrumentalist who plays accordion and mandola on the new recording, while vocalist Ellen MacDonald, whose family roots are in North Uist and Scalpay, has been staggering audiences and reviewers with her ancient Gaelic airs.

"With a top class female vocalist performing a slow, lyrical Gaelic song, it's tempting to liken the clarity and purity of the voice to fine crystal. In Ellen's case, the glass carries a dram of something smoky, maybe Lagavulin," according to Folk Radio UK.

For all that, it is the pipes and the fiddle that dominate, though MacKenzie might argue it is the resonance of the auld language itself.

"Gaelic is at the core of what we represent," he notes. "Three of us speak it fluently and the rest of us have plenty to get by with. It is also the music of the area we represent and that is what we've tried to portray in this album."

The son of a man from South Uist, and a woman who descends from early Scottish pioneers in Nova Scotia, MacKenzie was raised in a Gaelic-speaking home in Mabou on Cape Breton Island. He came to Skye as a student almost 20 years ago and now he and his wife, a musician and Gaelic teacher, are raising a family there with Gaelic as their first language. Last year he brought the band to Cape Breton's renowned Celtic Colours International Festival, and he is hopeful a Canadian tour is not too far in the future – the cuts from 'Heb Sesh', as the band calls the album, would likely sound as sweet back home on MacKenzie's native island.

McVarish, who now lives in Morar, the village his great-great grandparents left for the New World, was raised in North California and, like MacKenzie, returned to Skye to study the music of his ancestors.

When Dàimh began 17 years ago, it was a part-time band, performances taking a back seat to "real jobs" and individual musical opportunities. After its last album, Tuneship, the members committed to playing more.

"Early in the New Year we will be touring Scotland, Ireland and Iceland, and then we'll be off to the US again," MacKenzie shares. "We can hardly wait."

Chances are that those audiences will be lining up to hear centuries-old, romantic tunes such as Lochiel's Awa' to France, along with songs of weary crofters hoping to exchange the hides of their dead cows for a bottle of the good stuff.

www.daimh.net

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Evans & Doherty



Unlike most musicians, Brian Doherty is not overly concerned with album sales or living the rock star life

"Longevity is success, as far as I'm concerned," says one half of the Halifax, Nova Scotia-based Celtic folk duo Evans & Doherty with a deep Irish brogue.

Alongside his musical partner, Kevin Evans, Doherty is celebrating more than 35 years in the music business. The group has been performing together for over three decades, recently acknowledging their accomplishment with the release of a two-disc set of 30 songs called 30 Years of Folkin' Around.

"We put the album out to mark this musical milestone," shares Doherty. "Some songs have been with us for all of those years, some are new, some were written by Kevin, and some are traditional tunes."

Before the twosome teamed up, they played in other area bands. During the 1980s, Doherty explains, there wasn't much of an East Coast music scene. "But we had a number of clubs, universities and theatres that we performed at regularly."

Due to the limited number of venues, Barley Bree (Doherty's band) ended up playing in many of the same places as The Garrison Brothers (Evans' band). As such, the two knew each other well from the local circuit.

As fate would have it, Doherty left Barley Bree around the same time that Evans was departing The Garrison Brothers.

"We both wanted to pursue other careers outside of music, but we wanted to keep our hands in the music scene as well."

The pair decided to perform together to, as Doherty puts it, "keep our hands agile." From there, they began playing regularly at an Irish pub called O'Carroll's in Halifax, performing five to six nights every other week for 15 years. Those gigs earned them a strong local following, and soon they were asked to participate in festivals and gigs outside of the city.

O'Carroll's eventually closed, but Evans & Doherty kept at it, eventually opening a pub of their own, The Old Triangle. A popular eatery and watering hole in downtown Halifax, the "Triangle" also has locations in Sydney, Cape Breton; Moncton, New Brunswick and Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island.

"As time goes on, our business interests have eaten into our performing time," admits Doherty, "so we don't gig as much as we used to. Still, things get pretty busy through March and April, mostly for Saint Patrick's Day celebrations. And we perform at festivals across the U.S. in the summer months, as well as at events here at home."

Evans & Doherty have taken their music outside North America also, playing in places as far afield as East Germany and New Zealand. Doherty is thankful for the people they have been able to perform with along the way.

"We have had the good fortune to work with some of our musical heroes; people like Liam Clancy and Tommy Makem – they were one of the stem groups that started what is now called traditional Irish music, and they were among the first to bring it to the North American market and beyond."

Naturally, after three decades of sharing the stage, the pair has become more and more in tune with one another.

"Performing kind of becomes second nature to us. I know what Kevin's thinking, and he knows what I'm thinking. That kind of interaction has made us much musically tighter over time."

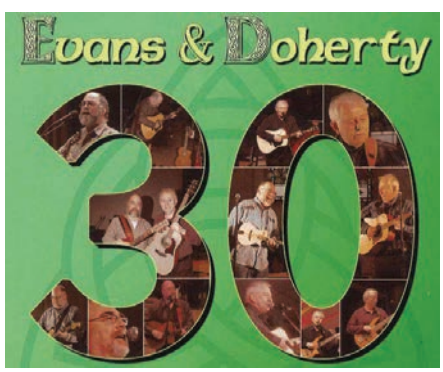
At this point, the pair are not out to make their mark on the music business. Instead, Doherty says he just hopes people appreciate and enjoy what they do.

"We are there more to perform at really good venues and play where we know people will come out and see us."

For 2016, Doherty says that he and Evans are going to "keep doing what they do." Local fans can catch the group regularly at The Old Triangle, while others will have their chance during festival season.

"And, hopefully, we can keep doing what we do for another 30 years."

www.evansanddoherty.com





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Peter Kirby

A police officer, a kidnapped Guatemalan journalist, and an unraveling mystery - all are elements of Peter Kirby's latest book, Open Season, the third in a series of stories starring Inspector Luc Vanier

"I want my books to be topical," shares the author over the phone. "I want to be in a position to examine real issues that are going on – serious issues. The vehicle I can best use to do that is crime fiction."

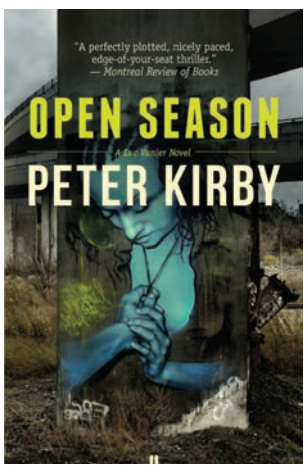
Kirby, who plies his trade as a lawyer of international law by day, spent the first 10 years of his life in Ireland. His family then moved to the Brixton district of London, where he eventually left to travel through the United States and Canada. These days, the part-time scribe lives and works in Montréal, Quebec, where the Luc Vanier series takes place.

Although the characters are recurring, Kirby says readers need not pick up the tomes in any particular order. The Dead of Winter – the first novel in the saga – tells the story of pursuing a serial killer who targets the homeless population.

"That allowed me to explore what it means to be homeless in a city like Montréal, where winters can be quite difficult," he explains.

His second book, Vigilante Season, follows Vanier and his dealings with a militia group in the city's Hochelaga district.

"Funnily enough, almost a year after I wrote the book, there was a militia group in one of Montréal's neighbourhoods," recalls the writer. "You know, they say that fact is stranger than fiction."



In Open Season, Vanier sets out to uncover the whereabouts of a kidnapped journalist. In doing so, he discovers that the victim is also a failed refugee claimant. Kirby says he wanted to use the fictional account to shed some light on issues involving refugees, as well as on the crime of human trafficking.

"These days, refugees and our treatment of refugees is front page news. But while I was writing this book I was, frankly, fairly offended by how unwelcoming Canada had become to refugees."

Kirby hopes his novels inspire readers to think, instead of simply serving as a form of escapism. When deciding what to write, he says he asks himself: "What do I want to talk about, what is it that's on my mind, and how can I build an interesting story around those kinds of issues?"

"There are amazingly brutal things going on," he concedes. "Even here in Canada, we have developed this innate ability to simply block it out."

Despite his legal background, Kirby maintains that his work as a lawyer is not what inspires him to write crime fiction.

"It is almost something internal," he explains. "This isn't so much a reflection of me as a legal professional - it's much more a reflection of me as a human being."

The Dead of Winter, Kirby explains, is the book most indicative of his Irish heritage, due in large part to its dialogue on religion.

"Talking about the Catholic Church in Montréal is easy, because Quebec is probably the closest place to Ireland you'll find in North America in that regard. The demographic and the history here are very reflective of Ireland in many ways."

Though he doesn't plan on quitting his day job any time, Kirby is looking forward to picking up the pen again. He already has another story idea in mind, though it likely won't take place on the Emerald Isle. "Not yet," he says. "I have thought about sending my hero on vacation somewhere, but that might be a bit trite."

Montréal, he notes, has a very strong Irish community. Since he left Ireland at such a young age, however, he feels his relationship with his homeland is more of an emotional one, rather than geographical.

"It's a different kind of connection…I don't think I could do it justice," he says. "In truth, I don't think I know it well enough."

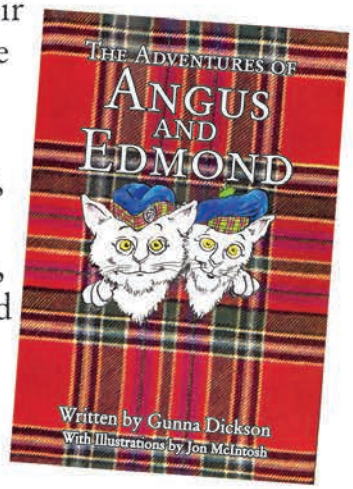
Kirby will no doubt be giving readers another Vanier story, but he is still thinking over the details.

"It starts off with something very simple. You might get the theme, but then, 'How do I construct a story about that?' Then, you have an experience, and that's the starting point. That's the thing that clicks."

www.peterkirby.ca

CELTIC CATS

This lively book of cat tales follows brothers Angus and Edmond on a journey to trace their roots~from a shelter in New York City to the Highlands of Scotland.



Their adventures take them to Paris, London, Edinburgh and St. Andrews. While soaking up local history, the lads hit the tourist shops, visit castles and ghoulish sites, and play a round of golf at The Royal and Ancient. Along the way they meet the Loch Ness Monster and the ghost of Hamish McHamish.

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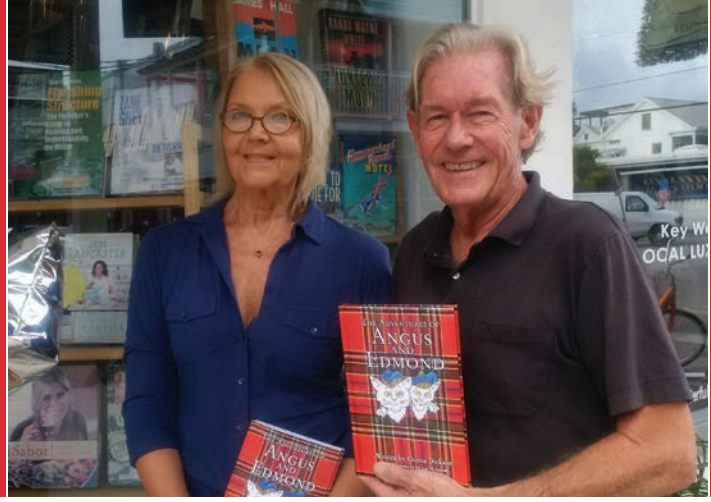
Author Gunna Dickson is a New York based writer, editor and translator. Illustrator and fine artist Jon McIntosh lives and works in Key West.

"The Adventures of Angus and Edmond" (ISBN 978-1-62137-759-7) is published by *Virtualbookworm.com*. It is available in hardcover and softcover at *Amazon.com, Amazon.co.uk* and numerous other online sites.

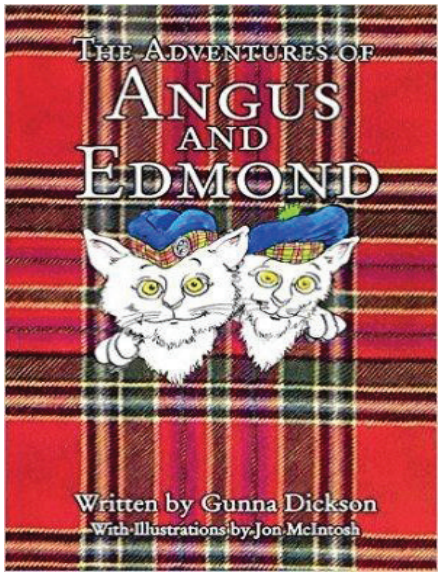


Gunna Dickson

New York-based writer Gunna Dickson draws inspiration from her late Scottish husband's heritage



The idea for Gunna Dickson's new book, The Adventures of Angus and Edmond, came to her at a difficult time in her life. Her husband, author and journalist Stewart Dickson, had succumbed to cancer. Not long afterwards, the couple's two cats passed away within six months of one another.



"To contend against the unbearable stillness in our apartment, I found myself looking to adopt two more kitties," the writer recalls via email. "The Humane Society of New York happened to have a couple of inseparable litter mates with Scottish names – Angus and Edmond. It was a perfect match."

"The book is a tribute to my husband and his heritage," says Dickson, noting that Angus and Edmond's quest for their roots in the Highlands of Scotland leads them to Paris, London, Edinburgh and St Andrews.

"The story is very visual and I knew it had to be illustrated," she continues. "When a mutual friend introduced me to artist Jon McIntosh, everything fell into place. He was a godsend. The illustrations by the magical Mr. McIntosh breathed life into my story."

An award-winning illustrator with Scottish roots, McIntosh currently lives and works in Key West, Florida. Given his passion for his ancestry, the collaboration simply made sense.

"My grandfather was brought to the U.S. by way of Nova Scotia in the 1800s when he was a very young child," he explains. "Our family was from the Moy area and from an early age my grandfather taught me about our clan and heritage. He even made it possible, when I visited with him in the summer, to learn the pipes. I have made many trips to Scotland to visit with the Mackintosh kin, and I was even married at a castle in Ayrshire!"

After graduating from the Rhode Island School of Design, McIntosh turned his attention to painting, commercial design and illustration.

He says everything about the story of Angus and Edmond lends itself to colourful imagery.

"Gunna's writing is very descriptive," he explains by email. "The only real challenge was for her and I to arrive at a style that was appealing for all ages; create her characters and their demeanor, and then apply them to scenes from the book."

Dickson says it was actually quite easy to write a story featuring cats as main characters.

"For years I was 'ghost-writing' silly verses from our cats to my husband for his birthday or Father's Day, and this is kind of an extension of that."

In fact, Dickson and McIntosh already have plans for a second book in the series. "Angus and Edmond are funny and sweet," she says. "And their antics inspire me."

In addition to being an author, Dickson is an avid reader. Many of her favourite books are mysteries – "from Sherlock Holmes to Mary Higgins Clark."

"That said, my eclectic reading list leans mostly to non-fiction, as well as military and political thrillers by authors such as Brad Thor, David Baldacci and Vince Flynn. I read every night before going to sleep."

The light nature of Dickson's new book is a contrast to her husband's novel, VAIR; a historical thriller in which a trail of brutal murders using 16th Century weapons follows the modern-day visit of a British Royal to the U.S.

"Stewart applied his knowledge, intellectual curiosity, professional experience and imagination, together with a lot of research," she shares. "My book about Angus and Edmond is pure whimsy."

That said, she certainly doesn't feel confined to a single style of writing.

"I am a serious-minded person who cares a lot about politics and global issues, and I have translated six books about totalitarian rule and the suffering it brings to those oppressed by it. I do have a softer side, however, and a pretty good sense of humor."

Dickson believes that Angus and Edmond's antics will appeal to a broad range of readers.

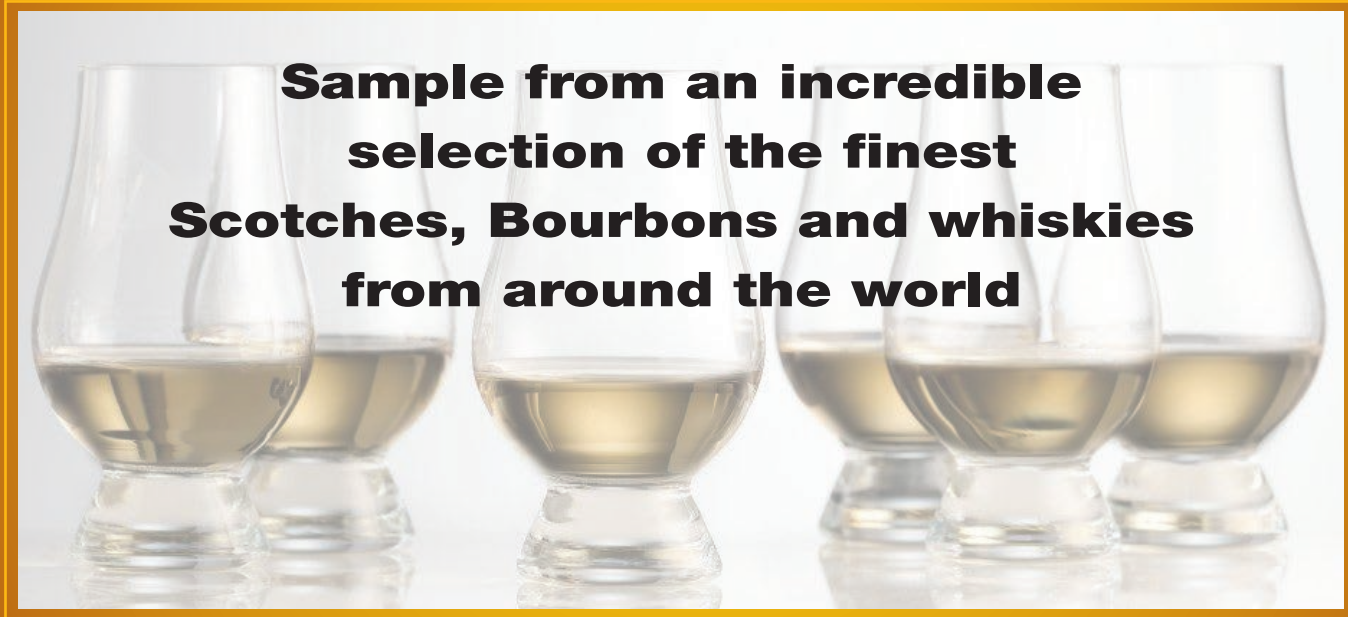
"Anyone who has ever loved a pet will like this story," she says. "The cats' adventures will also appeal to children, who tend to have a vivid imagination."

For those looking for a different sort of read, Dickson is working on VAIR II: Ann's Story. The book will be a sequel of sorts to Stewart's novel, written from the point of view of its main female character.

"I put it aside for The Adventures of Angus and Edmond but I am ready to resume work on it," she says. "It is a much more difficult book to write."

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URBANKELT
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With one eye on the past, and another on the present, UrbanKelt has its sights set on the future…



"Bunney" – as he is known to his peers online – believes that now is a perfect time to be promoting Celtic culture.

"Celtic groups, classes, and societies are popping up by the hundreds," shares the young entrepreneur via email. "Because of the internet, the sources are endless. I think it can only get stronger."

Bunney founded UrbanKelt in 2013. The website-only hub is quickly making a name for itself as a network for Celtic music, language, film, style and talent. The name, he says, was inspired by the new generation of Celts who live in ever-changing metropolitan and urban environments.

"I chose Kelt with a 'K,' because the name Celt was coined for us by the Greeks: Keltoi. So, UrbanKelt is reaching forward into the future with 'urban' and holding onto its ancient past with 'kelt.'"

Over the first 18 months, UrbanKelt was simply staying on its feet. Growth has been strong over the last half-year, however. Currently, the staff of eight people is aided by a number of friends and family members. As a non-profit entity, everyone works on a volunteer basis.

"UrbanKelt is a new concept," explains Bunney. "It is a cultural platform that aims to awaken and evoke a new Celtic sound division, creating dynamic change by filling a niche. It is moulding a fresh and exciting movement with a mix of genres pertaining to Celtic culture."

Bunney is no stranger to the Celtic way of life. His Welsh heritage on his father's side goes back over 100 years. His mother is Irish.

"As a child, I would be in the car with my family on a road trip, and I would tingle as soon as we passed the border into Wales," he recalls. "I knew I was home."

As a youngster, he was involved with Irish dance, and played both the tin whistle and the bodhrán. When he arrived in London 20 years ago, he began singing in the London Welsh Choir. Still, he yearned to do more.

"I realized that other nations had a modern identity with songs, music videos, film, TV and more in their native tongue, and I questioned why we didn't, or at least to the extent that the rest of the world did. Our past and tradition is stunning, but I felt it could be taken further."

Since UrbanKelt's founding, it has partnered with a number of other Celtic associations, including The Celtic League, Kernow in the City, London Celtic Punks, The London Welsh Centre, and the London Irish Centre. The internet has been crucial to the group's development.

"It is great to see the friendships developing overseas," notes Bunney. "We have a real growing community online, and we are all very supportive of each other."

While that Celtic community is strong, he says that more can be done to preserve and promote the languages. Even in the United Kingdom, he has come across people who don't know that Scotland has its own language.

"Language is an essential part of a culture and identity. We should be teaching our children – we could bring a language back in just one generation. Some may say they serve no purpose, but I disagree. Although English is the dominant language, every other nation benefits from speaking both English and its own native tongue."

Bunney believes that music is an ideal way to bring Celtic language to mainstream audiences. Soon, their website will be multi-lingual. "Give us a few more years and we promise to get the Celtic languages into the charts."

While UrbanKelt has - in Bunney's own words - "grown into a huge, wild tree in a short period of time," the coming months will see the organization prune the branches a little and tighten its focus to bands, tours, and their newest project, music videos.

"I had a dream and planted the seed," he says of UrbanKelt. "It has been a difficult and very emotional journey. Like climbing a mountain, I believe if you are half way up, there is no turning back until you reach the top. I am very proud of how far it's come in the last two years without a single penny behind it – all love, sweat and tears."

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Tales from the Down Recorder

19th century musicians, magistrates, mistresses and mothers of Northern Ireland's County Down are sparking to life, thanks to the enthusiastic efforts of a small group of female writers

Blending fact and fiction while relying heavily on local history, they call themselves the Writers at Coney, taking their name from a tiny seaside hamlet on the county's east coast. Membership ranges between five and eight. They originally came together to write for children, but subsequently took up a challenge to examine life in County Down in the mid to late 1800s. Their inspiration comes from the pages of an old, but still operating community newspaper, the Down Recorder.

Group leader Maddie Stewart credits local historian Michael Howland with triggering their imaginations by giving them excerpts from the paper dating from the 1840s to the 1890s in which articles on politics, crime and social events were juxtaposed.

"The group was given a selection of extracts and highlighter pens," recalls Stewart, noting the project began simply as a writing exercise. "The first instruction was to highlight anything, which for any reason, excited or interested you."

It turns out there was a great deal to interest the writers and they have, to date, compiled five short stories – the beginnings of a book which will apparently range from the poignant to the hilarious to the incredible. The plan is to publish each short story alongside the excerpt that inspired it, giving readers a rich and colourful view of politics, fashion, family life, attitudes and social issues in times past.

"We haven't got that far yet but we are on our way," notes Stewart, a published children's author.

Writer Morna Sullivan, whose family - like Stewart's - comes from neighboring County Antrim, remembers being enthralled by stories long before she could read or write. She went on to study literature in Belfast and later, creative writing. She is the author of The Favourite Vienna Blend.

"This story was inspired by a couple of articles in one edition of the Down Recorder of 1888 entitled 'Wholesale Poisoning of Husbands' and 'Strong Drink,' a few lines about the late bandmaster of the Coldstream Guards, and the growing popularity of cocoa on the same page," she explains.

Sullivan fashioned these disparate elements into a small but intense restaurant drama, the layered details of its setting wonderfully evoking the 1880s.


Down Recorder.

Mairi McCurdy, whose background is a mix of Irish and German and who returned to Northern Ireland after living abroad for a decade, is a teacher who was first inspired to create stories of heroic female role models for her children. She embraced the Down Recorder project and wrote Lizzie Murray's Musical Evening.

"This story was inspired by two reports: one entitled 'An Unfortunate' and the other, 'Ardglass Musical Society,'" points out McCurdy, whose story is set in 1887. "I found the character, Lizzie Murray - 'the unfortunate' - intriguing so I created the story behind her arrest. The 'Ardglass Musical Society' provided a contrasting backdrop for a snapshot of her life."

It was the historical element, as much as the desire to write, that lured teacher Rhonda Glasgow, who has Scottish and Irish roots and now lives in Belfast, to the writing project.

"I have a great interest in history and really loved the Down Recorder activity," she notes. "The school I work in is in County Down, so they still come out to photograph the kids and we still read all the local news in the paper."

Her story, The Ardglass Policeman, takes the form of a letter from a perplexed young Irish woman to a sister in America, a sister she much prefers to the one she works with in the family shop. It covers a dog's breakfast of fashion, flirtation, religion and the peculiar intricacies of the local court system.

An 1865 article about a farmer pitted against an unsympathetic magistrate gave Stewart the impetus for her story, The Importance of Being a Magistrate.

"It was inspired by a report entitled 'Hillsborough Quarter Sessions,' describing word for word a farmer named O'Hara who was being questioned by a magistrate referred to as His Worship. There was an unattractive, pompous and self-important tone to the magistrate's questions and statements. Other articles of the period tell of children being sentenced to hard labour for the most minor of misdemeanours."

While each of the group members continue to work at writing for children and teenagers, the Down Recorder project has given them an appreciation of the language and journalistic style of a different era.

"We have enjoyed working on this project immensely and have learned a lot about the rich language and style of writing used in that period," shares Sullivan. "And it has been very rewarding to learn more about our local history and heritage."

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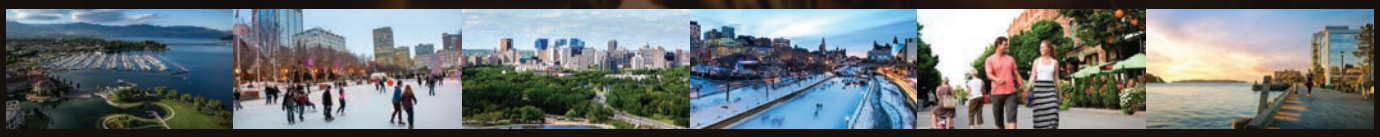
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TORONTO IRISH FILM FESTIVAL



While the Toronto International Film Festival (TIFF) might make bigger headlines each year, the Toronto Irish Film Festival - or TIRFF - also attracts cinema enthusiasts from around the world

"We noticed, particularly in Toronto, but in almost every city across the country, there are film festivals representing different cultural communities or focuses, but there wasn't one for the Irish community," says the festival's co-founder, John Galway. "So we talked to a bunch of organizations in Toronto, and sat down and planned it out."

Galway and fellow film enthusiast Michael Barry founded TIRFF in 2009. Both collectively possess over three decades working in Canada's film and television industry – in fact, Galway's first job out of university was working for TIFF. Both also have ties to Belfast – Galway's mother and father's families came from the Northern Ireland capital city, and Barry emigrated from there 15 years ago.

In 2010, they hosted their first screening. "We showed one film as a little tester to see what the reaction would be," Galway explains. "It was a documentary on the singer-songwriter Liam Clancy. We sold it out, so we knew there was something there."

Since then, the festival has enjoyed sold-out screenings at the TIFF Bell Lightbox. "Each year we've added to the programming and added different spotlights," notes Galway. "What started as a one-day event has now evolved into a full weekend."

Programming typically includes shorts, feature-length films, and documentaries. At least one program is dedicated to Northern Ireland, Galway adds. Last year, they screened the documentary Rebuilding the World Trade Center by Belfast's Marcus Robinson, who, over the course of 10 years, created paintings and filmed the reconstruction on site at Ground Zero in New York City.

"That was the first time we had the Northern Ireland Bureau in Washington and Northern Ireland Connections involved in the festival," shares Galway, "and we're going to do another similar spotlight this year."

Opening night at TIRFF often showcases a major fiction film with one of the main actors or the director in attendance. Last year, that film was Standby – the tale of a 20-something man who lost his job, was left standing at the altar, and begins working with his mum at the airport tourist bureau. The star of the film, Brian Gleeson, attended the Toronto premiere. The year before, the special guest was Alex Fegan, director of the documentary The Irish Pub.

"It was very popular and had a long Q&A," says Galway of the discussion after the documentary's screening. "When you have a guest over, the audience can interact with them and discuss the film and examine what went into it. I think that's what kind of makes a festival extra, beyond just going to see a movie."

The opening night film at this year's Toronto Irish Film Festival is You're Ugly Too, starring Aidan Gillen (Game of Thrones). Directed by Marc Noonan, the film has received multiple awards and nominations, including winner of the Screen Directors Guild of Ireland/Directors Guild of America Finders series in 2015.

Some of the documentaries to be screened at TIRFF 2016 include Eleanor McGrath's Forgotten, a film about the British Home Children that came to Canada, and Paddy Hayes' Deoch an Dorais (Name Your Poison), which tells the story of a homeless Irishman, known as "Rasputin of the Bronx," who survived multiple murder attempts as part of an insurance scam.

In addition to feature, short and documentary programming, and the Northern Ireland spotlight, this year will feature a new "best of Irish animation" series curated by a partner festival in Dingle, as well as more Irish language content.

"We try to include films from all four corners of the island," contends Galway, who himself travels to the Galway Film Fleadh each summer to scout potential films for the Toronto festival.

Galway and his team are planning on hosting Irish film events throughout the year also. In April, they are planning a day of film to pay tribute to the centenary of the 1916 Easter Rising. In the future, Galway hopes to take the festival on the road to other Canadian communities with Irish roots.

"We've always tried to have films that really show Ireland and that are set in Ireland. We try to have a mix of what people might think of as 'traditional Irish' but also try to show modern, contemporary Ireland, be it in Dublin or Belfast or one of the other cities. When you see it up on the screen, you'll know right away that it's an Irish film."

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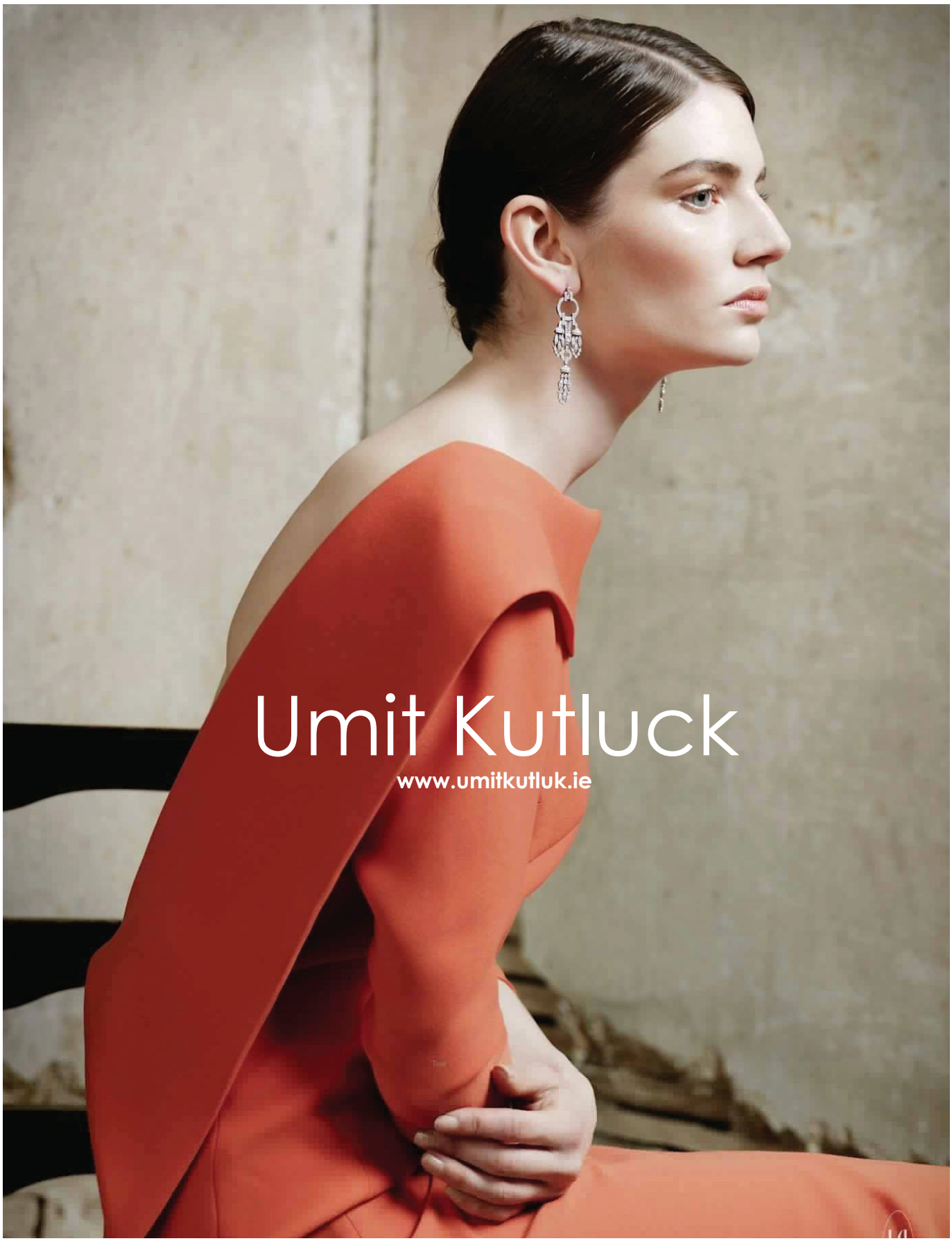
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Umit Kutluck
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I was born and raised in Istanbul, so my roots are in Turkey. I came to Ireland in 2006 and simply fell in love with it. It has since become my home.

I grew up surrounded by fabrics, textures and colours - it was a part of my childhood - and I was always creative, so becoming a fashion designer was a very natural thing for me. I suppose it is in my blood.

I follow all the latest technology used in the fashion industry and try to incorporate them into my designs. So as these technologies have evolved over the years so have my methods of garment construction and detailing.

Fashion moves incredibly fast compared to other industries. The job entails a constant search for something new. Every six months I have to channel new inspiration and research into a new collection.



As such, you cannot do this job in isolation. You need to build up relationships with people in connected industries - stylists, illustrators, photographers, fashion buyers, journalists. This all takes time but it's this teamwork that brings the idea from the 'inspiration' to the finished product.

The fashion industry is constantly changing with consumer demand, modern lifestyles and the latest trend. For example, in a short space of time online stores have become a popular platform for shopping. While the in-store shopping experience has changed, an online presence makes shopping easier for the consumer.

That said, I think, where possible, we must try and support Irish or local fashion brands and smaller artisan businesses rather than mass-produced lines of clothing.

I love fashion and I cannot imagine doing anything else. It feels like the most natural thing in the world.

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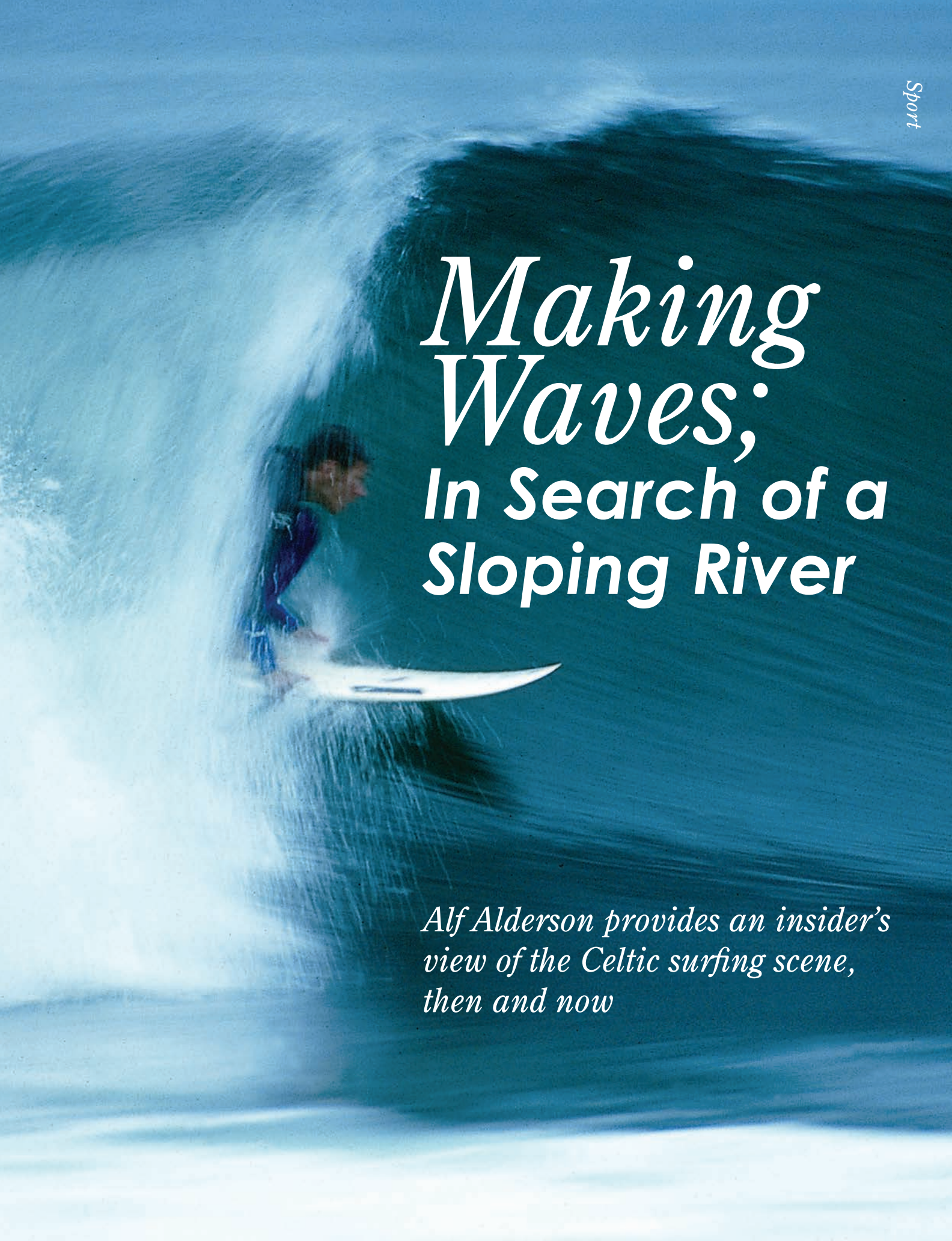
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Making Waves; In Search of a Sloping River

Alf Alderson provides an insider's view of the Celtic surfing scene, then and now

I realized the Celtic surfing scene had come of age when I attended the world premiere of a movie called Waveriders in Dublin a few years ago.

The documentary focuses on the Irish roots of surfing, and examines the life of Irish-Hawaiian surfing and lifeguarding legend, George Freeth.

More importantly, as far as the current Celtic surf scene is concerned, Waveriders features 11-time world surfing champion, Kelly Slater performing on Irish waves, along with Irishman Richie Fitzgerald and British champion Gabe Davies taking on the monster, sixty-foot waves off Mullaghmore in County Sligo.

This introduced the world to the fact that the Celtic nations have waves as big and powerful as anywhere else on the planet – if a tad colder and windier. Of course, this information was nothing new to those who have been surfing these waves for decades.

Cornwall, along with the Basque country, first saw surfboards grace its summer swells well over fifty years ago, and the sport gradually crept around the coves, bays and beaches of Europe's Atlantic coast.

People were riding waves at my own local breaks in Pembrokeshire, Wales, only three or four years after the sport was introduced to Cornwall. Photos exist from the early '60s of members of the Porthmawr Surf Life Saving Club when the club was based in an old railway carriage.

I was shown the photo by the club's founder, Dr. George Middleton of St. Davids, now in his eighties and still getting into the surf occasionally on an old belly board. He is responsible for two more generations of Middletons currently riding the surf in Pembrokeshire and Cornwall.

Paul McHugh, who was making rudimentary surfboards in the '60s, was another surfing pioneer to the Welsh region. "I think I was one of the first to surf down here," he says. "Then people started coming here from Cardiff. But there were few young people in Pembrokeshire - there was no work. Then Pete Bounds (former British and Welsh surfing champion) and Paul Ryder (known as 'one of the founding fathers of Welsh surfing') moved down here and things slowly took off."

This experience of surfing being 'drip fed' into the Celtic regions was also common to Scotland and Ireland.

Ireland's west coast in particular is renowned for the quality of its surf, but it's understandable that not too many people wanted to paddle out into its waters forty or fifty years ago. Back then, wetsuits didn't particularly keep you warm; they were more of a device for slightly delaying the onset of hypothermia.

But by the time I was getting into surfing in the late '70s and early '80s, wetsuits were much improved, as were surfboards, and anyone who surfed in Britain was well aware of the quality of the waves along the country's Celtic coastlines.

I remember making surf trips from university in the north of England to the Llyn Peninsula in north Wales, the heartland of Welsh culture, and being fascinated to hear Welsh being spoken by local surfers.

Like many other surfers, I've met several friends in the waves at remote surf spots in Ireland and Scotland who I still remain in contact with today; for clichéd as it sounds, Celtic surfers are invariably a welcoming bunch.

As an Englishman living in Wales, I've encountered no end of stick over rugby, football and even politics, but not once has anyone ever raised the issue of my Anglo-Saxon heritage when I've been surfing.

"In fact, one of my proudest moments came earlier this year when, whilst checking out the waves rolling in at my local beach, a Welsh surfer friend told me, "You've been surfing here for thirty years now boy…I reckon that makes you one of us."

So here are a few snapshots of what being 'one of us' means…







Northern Scotland

Back in 1990, I was surfing a small summer swell at Fraserburgh on the North Sea coast. I got chatting to a local surfer named Billy and informed him that I was heading up to Thurso. He asked for a lift in return for a couple of nights' free accommodation in a ramshackle caravan he owned there.

Today, Thurso is packed with surfers on any good swell as it was one of the best reef breaks in Europe, but in those days the numbers were much smaller. It wasn't just the cold that put people off though; it was the serious nature of the waves, which are fast and heavy and break over a shallow rock shelf in the daunting shadow of a castle on the shore.

Surfing there one evening, one of the locals advised us that if we were all going to go for an après-surf drink together, we'd need to keep the surf session short as the pub was closing at midnight. This was June, and being in northern Scotland, we were still in the water at 11.30pm.

It was light again by 3am, which means that if you're fit enough, you can surf here for more than 20 hours a day in midsummer.

Cardigan Bay, Wales

Wales has its own version of Atlantis. Ancient mythology describes a land, now sunken in the waters of Cardigan Bay, called Cantre'r Gwaelod, which translates to the 'Lowland Hundred.'

Although the 'Lowland Hundred' was inundated and is no more, the church bells of this mysterious land are still said to ring out in times of strife; and in 1770, a Welsh scholar named William Owen Pughe even reported that he saw human habitations underwater there.

Whilst I can't vouch personally for any of that, I can tell you that this is a stretch of coastline that often has excellent (albeit cold) waves in winter, when huge, unsurfable swells batter the more exposed coastlines to the south of Cardigan Bay.

Some of the best waveriders in Europe, such as former European Longboard Champion, Chris 'Guts' Griffiths, regularly make the journey here from bases in South Wales and even England to score the excellent point breaks it offers.

But you can, on occasion, still get the waves to yourself. You might even today find something of the atmosphere experienced by the likes of Paul McHugh and Pete Bounds when they first ventured to Wales' furthest corner in search of surf, over fifty years ago.

Donegal coast, Ireland

I had been spending the last few days in the busy seaside town of Bundoran which regularly hosts the Irish National Surfing Championships. In order to escape the hullaballoo of the busy surf capital, myself and 'The Gill' (surf photographer Paul Gill) decided to head up to Bloody Foreland in the parish of Gweedore.

This is the largest Irish-speaking parish in the country and, as with areas of my home county of Pembrokeshire, English is very much the second language. Fortunately the old boy who we got chatting to as we stopped to check our map gave us directions in English.

When he saw the surfboards on the roof of the car he asked, "So you'll be looking for a sloping river then, lads?" with a deadly serious look before cracking a wide smile.

He pointed us in the right direction for a bay that doesn't even have a name on the map, where we found a perfect gin-clear point break with just three other people in the water, one local and two New Zealanders.

News of how good the Irish surf is has clearly made it to the other side of the world.

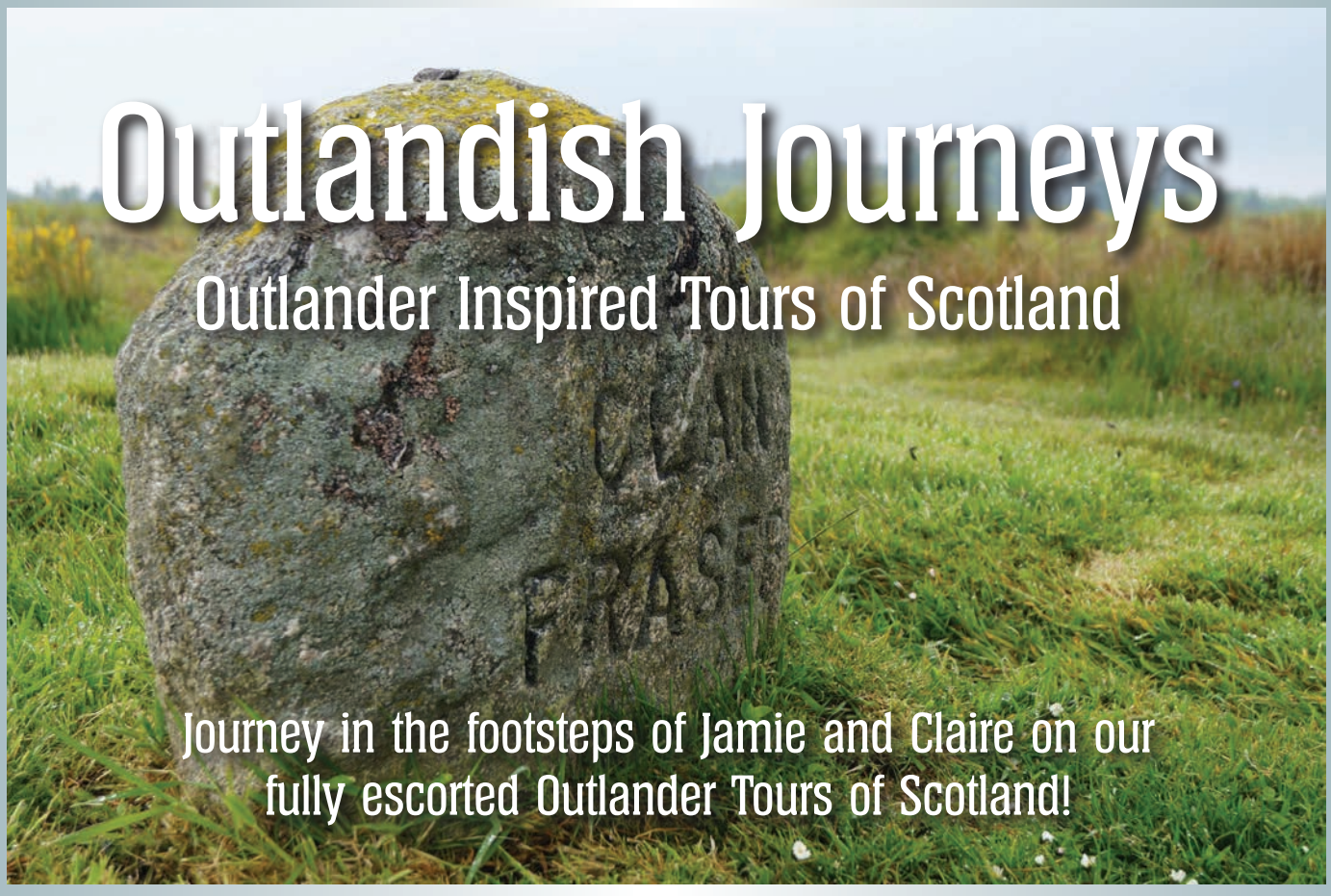






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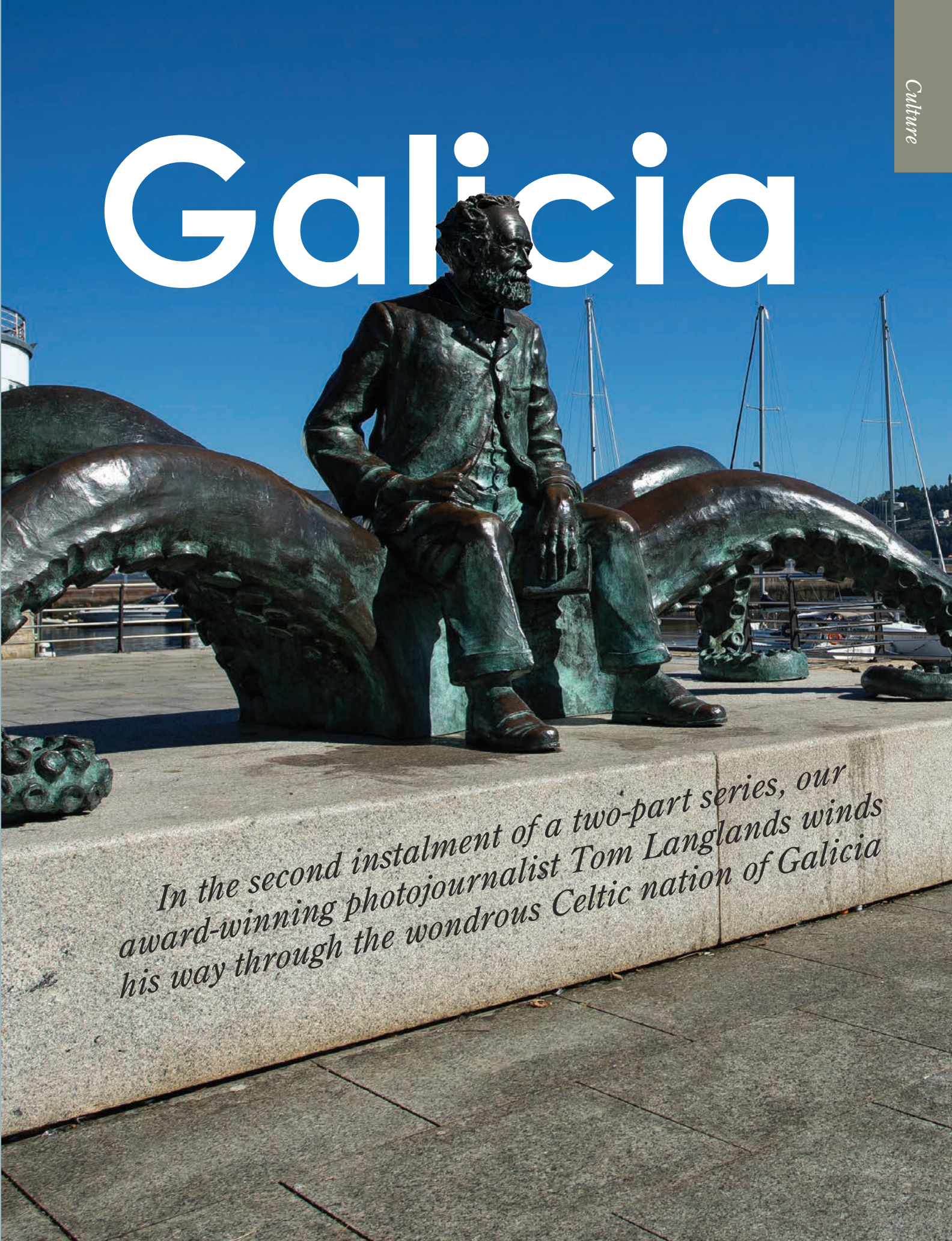
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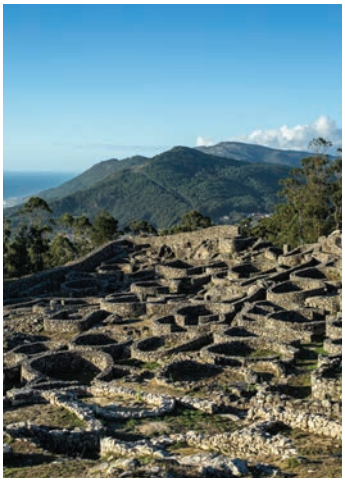
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Galicia



In the second instalment of a two-part series, our award-winning photojournalist Tom Langlands winds his way through the wondrous Celtic nation of Galicia







Gulls screech overhead, waves crash against the rocks below, and in the distance sits the gentle curve of the horizon where the ocean meets the sky. I am at Cape Finisterre - the headland at the end of the world. It lies at the southern end of the 'Coast of Death', so named on account of the number of ships that have floundered on this treacherous stretch of Atlantic coastline.

Long before Christianity adopted Santiago de Compostela as a place of pilgrimage it was Cape Finisterre that was the spiritual magnet for Europe's ancient tribes. From here at the end of the day, they watched the sun disappear over the horizon into another realm.What lay beyond that horizon would take many more centuries to discover, but it was connected with where I headed next.

To the south of Cape Finisterre lie the Rías Baixas (Lower Rías). Rías are large bays into which rivers flow forming large estuarine habitats. Four of these define the southern stretch of coastline towards Portugal. As I travelled south, the landscape grew less rugged. Here the hills roll towards the sea and the power of the Atlantic is tamed through a combination of islands, shallower water, and an undulating shoreline with many outstanding beaches. Rías are important ecosystems. The mingling of freshwater and saltwater over tidal, sandy basins creates unique habitats with rich food sources essential to a wide range of bird and marine life. The excellent quality of these habitats is one reason why seafood harvested from them is so prized. To complement the outstanding seafood are great wines - perhaps none more so than the beautifully aromatic whites from the famed Albariño grape grown on the surrounding hillsides. There are more than 8,500 acres of vineyards and 6,500 growers capitalising on the region's mild, wet climate.

It was early afternoon when I arrived in Pontevedra, the principal city of Rías Baixas. I took a walk along the Río Lérez and crossed the elegant suspension bridge, Ponte dos Tirantes. I wandered into the historic centre and found myself in a world of medieval courtyards, churches, crucifixes, colonnades, fountains and the quirky architecture of doors and windows that offered a glimpse into the past. Sitting under the shade of an umbrella at a café in Plaza de la Leña, I ordered Pementos de Padrón and a beer. Pementos are small green peppers grown in the municipality of Padrón. They are fried and liberally sprinkled with sea salt to create a Galician speciality. There is even an annual festival celebrating this delicious little pepper.

The following morning, courtesy of Turismo Rías Baixas, I met Patricia Furelos in the old town. She has been a Galician Tourism Licenced Guide since 1998. We walked the streets pausing frequently for her to overlay the stones with history and bring the place to life. Passing by the market we paused near the Río Lérez. Here, Furelos pointed out, one of the most famous ships in history was built - La Gallega, later renamed Santa Maria - the flagship of Christopher Columbus.

Furelos arranged a car and we headed inland to the Rock Art Archaeological Park at Campo Lameiro. This, is one of the most important petroglyph – rock art – sites in Europe. There, I met archaeologist and park director, José Manuel Rey García, who took me onto the hillside to see rock outcrops, carved thousands of years ago, that featured warriors with weapons, hunters chasing






deer, and a myriad of enigmatic circles and lines. García explained that the park raises public awareness of the many important petroglyphs found in the area. It is also an international centre for education and documentation seeking that explores and records the way of life of our ancestors and their art. Inside the park's main building a stunning exhibition and audio-visual display transported me back through several millennia until, finally, I emerged in the present.

Next we headed south to the seaside town of Baiona. If I learned one thing in Galicia it was the importance of food. Our first stop was the restaurant of the Paradores Hotel that occupies the medieval fortress of Castelo de Monterreal, overlooking the Ría de Vigo. It was in these waters that Jules Verne set part of his famous novel Twenty Thousand Leagues Under The Sea. It seemed an appropriate place to order Galicia's most famous dish, pulpoá feira – fair style octopus. I admit to being hesitant because anytime I have tried octopus before I found it rubbery and indigestible. This however, was soft and delicate, drizzled with olive oil and sprinkled with sea salt and paprika. Unsurprisingly, it tasted of the sea and was the perfect starter for the mouth-watering paella that followed. Over lunch I asked Furelos what made Galician cuisine so famous. Picking up a scallop, she held it against the blue of the ocean through the window and explained, "Galician cuisine is very simple. Everything is made from fresh, natural, high quality products that can be found in local markets." It may be simple, but it is beyond scrumptious.

Baiona is attractive, with a modern seafront concealing a network of old streets and lanes behind. Dozens of yachts bobbed gently in the bay, but one boat caught my eye; it was a full size replica of the Pinta. Alongside Santa Maria and Niña this caravel completed the trio of Columbus' ships that had sailed over the same horizon I had observed from Cape Finisterre. It was here in Baiona on March 1, 1493 that the Pinta became the first boat back to break the news of what indeed lay over the horizon - a New World. I crossed a floating walkway, climbed some wooden steps and ventured on board. At around 55 feet (17 metres) in length, I was struck by how small it was. It had three masts and little storage space. Despite more room below deck it still felt claustrophobic and that was without pitching and rolling across the Atlantic Ocean. Conditions must have been unpleasant for its crew of 26 sailors, and even more unpleasant for the natives they captured and brought back with them!

Leaving Baiona, we headed for the ancient Celtic hill fort of Santa Trega by A Guarda. Standing on top of this impressive hill I could see over the estuary of the Río Minho into Portugal, out across the Atlantic and over the rolling green land to the north and east. In 1913 during construction of a road to the summit, the remains of circular stone buildings were uncovered. Subsequent excavations revealed a huge Celtic hill fort. It is only in the last few decades that archaeologists have realized the scale and importance of this settlement. At present a mere 10 per cent of what is now known to have been a settlement of 3,000 people has been uncovered and it reveals a complex social group. Each stone circle is the lower portion of an enclosure that once stood much taller with a conical roof of branches and thatch. A family would have occupied several stone circles, each serving a different function, and all accessed from private courtyards that in turn were linked to communal 'streets.' Evidence also suggests there was a hierarchy with high status individuals holding prime hillside locations, while those of lower status were relegated to 'poorer quarters'. I walked the streets, stood in the stone circles, and watched the sun sink to the horizon just as my Celtic cousins had done thousands of years before.

Back in Pontevedra, Furelos and I chatted over a drink and I asked her why she considered herself a Celt. In unwavering English she explained, "Philology was my degree at university, so I have been dealing with languages and their evolution for some years. Like most philologists, I believe Galicians are Celtic."

Over the next few days, I explored some breathtaking beaches and spent a few days in the large seaport of Vigo from where, in 1719, a fleet of ships sailed for Scotland in support of the Jacobite uprising. Many of those vessels were caught in a storm and destroyed on the Coast of Death at Cape Finisterre.

My journey around Rías Baixas and Galicia was ending. I spent a final day in Santiago where my trip through this fascinating region had begun over two weeks before. There was just one final thing I wanted to see - and hear. I followed the sound of music to a covered way by the side of the cathedral, and there I paused to listen to a musician playing the traditional Galician gaita, or bagpipes. It reminded me of how much we share as Celtic nations - our culture, our relationship with the sea and above all the friendship and hospitality that I had encountered repeatedly throughout my travels.

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A Taste for Travel

Northern Ireland celebrates a Year of Food & Drink in 2016. As Celtic Life International correspondent Eimear O'Callaghan explains, a culinary revolution is satisfying residents and visitors alike, and feeding the local economy...

Magnificent, white, Atlantic breakers crash thunderously mere yards from the restaurant's wooden decking. Lights from its rain-lashed windows catch beach grass bending under north coast gales. Inside, the diners toast beside a log-burning stove.

Steaming, inky-blue mussels in Armagh cider, served in a white enamel pot, followed by slow-cooked beef cheeks and braised red cabbage, warm both heart and belly. It is midweek in the middle of a Northern Ireland winter, and the local boats have only put to sea twice in five days, but Harry's Shack is buzzing.

The Shack is one of the most talked-about new restaurants in Northern Ireland — famed for its location as much as for its food. Weeks after it opened in 2014, a rare combination of exceptionally high tides and huge winter swells brought the sea to two feet above its internal floor level.

"Debris was flung at us. Even a car washed past us," laughs owner Donal Doherty. "I knew that what I'd done was either madness or genius."

'Local' and 'fresh' could be bywords for this converted National Trust 'shed', nestling at the top of Portstewart's glorious mile-and-a-half-long beach, and as near to the sea as it can get without being swept away. As the waves roll in and seasons change, diners hankering after fabulous fish, spectacular scenery, ocean smells and the grinding of sand beneath their feet, happily travel miles regardless of the weather.

'If it's not fresh, we don't serve it," Donal insists, "and we guarantee that every bit of fish we serve is brought ashore on the north coast, the first pick of the day."

"In summer, fishermen bring lobster from the harbour five minutes away. The rest of our fish comes from boats that land at Greencastle across the bay. All year round, we've fabulous mussels from Grade A waters three bays away. And we grow our own vegetables and leaves organically in our two-acre walled garden."

Translucent white hake with tomato, chorizo and baby potato stew, and haddock in buttermilk batter, are the most popular dishes on his menu. Plaice, megrim or lemon sole, and brill and black





sole in summer, are fried simply in creamy, yellow butter or in the delicate, award-winning Broighter Gold rapeseed oil, produced just fifteen miles away.

Five years ago, Donal couldn't have sold ten per cent of the whole fish that now comprise eighty per cent of the menu produced by his chef, Derek Creagh. "People are trying new things, wanting something different. They know it's local. They know it's fresh. They trust us. They're eating fish like gurnard and megrim that we'd have struggled to sell two years ago."

What's happening at Harry's Shack is indicative of a new excitement that's sweeping through Northern Ireland. Peace has dawned, the night-time economy has recovered, tourists are visiting in droves and well-travelled locals, inspired by experiences abroad, are demanding more from producers and chefs.

For many years, high-end dining was virtually non-existent here, but the last few years have witnessed a proliferation of fabulous new restaurants which pride themselves on locally-sourced, seasonal produce. Last September, Ox and Eipic at Deane's — both in Belfast city centre — brought prestigious Michelin stars to Northern Ireland for the first time in five years. Five other restaurants feature in Michelin's Bib Gourmand listings.

As the saying goes, a rising tide lifts all boats. James Street South, Mourne Seafood Bar, Brown's in Derry, the Ramore complex in Portrush, the Boathouse in Bangor, and dozens more, testify to higher standards and wider choices. From pop-up street traders to farm-shops and farmers' markets, from pub grub to high-end dining — chefs and restaurateurs are upping their game and exploiting the riches around them.

Twenty-six-year-old Dara O hArtghaile and his wife Ciara are typical of the new generation of innovative and enterprising producers re-inventing Northern Ireland cuisine. After a year in New Zealand, being 'wowed' by the vibrancy of its cafe and artisan culture, they returned to the picturesque, County Antrim seaside town of Ballycastle determined to introduce the same thing there.

Dara taught himself how to bake 'real' bread. Two years ago, at 4 a.m. on a cold February morning, he placed four organic,

sourdough loaves in his mother's oven and paced the floor anxiously, waiting to see what would emerge.

"Baking those loaves for a new cafe in Coleraine was the most terrifying thing I'd ever done," he laughs, recalling his first foray into professional bread-making. He needn't have worried.

After operating the Ursa Minor bakery from their home kitchen for fourteen months, demand from restaurants and the public forced them to move to new premises. Dara works through the evenings, growing starters, resting dough, folding and hand-shaping loaves in a traditional process that takes up to 36 hours.

While her husband honed his bread techniques, Ciara gave birth to their son and perfected her patisserie skills. She now runs the Bakehouse Cafe, offering "real bread, real coffee and real cakes" three days a week.

The tiny cafe, with its pastel-coloured chairs and stripped timber floor, has been closed all day and feels chilly. But when Dara arrives, carrying two loaves straight from the oven, the aroma of freshly baked bread warms it instantly.

He watches closely as Ciara cuts into them – the rugged, golden crust cracking open and emitting a sigh of steam. "Leave it to cool and let the crumb set," he suggests. But the temptation to dunk a thick slice into golden olive oil and balsamic vinegar, and savour its sourness and 'wheatiness', proves irresistible.



Dara & Ciara founders of Ursa Minor





Dara O hArtghaile





Broughgammon owner Charlie Cole



Becky Cole

Ciara, meanwhile, tantalizes with the promise of French-inspired patisserie, made in summer with Northern Ireland apples and berries. In winter she specializes in cream-filled almond éclairs, topped with burnt caramel and toasted, flaked almonds.

Stressing the 'honest, fresh, local, seasonal, no additives' nature of their produce, Ciara observes that, "Organic food is what my grandparents used to call 'food'. People want to trust what they're eating. They're asking what's in it and why."

A few days earlier, the couple had experimented by adding kelp, harvested on Rathlin Island and smoked at the North Coast Smokehouse, to their loaves. "It was salty, smoky and exciting," says Dara. "With natural resources like that, why shouldn't our food be up there with the world's best?"

Awards and certificates adorn the walls and mahogany sideboards of Armagh's 250-year-old Newforge Country House, testifying to the quality of food served by chef, John Mathers, in what's been his family home for five generations.

"Our philosophy is simple: honest food using the best ingredients we can find," he explains. "I bake my own wheaten bread every day. Fresh from the oven and spread with the famous Abernethy butter, produced just 14 miles from here. What could be better?"

A deep, creamy round of horseradish panna cotta trembles on my salad of smoked Lough Neagh eel and sea trout, cured and hot-smoked by John himself. The natural yoghurt and cream used to make it come from Clandeboye Dairy – 40 minutes away – and are infused with horseradish from his garden. Shavings of pickled, home-grown vegetables and slivers of radish and beetroot add to the starter's elegance.

"We don't use local produce just for the sake of it. But when it's fantastic and warrants a place on our menu, it'll be there."

A look through the Newforge menus bears this out: Glenarm Estate shorthorn beef that's been salt-aged at the internationally-acclaimed Hannan's Meats a mile away; pale-smoked hake; artisan cheeses made an hour's drive away from unpasteurized cows', ewes' and goats' milk; vegetables from the Mathers' farm; homemade apple and rhubarb chutneys and, for breakfast, Moyallon dry-cured bacon, and eggs from hens which roam the Mathers' orchard.

John believes Northern Ireland is finally on the map as a food destination. "We were insular for far too long but times have moved on and the negative coverage that we endured during 30 years of the Troubles has gone. People are realizing how good our produce is and we're making headlines for the right reasons."

His drinks list features Northern Ireland's famous Bushmills Whiskey, of course, but it's also evidence of another explosion of local creativity — five craft beers brewed by Clanconnel Brewery in nearby Waringstown, ciders from MacIvors in Armagh, Shortcross gin from Downpatrick and Ireland's first potato vodka, RubyBlue, distilled ten miles away at Hughes Craft Distillery in Lisburn.

"If you're sitting in the sunshine of Tuscany, looking out over the fields and sipping red wine, it'll taste pretty good," John says. "But when you're here on a crisp, sunny day in autumn, with a glass of Armagh cider made from apples grown half an hour away - that's fantastic too. Location makes for a better fit."

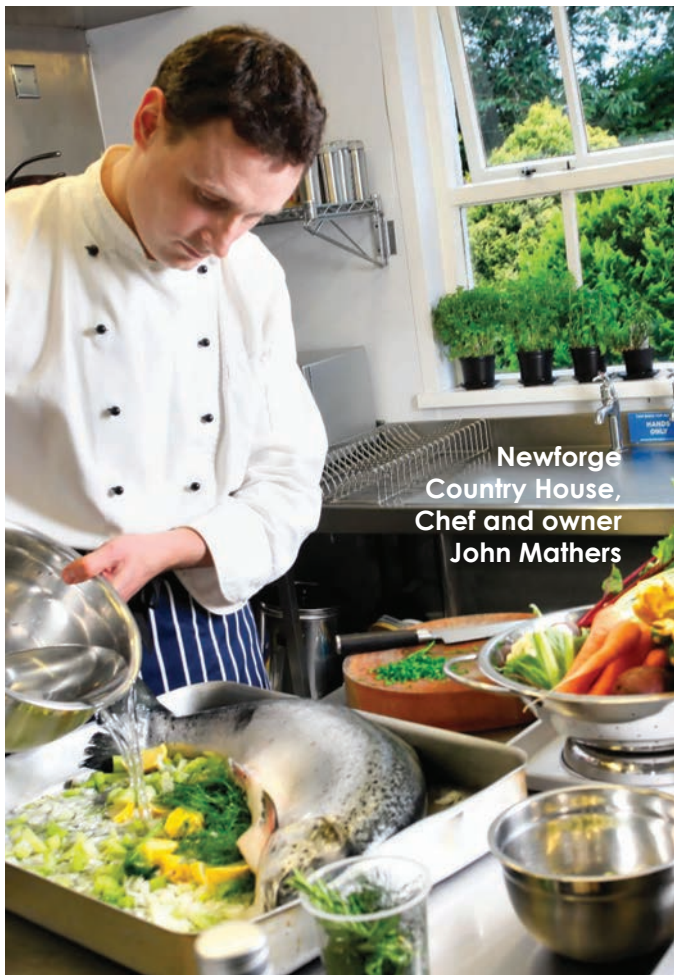
It's also fitting too that exactly 170 years after 'an Gorta Mór' — the Irish famine — when a million people died and two million emigrated, chefs and producers are confidently declaring their food among the best in the world. Words like 'local', 'trust' and 'honest' keep recurring.

"We've been slow to shout about how good we are," says chef and author, Emmett McCourt. The Derryman's book, 'Feast or Famine', was named Best Culinary Travel Book at last June's Gourmand Awards in China.

"We're surrounded by a wealth of natural resources," he continues. "Great Atlantic shores and a luscious landscape. We've grass-fed cattle and lamb, an abundance of fish and shellfish, and a fantastic new generation of culinary talent. We treasure a connection with the land that goes back generations — and that sets us apart."

Emmett, whose earliest food memory is the smell of freshly-baked bread wafting across a rubble-strewn Derry street at the start of the Troubles, agrees that three decades of violence held Northern Ireland back. Food scares have damaged public confidence.


Newforge Country House


Newforge Country House, Chef and owner John Mathers

"People care now about the provenance of what they're eating and they want a shorter food chain. They want to know their bakers and butchers, to hear their stories and build relationships with them."

Emmett's excited by the new confidence that's inspiring chefs and encouraging consumers to demand more. "Northern Ireland food and drink are finally coming of age. At long last, we and our heritage have found our rightful place in the kitchens of the world."

County Antrim's Lough Neagh eels, Armagh's Bramley apples and County Down's Comber potatoes are up there now with Champagne, Parma Ham and Greek feta cheese, since the European Union recognized their regional importance and granted them Protected Geographical Indication (PGI) status. Local producers are scooping Great Taste, Blas na hEireann (Taste of Ireland) and many other awards.

Farm-shops and farmers' markets are springing up, and being supported, in towns and villages across Northern Ireland. Shoppers throng Belfast's 19th century St George's Market at weekends and arm themselves from its mesmerizing array of local produce.

The mouth-watering aromas of sizzling pork, freshly-baked breads, ripening cheeses and freshly-brewed coffee intoxicate Saturday visitors, and a band with the risqué name, The Folkin' Eeejits, entertains them enthusiastically with favourites like Dirty Ol' Town and Galway Girl.



Chef & Author, Emmett McCourt

Chris McNabb, from Silverfin Seafood Specialists in Newry, is busy at one of the five fish stalls. Gone are the days when, for religious reasons, many people only ate fish on Fridays. Despite rising daily at 5 a.m. to check the catches at County Down's fishing ports, he's chatty, cheerful and on first-name terms with customers.

Lobster, landed that morning in Kilkeel, twitch on a bed of ice. Air bubbles oozing gently from whole crabs show that they too are still alive. Mussels from Killough, King Scallops from Portavogie and a huge range of North Atlantic fish — including cod, hake, sea trout and haddock — glisten with freshness.

As two French visitors splash a dash of tabasco on their chilled oysters before downing them, Chris's pride is obvious.

"We're an island nation surrounded by an ocean, with the world's best fish and its cleanest waters. We've wild salmon in our rivers and Lough Neagh eel and pollan. No additives or preservatives — straight out of the sea and off to the market. It's the last thing on the planet that's taken straight from nature."

Raising her voice above the clamour of music and trade, Polish-born Alicia describes how she arrived in Northern Ireland as a student in 1998. After staying through the summer to pick strawberries in Armagh, "he caught my eye and I caught his. All the rest is history."

'He' is her husband, Seamus Breslan. Together, they farm beside the lazily meandering Blackwater River between Armagh and Tyrone, on land first cultivated in the 17th century.

"The hedgerows are rich with heirloom apples, plums and greengages. I forage for fruit and herbs to make our Amberline syrups and preserves."

Although it's winter, their wooden tables sag beneath a cornucopia of root vegetables and brassicas, still speckled with earth and damp with Northern Irish rain. Carrots, artichokes, celeriac, beetroot, parsnips, green and purple broccoli are piled high in blue plastic crates, alongside boxes of herbs, and orange and gold nasturtium flowers.

"There's a dawning appreciation of local produce," says Alicia. "Restaurants, like Deane's, approach us as growers, looking for unusual vegetables, funky tomatoes, different leaves, herbs and edible flowers. They take small amounts to start, play and experiment with, and draw up their menus seasonally. It challenges them to be creative."

Feeding beer to cattle was County Antrim farmer, Nigel Logan's creative response when he wanted a more tender and succulent Wagyu-style beef that 'ordinary customers' could afford. "We brewed buckets of stout to feed to our rare breed, shorthorn cattle," he explains, keeping an eye on the queue of customers snaking round his stall. "The animals devoured it and the customers loved it."

Three years later, the cattle still enjoy a stout diet, and the lucrative spin-off is the farm's micro-brewery, producing quirkily-named, award-winning craft beers - Horny Bull, Goats Butt and Spitting Lama.

The enterprising farmer represents the fourth generation of his family to have farmed at Hillstown, near Ahoghill, but he's the first to run a farm-shop, supplying dry-aged beef, pork from rare-breed saddleback pigs, free-range turkeys and fresh brown eggs from Black Rock hens.

"Everything we do now is geared towards the farm-shop," he says, acknowledging his customers' desire for greater traceability and shorter food chains.

"Northern Ireland food is very safe and we grow grass like nowhere else in the world. People arriving at our shop can watch our cattle and sheep grazing in green fields beside it."



Chef & Author, Emmett McCourt

An abundance of green grass was one of the factors influencing Charlie Cole's decision, aged just 23, to embark on goat production as a low-cost entry into innovative farming. 'Lashed by our rain, bashed by our winds', proclaims a poster beside a freezer filled with cuts of his Broughgammon kid goat and veal.

Four years after starting out, Charlie and his 26-year-old wife Becky are rightly proud of their thriving farm, in lush countryside a few miles inland from North Antrim's stunning coastline. He wipes his hands after a morning's on-site butchering and accompanies her across the farmyard to where builders are finishing the vast double barn that will soon accommodate 150 hand-reared goats.

Becky, struggling to be heard above the contented bleating of dozens of frisky animals, outlines Broughgammon's philosophy. "The last five years have seen phenomenal demand for goats' milk products, so females are much in demand. But billy-kids are being put down at birth. We buy them and rear them till they're eight months old. Cabrito, or kid goat meat, is up there with chicken in terms of healthiness — low calorie, low fat, high in iron and protein."

As I step backwards to stop a kid nibbling my coat, Charlie admits to going "a bit goat crazy" since buying his first herd of thirty. "They're ridiculously nice animals, personable and inquisitive."

He knew he was undertaking something unheard of in that part of Northern Ireland but, with a spirit of entrepreneurship characteristic of the region's young producers, he calculated he had little to lose.

"Seventy-five per cent of the world's population use goat as their primary meat. We're showing local people that billy-kids are a viable, healthy food source. We're also giving our growing ethnic population a taste of their childhoods."

Food doesn't come much healthier or more ethical than this. As we wander along a mucky lane, past geese and chickens which provide the family's eggs, Becky explains that Broughgammon rears milk- and grass-fed male dairy calves in the same ethical way, before dispatching them to meet the growing demand for free-range, rose veal.

Their success means the Coles now devote four days a week to butchery — preparing pheasant from local estates, butchering one deer a week to satisfy demand for venison, and getting orders ready for restaurants, hotels, ten farmers' markets a month, and their 'billy-burger' van.

"A food revolution's definitely underway," says Becky. "People care about nutrition and the welfare of the animals. They've discovered how good local produce is and they're celebrating it."

Broughgammon is venturing down a totally new path but others contribute to the 'revolution' by breathing new life into traditional practices.

When Boston-born, Julie Hickey, showed her straight-talking father around her new dairy in the Sperrin Mountains, he suggested less than reassuringly, "If the cheese doesn't work out, use the vat as a hot-tub."

Several years later, wearing a green protective coat, white rubber boots and a blue hairnet, Julie proudly slides back the lid of the gleaming, 500-litre, stainless steel vat and savours the fresh, milky smell of curd. In under six months, it will be transformed into sixteen five-kilo wheels of her award-winning blue cheese.

Dart Mountain Tamnagh Foods, which Julie runs with her husband, Kevin, snuggles in a picturesque valley between the grassy, heather-covered Dart Mountain and the fast-flowing River Faughan. The names of its cheeses evoke the spirit of the land-





Northbound
Brewery owners,
David & Martina Rogers







Julie Hickey, with some of her Dart Mountain Dusk cheese

scape: Sperrin Blue; Dart Mountain Dusk; Kilcreen (a town-land nearby), and Banagher Bold, named after the family's parish and wrapped in the colours of the local Gaelic football club. Tirkeeran - Irish for 'dark place' - will be released later this spring.

"There's no greater food alchemy in the world," Julie enthuses. "We get milk – a 100% natural product - and change it into thousands of cheeses that are unrecognizable from one another. Hard, crumbly, stinky, bloomy. I'll just keep inventing them and I'll never get bored."

Nor, it seems, will her customers. Dart Mountain cheeses are steadily making their way into shops, hotels and restaurants. A range of granola she produces "to kill time while the cheeses age" is on sale in Harrods of London and exported to Switzerland.

Julie concedes that her father's initial skepticism was understandable, but adds that people's tastes have changed "unbelievably" since she and Kevin ran a restaurant ten years ago.

"Back then, huge wholesalers' trucks delivered to everyone and you couldn't get local products. But we've come on leaps and bounds and, in terms of what we can do, the sky's the limit."

Julie harbours ambitious hopes for food trails and agri-tourism, and wants to strengthen connections with other producers. Her Banagher Bold – Ireland's only ale-washed cheese – is the result of a collaboration with Northbound Brewery in Derry, one of a host of emerging micro-breweries that are challenging traditional drinking habits.

"In 2007, there might have been a dozen craft breweries on the whole island of Ireland, but now there are probably close to 100," says Master Brewer, David Rogers, watching carefully as a pallet of his beers is loaded onto a lorry bound for Dublin. "We were trailing the rest of the world but we're catching up now at a rate of knots."

Scottish-born David acquired his brewing expertise while living at Bondi Beach and working in a Sydney brewery. Like the owners of the Ursa Minor bakery, he and his wife Martina returned to Northern Ireland fired up with new ideas for handcrafted produce.

His 2000-litre brewhouse makes four varieties, named simply by numbers denoting international bitterness measurements. They're being snapped up by local bars, restaurants and what David describes as "clever, switched-on chefs."

"This is beer as pure and natural as can be," he says, standing on a viewing platform, towering over shiny, stainless-steel tanks. "Water, yeast, hops and knowledge. From the mash tun, to the hot tank, to the fermentation vessels, I brew every part of it. There's no filtration and no pasteurisation, and it is bottled on site after a journey of only two meters."

Northern Ireland, on the other hand, has travelled a long way and its food sector's eyes are fixed firmly on the future. Producers and chefs who're in the spotlight in 2016 hope they're on the cusp of something great.

The omens look good. Tens of thousands of visitors will descend on Northern Ireland in 2019 when the British Open Golf Championship is staged at Royal Portrush, just five miles from Harry's Shack.

"The Year of Food and Drink is just the start of it," says Donal Doherty confidently. "It's timed perfectly. We've new producers and new restaurants, and we're ready for it."

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A Feast *for Friends*

There's a lot on the plate across Northern Ireland in 2016, with each month serving up something scrumptious...





January

The first month of the year aptly takes its theme from the first meal of the day - breakfast. Visitors can learn about food provenance, enjoy an early morning breakfast fair in the city centre, or hire a gourmet breakfast van for a music festival. The obvious choice for rise 'n' shiners this month is the Ulster fry, or "full Irish" breakfast – a classic kick-starter that includes bacon, sausages, black pudding, eggs, beans, mushrooms, tomatoes, potato bread, and soda bread baked on a griddle.



February

Farms, breweries and bakeries - in February, you are encouraged to love local. One great way to mark the occasion is to visit the Belfast Farmers' Market. The winter market is open every Friday from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. – and, as it is indoors, there are no worries about the cold. Organic vegetables from Maine Organic Farmers and grass-fed beef from Meadowsweet Farm will be fresh for the taking, and there's seafood and baked goods available as well. Businesses such as these can bring a little artisan excellence to your visitor experience. Similar markets can be found across Northern Ireland.



March

Nothing tastes as good as tradition. Many of Northern Ireland's finest chefs, food and drink producers use methods and recipes that have been passed down for generations. Bring this month to life with things that intertwine Northern Irish heritage and culinary past. Most traditional foods have their roots in old Irish staples: potato and bread. Irish stew is both traditional and perfect for the winter. Steak and Guinness pies are delicious for the meat lover, as is the somewhat deceitfully-named vegetable roll. The dish is, in fact, made with thick slices of a fatty meat from the trimmings of brisket and rib, as well as seasoning of fresh vegetables.



April

Do you prefer stouts, ales or just a Baileys on the rocks? For many years, there has been an explosion in the manufacturing of craft beers, unique gins and whiskeys in Northern Ireland. The month of April focuses on brewing and distilling. Northern Ireland's largest microbrewery is the Whitewater Brewery, found in Kilkeel – just over an hour's drive from Belfast. Whitewater Hoppelhammer won the Supreme Champion Beer of Belfast award during the Belfast Beer & Cider Festival in 2012. Hoppelhammer is aptly named, since it's a triple-hopped India Pale Ale. The beer also contains fruity notes.



May

Northern Ireland has many heritage sights and beautiful scenery to offer. But have you ever thought of how the landscape and the food overlap? In May, you're asked to taste the place on the plate. Take Lough Neagh, for instance. The lake supplies about 40 percent of Northern Ireland's water. For the more adventurous diners, it is also home to the Lough Neagh eel. Eel fishing has been a huge industry on Lough Neagh for centuries, and it's now home to the largest commercial wild eel fishery in Europe. The eel is often fried in chunks with white onion sauce, or smoked and served as an appetizer.



June

If you're lactose intolerant, you may need to find an alternative for June, because it's the month of dairy. Since Northern Ireland is covered in lush grassland, it's no wonder their dairy is award-winning. Mullins Ice Cream, for example, won Best Product for Northern Ireland from the Great Taste Awards 2010. As the summer begins, it's a great time to pick up an ice cream cone. According to the company's website, Mullins specialises in making homemade luxury ice cream, ice cream cake desserts and sorbets for scoop parlours, retailers and food service. They've been making the creamy treat since 1954.

July

In midsummer, get ready for a spread of seafood. The theme is Northern Ireland's wonderful waters, so the country will champion the best of its lakes, islands, riverbanks and ocean edges. Situated on a picturesque harbour in Donaghadee, hungry folks can find a restaurant called Pier 36. It's among Tourism Northern Ireland's seafood specialists recommendations. At Pier 36, visitors can dine on seared Portavogie halibut, stuffed sea trout, char-grilled Atlantic tuna and more. With that kind of selection, it's a great place to top off a Guinness and enjoy some fresh, local seafood.



August

In August, outdoor events are a must. The theme is "love NI meat," so it's a good excuse to learn how to cook a lamb kebab, beef burger or pulled pork sandwich. There are a variety of butcher shops in Northern Ireland where visitors and residents alike can get their fresh meat fix: Armstrong Meats, Corries Farm Butchers, and O'Doherty's Fine Meats – just to name a few. Fire up that barbeque and think like a carnivore!



September

As pumpkin pie season begins, it's time to brush up on your baking skills – September's theme is bread and baking. If your soda bread always comes out burnt, you may need to take a class. One option is the Wee Buns cookery school, based in the countryside near The Moy Village. For people who want a quick crash-course in baking, Baking for Beginners and Baking Advanced are two four-hour long classes. For the more committed baker, Wee Buns also holds classes that take place over the course of four weeks. You will learn to make brownies, blondies, classic sponge cakes and more.



October

For hundreds of years, harvest time has been celebrated through song, poetry and prayer. All October long, you're invited to continue that celebration through the harvest theme. It's time to enjoy the fruits of the land and be thankful for the skills of Northern Ireland's farmers. Re-imagine the Harvest Festival or give your Hallowe'en happenings a harvest slant. Last year, the Richhill Apple Harvest Fayre took place for the second time, giving folks a chance to gather in the village square and sample ciders, juices, apples and more.



November

As the year begins to come to a close, you're encouraged to think about the legacy of the past 10 months. Since the best way to honour that legacy is to learn something new, the theme for November is "legacy and learn." This celebration of Northern Ireland's food culture is a chance to instill an ever-growing love for food and the culinary arts in people of all ages. To do this, you can learn to cook or improve your skills at the award-winning Belle Isle Cookery School. Set in the beautiful County Fermanagh, the school offers classes based on its cookery course calendar, or you can book private classes for groups of 4-14 people.



December

Get into the holiday spirit with December's theme. Christmas is a time for most folks to indulge, and there's no reason this year can't be bigger and better than usual. Take a break from your busy gift shopping schedule to stop for an afternoon tea. Last year, Discover Northern Ireland made a list of places hosting festive tea time events: the Silverbirch Hotel, Titanic Belfast and the Everglades Hotel are just three examples of places you can curl up with a hot drink. In addition, let the year go out with a bang by participating in all the Yuletide happenings.



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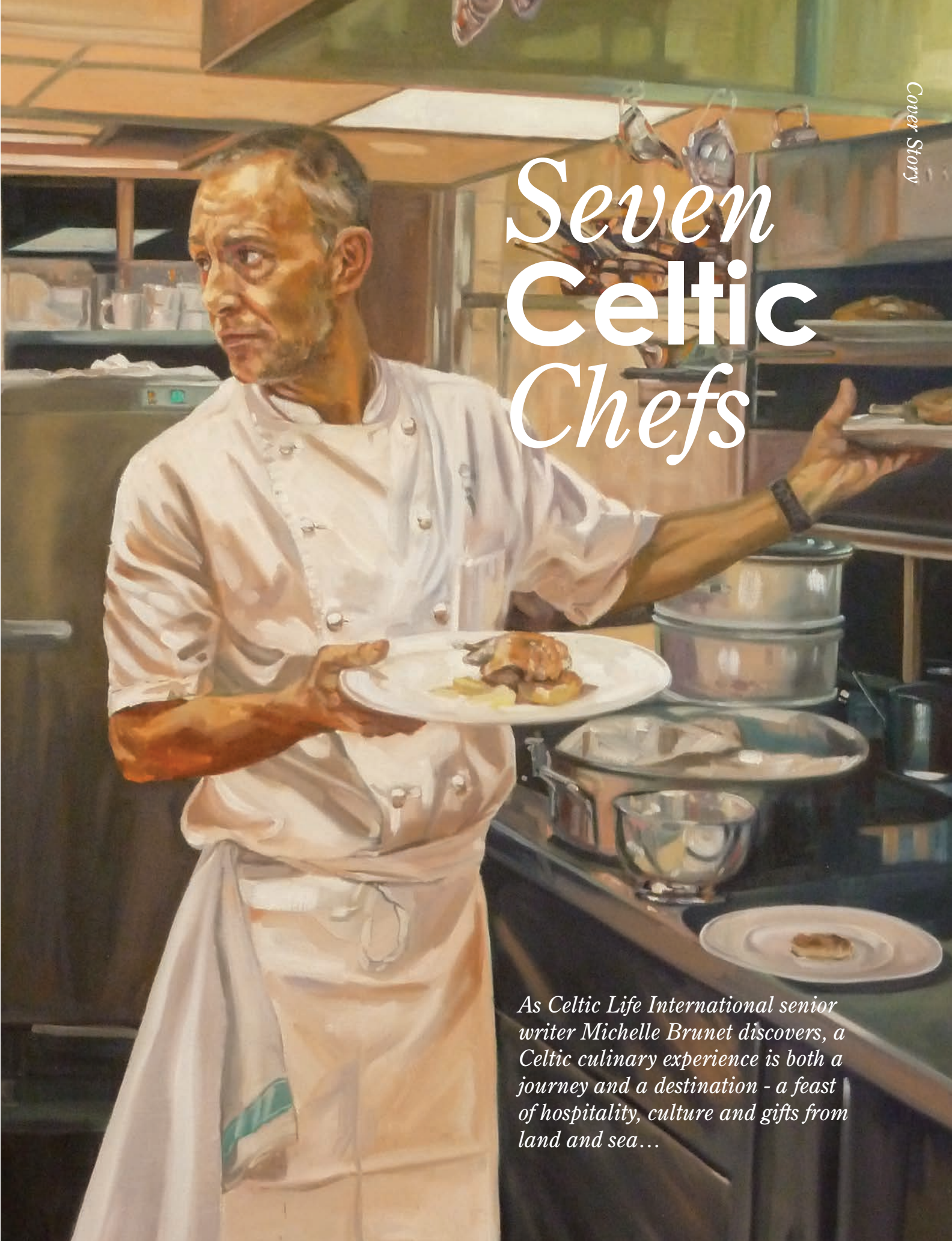
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Seven Celtic Chefs

As Celtic Life International senior writer Michelle Brunet discovers, a Celtic culinary experience is both a journey and a destination - a feast of hospitality, culture and gifts from land and sea…





The Kilted Chef, Alain Bosse

Alain Bosse, a.k.a. The Kilted Chef, was the first person Taste of Nova Scotia named as a Culinary Ambassador of Nova Scotia.

Bosse serves the title well. He has promoted Nova Scotia and Atlantic Canadian food at home and abroad, teaching both aspiring chefs at Cordon Bleu institutes and children in elementary classrooms, preparing dinner for the Prince of Wales, and travelling through North and South America, Europe and China to deliver presentations on Atlantic Canadian products.

"When coming to Atlantic Canada everyone goes for seafood, and so they should," advises Bosse. "We have some of the best seafood in the world – but don't limit yourself; we have amazing chefs who are doing charcuterie, foraging for food stuffs, taking the time to develop relationships with farmers who are raising grass fed meats…we are truly becoming a culinary destination!"

Bosse is originally from Edmundston, New Brunswick, but living and working in Nova Scotia has influenced his culinary style. "Because of the huge Celtic heritage in our region, everyone cooks a little Celtic from time to time. Cottage Pie and mince appear regularly at home, a local butcher produces Lorne sausage for me – I hope to make my own someday soon - and who wants to eat plain, old fudge when you can eat tablet?!"

His travels outside Atlantic Canada have also had an impact on his profession and palette. "When you go to a different country and eat food that is inherent to that place, you are tasting their history, in some cases their struggles, and their triumphs...food can be an amazing storyteller if you take time to ask the questions."

www.kiltedchef.ca

The Kilted Chef's Old Fashion Grilled Lobster Roll

Ingredients

- *6 hot dog buns*
- *3 oz soft butter*
- *1 pound (500 g) lobster meat chopped*
- *2 tbsp mayonnaise*
- *¼ cup diced celery*
- *pinch of salt*
- *pinch of pepper*
- *3 oz spinach leaves*

Instructions

In a bowl mix the lobster meat, mayonnaise, celery, salt and pepper to taste. Butter your hot dog buns on both sides and grill them until nice and golden. Open your grilled bun and place a bit of mayonnaise on the bottom of the bun; then add 3-4 spinach leaves to each. Spoon the lobster mixture into the centre of the bun, serve and enjoy! Serves 6





Chef Adam Vasey

Scallops with crispy pork belly, grilled plaice and roasted partridge are some of the dishes chef Adam Vasey serves at his restaurant, No. 4 Peterville, located in St Agnes, Cornwall, UK.

After eight years in London, Vasey and Nola Kinna moved home to their native village to open the eatery. "The Aggie Surf Shop had come up for lease so we decided to move home and set up here," Vasey explains. "It's a bonus really – Cornish ingredients are the best, even though we're biased. Our fish comes straight off the boats, our game from local shoots, pork from a herd a few miles away…"

Opening the restaurant in St Agnes has Vasey returning to familiar territory in more ways than one. "My parents owned a restaurant on the beach and we lived in the flat above it, so I was surrounded by cooking and kitchens from a very early age."

Guests at No. 4 Peterville experience what Vasey and Kinna hope for when they go out to eat. "We serve great food, great booze, and provide great music in a relaxed environment. That is what we would want from a restaurant, and therefore that is what we try to give everyone who walks through our door!"

www.no4peterville.co.uk

Chef Adam Vasey's Scallops & Crispy Pork Belly

Ingredients

Scallops

- *1 dozen scallops (roe on)*
- *100 ml Calvados*
- *100 g unsalted butter*
- *pinch of sea salt*

Belly

- *1 kg pork belly (will be extra leftover)*
- *3 white onions*
- *2 carrots*
- *3 sticks of celery*
- *1 bottle of cider*

Instructions

Get a side of pork belly from your butcher (we use Primrose Herd) – ask for the ribs out. In a roasting tray place onions, celery, carrots and cider (we use Cornish Orchards). Place the pork belly on top of the vegetables and slow cook for 4 hours. After 4 hours, lift the pork out

and press it overnight with something flat and heavy. Once it's pressed, cut it up into squares – about the same size as the scallops. Before serving, cook off in the oven till the fat is crispy on the top. Then flash the scallops in a very hot pan with butter till they're golden on the outside. Add a good pinch of chopped parsley to the butter and serve. Serves 4.

Chef Beatriz Sotelo

One of Galicia's 13 Michelin star restaurants is located in Cambre, in the province of A Coruña. Called A Estación, which means "the station," the eatery sits inside a converted train station.

One of its chefs is Beatriz Sotelo. "After travelling on many trains and stopping by many stations, Beatriz Sotelo arrives in Cambre," states the Grupo Nove website. "She decides to get off here and begin a new stage with Xoán M. Crujeiras to turn this place into a station to stay."

Two chefs might sound like "too many cooks in the kitchen," but Sotelo and Crujeiras complement one another to deliver a range of dishes, from empanadas filled with cockles to Galician veal. "Xoán and I make a good team because we are two very different people," says Sotelo. "Two personalities, man and woman, serenity versus temperament, a perfect couple - although it is not always easy. It is like a marriage."

Sotelo, who was born in a small village in Pontevedra, began her culinary journey at home. "I cooked with my family, and in my house there were many countryside products that I used with my grandmother."

Local ingredients are still important to Sotelo. "We use products from smaller producers close by," she notes. "For example, a sardine or a longueiron (razor clam) - they are essential ingredients in our cooking process."

www.nove.biz/es/a-estacion/





A Estación's Tarta De Castañas

Ingredients

- *250 g short-crust pastry*
- *150 g softened butter*
- *150 g sugar*
- *½ tsp cinnamon*
- *1 shot hazelnut liqueur*
- *2 eggs (separated into yolks and whites)*
- *550 g cooked chestnuts in syrup (Castañas cocidas en almíbar)*

Instructions

Line a spring-form pan (24 cm/9 in diameter) with the pastry dough and bake it in the oven at 180°C (350°F) for 10 minutes. In a bowl, beat the butter with the sugar, cinnamon and liqueur. Add the egg yolks and mix gently. Crush half of the chestnuts and mix them with the butter cream. Put the rest of the chestnuts in a blender and grind them to a purée. Add the puréed chestnuts to the mix. In a separate bowl, beat the egg whites to the point where they form peaks, and mix them with the other ingredients. Fill the pan with the mix and bake at 180°C (350°F) for 45 minutes. Let it cool and sprinkle with icing sugar. The dessert also goes nicely served with hot chocolate and chocolate, vanilla or nougat ice cream.





Chef Sylvain Guillemot

The big and bright windows of Auberge du Pont d'Acigné allow diners to enjoy tranquil views of the Vilaine river while they indulge in les créations du moment.

Chef Sylvain Guillemot and his wife Marie-Pierre opened their Breton restaurant, just outside Rennes, in 1995. Ten years later, the eatery received its first Michelin star. They earned a second in 2013.

"The proudest moment was definitely getting the second Michelin star," Guillemot recalls. "The phone call from Michelin to let us know was such a surprise."

Visitors to l'Auberge are treated to Guillemot's culinary signature – "cuisine d'instant et d'instinct" – a style partly inspired by his time working at the three-Michelin-star restaurant L'Arpège in Paris. "It was beside Alain Passard I learned that recipes are always changing," shares Guillemot. "The most interesting part is not what is being prepared, but what is still to be made."

Guillemot is the former president of Tables et Saveurs de Bretagne, an association of 41 of Brittany's most talented chefs. He is also enthusiastic about his region's producers.

"My favourite moments are the feelings rediscovering the products each season. I go to the market every day to find the freshest ingredients from the local, independent producers."

Regional products are a muse for Guillemot's creations, and in turn Marie-Pierre creates wine lists "in synergy" with her husband's cuisine. "The guests come to be surprised," Guillemot muses, "and to rediscover ingredients that they know, paired in unusual ways, like tarragon with quince, and buckwheat with apple…"

www.auberge-du-pont-dacigne.com

Chef Sylvain Guillemot's Sea Scallops Surprise

Ingredients

Watercress broth

- *1 bunch watercress*
- *½ litre chicken broth*

• *butter*
• *black pepper, salt*

Sea Scallops
• *200 g sea scallops*
• *salt, black pepper & olive oil (for seasoning)*

Mix
• *10 g haddock*
• *5 g chive*
• *5 g lemon*
• *10 g red radish*

Buckwheat Crisp
• *100 g buckwheat flour*
• *150 g boiling water*
• *100 g salted butter*
• *15 g egg whites*
• *4 g salt*

Instructions
For the broth, separate the watercress leaves from the stems and blanch them before putting them in an ice bath. Heat up the chicken broth and put the watercress, once drained, in it. Mix it together before passing the coulis through a tamis/sieve. Keep the broth warm. For the scallop balls, dice the sea scallops and season them with the olive oil, salt and black pepper. Then form four scallop balls, one for each portion, and wrap each in plastic wrap. For the topping mix, dice the radish, lemon, chive and haddock. Mix them together and keep them in the fridge. To make the buckwheat crisps, mix the buckwheat flour, boiling water, butter and egg whites in a bowl. Let the mixture rest for a little bit before spreading it in circles on a non-adhesive surface and bake in the oven at 160°C /320°F. To assemble the dish, first steam the balls of sea scallops (still in plastic) for 2 ½ minutes. Unwrap the scallops and set them in the centre of each plate. Add butter to the warm broth, just before adding it to the plate. Pour some broth around the scallops. Place some of the lemon-radish-haddock-chive mix on top of each scallop ball. Finally put the buckwheat crisps on top. Et voilà! Serves 4





The Irish Cook, Margaret Johnson

Being 100 percent Irish-American, Massachusetts-born Margaret Johnson started visiting the Emerald Isle in 1984. Since then, she has been back over 80 times.

Those first trips to Ireland inspired a career change. "After my first several visits, I realized that Irish food was something that Irish-Americans were completely overlooking so I decided to focus my efforts on that," she explains.

To date, Johnson has published 11 cookbooks, including her latest, Favorite Flavors of Ireland. "It's a tribute to 30 years of travel there, and a compilation of all my favorite recipes from 10 previous cookbooks."

She notes that the state of Ireland's culinary industry has never been stronger. "For so many years Irish cooking was thought of as a joke – you know, a seven-course Irish meal was a six-pack and a boiled potato – but so much of that perception has changed in the last 20 years. Now people actually go to Ireland to cookery schools!"

Johnson loves Irish lamb and "the fact that most meals come with three kinds of potatoes." The best brown bread she and her husband ever tasted in Éire turned out to be a store-bought product. Johnson found out, however, that the bread was originally conceived in a small bakery and she was able to track down the recipe from the original baker.

www.irishcook.com

A Margaret Johnson Favourite:
Guinness and Malt Wheaten Bread

Ingredients
• *1 cup fine whole wheat flour*
• *1 cup coarse whole wheat flour OR*
1 cup each wheat bran and quick-cooking (not instant) Irish oatmeal
• *1/4 cup sugar*
• *1/2 tsp. baking soda*
• *1/2 tsp. salt*
• *4 tbsp. unsalted butter, cut into small pieces*
• *1 tbsp. barley malt extract, also called barley malt (available in health food stores)*
• *3/4 cup buttermilk*
• *3/4 cup Guinness Stout*

Instructions
Preheat the oven to 375° F. Grease a 7-inch loaf pan and dust with whole wheat flour; tap out excess. In a large mixing bowl, combine the flours, oatmeal or oat bran, sugar, baking soda, and salt. With a pastry cutter or your fingers, cut or work in the butter until the mixture resembles coarse breadcrumbs. Make a well in the center, add barley malt, buttermilk, and Guinness, and with a wooden spoon, mix until blended. Transfer the batter to the prepared pan. Sprinkle additional flour on top and bake for 30 minutes. Reduce oven temperature to 325° F and bake for 30 minutes longer. Bread is done when it springs back after gently pressing the top. Turn oven off and allow to cool with door open for 30 minutes. Turn onto a wire rack to cool completely before slicing. Makes 1 loaf.

Dai Chef

Even after 40 years in the culinary industry, Welsh Chef Dai Davies - better known as Dai Chef - shows no signs of slowing down. He has cooked for monarchs and celebrities, captained a culinary Olympic team, mentored chefs who have gone on to world class restaurants, and has showcased Welsh food to a variety of countries, including a large group of travel industry reps in Las Vegas.





"Apart from the obvious lambs, leeks and laverbread, we have the sweetest crustaceans, fantastic game, multi-award winning dairy, from whisky to toffee vodka, not to mention our bara brith and Welsh cakes," he raves. "We even sell garlic to the French! It would take a lifetime to peel back the culinary tapestry that this lush land has to offer."

Dai Chef was born in Aberystwyth. "My Dad was a hunter-gatherer. I would make rabbit pies, and I would sell around to the local pubs in the town. My Dad would say to my mum 'let the boy cook' – and that was the title of my first cookbook."

In November 2015, Dai Chef became the Executive Chef at Brynteg, a five-star holiday home park located in Snowdonia's foothills. Margaret Charlotte, his 10-year-old daughter, helps him by running the kid food academy.

"Real Celtic food is all about the taste," says Dai Chef. "With so much local produce, like mussels and oysters from the Menai, black beef, our own sea salt, locally-produced butter, yogurt and cheese and Snowdonia Mountain lambs, we remain proud here at Brynteg to give our guests the opportunity to experience the true taste of Wales."

www.brynteg.co.uk

Dai Chef's Mincemeat

Ingredients

- *250 g each of raisins, sultanas and currants*
- *150 g of candied peel, finely chopped*
- *150 g of shredded suet*
- *50 g of whole almonds, finely chopped*
- *250 g of dark brown sugar*
- *100 g of glacé cherries, chopped*
- *1 large apple, cored and grated*
- *1 tbsp mixed spice*
- *grated rind and juice of 2 oranges and 1 lemon*
- *pinch of rock salt*
- *200 ml of liquor of your choice - brandy, sherry, amaretto or cranberry juice*

Instructions

Make sure you have sterilised your glass jars, which will need to have tight-fitting lids. Mix all the ingredients together and soak in the liquor overnight. Next day, place the mixture in the jars. You can decorate the jars for holiday gifts.

Chef Craig Grozier

"There's a fin floating around my saki and it's really tasty," recalls Chef Craig Grozier of one of his dining experiences abroad. He's travelled to many countries - from Japan to Peru - to "widen the horizons of his culinary knowledge."

Grozier grew up in the Scottish Highlands near Loch Ness. He began his culinary journey two decades ago by working with some "great chefs" around Glasgow.

In 2012, Grozier started his Glasgow-based business, Fallachan, which provides private, corporate and public clients with a range of tailored eating experiences. Projects have included cooking for culinary adventure tours, radio and TV spots, and curating the 2014 Albannach Food and Drink Festival. Recently he has been enlisting top UK chefs to join him in "guerilla fare" – "cooking and serving the best possible food in a temporary location" – like taking over a small farmhouse kitchen to deliver a high end, three-course meal.

Grozier has also been working on the Isle of Islay with The Botanist Gin, a product made with botanicals from the island. Along with Mark Williams of Galloway Wild Foods, the pair educate people from around the world about the gin and foraging on the island, taking them on excursions and cooking with the ingredients they have collected.

Grozier aims to continue delivering custom-made culinary experiences to groups from Scotland and overseas. "I like to learn, I love culture, I love history and I think they all tie in with food. We all need to eat, but with that comes culture and sharing…Food generally brings us together."





www.fallachandining.co.uk

Chef Craig Grozier's Forager's Eggs

Ingredients

- *200-300 g chanterelles*
- *75 g salted butter*
- *10 turns freshly ground pepper*
- *600 ml mineral water*
- *2 free range eggs*
- *1 large pinch of Mark Williams' dashi powder/Mara dried seaweed powder*
- *Hebridean salt to finish*

Instructions

Melt the butter over a medium heat in a deep frying pan and add the mushrooms till they give up their juices (this is the base of the broth). Add the water and the dashi or seaweed powder. Taste for seasoning and simmer for a few minutes until all the flavors combine. Crack the eggs directly into the broth and simmer covered with a plate or another pan for 3-4 minutes till the whites are set and the yolks are still runny. Serve with good quality bread, ideally sourdough. Eat directly from the pan.

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Mohonk *Mountain* House

Arriving at elegant, historic Mohonk Mountain House in New York State's Hudson Valley, visitors will almost believe they are in the Highlands of Scotland

The pipes and drums of the Old Country reverberate over the lake and into the woodlands, and there is a ceilidh around every corner, it seems. No, it is not a modern-day Brigadoon, for the adventure lasts an entire January weekend and has done so for 35 years running. It is Scottish Weekend at Mohonk Mountain House, January 22-24, 2016.

"You can feel the excitement from the moment the first bagpipes sound at tea time," says Mohonk's spokesperson Nina Smiley. "Guests become enamoured by the music, enthralled by the heritage and, of course, delighted by the kilt."

Located 90 miles north of New York City, and founded by Albert Smiley in 1869, Mohonk Mountain House is a Victorian castle resort set on 40,000 largely undeveloped acres above pristine Lake Mohonk. Still owned and operated by the Smiley family, it is a National Historic Landmark with vast meandering gardens and 85 miles of hiking trails.

With an open-air skating pavilion, cross-country skiing and snow-tubing, there is plenty to do on any winter weekend. But on Scottish Weekend, the festivities focus on the old Celtic arts and traditions with performances, demonstrations, workshops, non-stop entertainment, and a healthy helping of the craic. Of the 40 themed programs offered through the year, the Scottish weekend is one of the oldest and most popular.

"The weekend is an exciting immersion into all things Scottish and the best kind of getaway," continues Smiley. "From bagpipes to kilts, from dancers to drums, from haggis to history, we invite guests to delight in the wonderful world of Scottish Weekend."

The ever-changing mix of traditional programming and new events attracts many return visitors from New York City, the state and beyond, which contributes to a sense of family and tradition, she adds.

The theme for the January 22-24 gathering is "The Life, Times and Works of Robert Burns," and the bard's works will be front and centre at a classic Scottish concert. Also tied to the theme is the annual ceremony in which Burns' traditional toast to the national food of Scotland is recited.

"Every year the sound of bagpipes fills the halls of Mohonk Mountain House with a bagpipe procession from the centre of the house to the dining room…"

"It's then followed by a traditional Address to the Haggis, led by James Fraser and the Schenectady Pipe Band Ensemble."

The Celtic roots band MacTalla Mor, with its ancient and modern instruments, as well as traditional and original songs, will kick off a welcome ceilidh. The Thistle Hill Country Dancers from New York's northeastern and Ohio River regions will be performing jigs, reels and strathspeys covering the range from energetic to elegant. The group will also be teaching the basics of country dancing, and participants are invited to show off their new skills at a ceilidh.

Pipe Major William Monroe of the Schenectady band, one of the oldest bands in the US, will engage visitors in a discussion of the history, structure and playing of the great Highland bagpipe. Shot of Scotch – a performance group of premier-level Highland dancers who have performed at Lincoln Centre and with the Brooklyn Ballet's First Look program, as well as at New York's Tartan Day ceilidhs and parade – will be dancing their way through the weekend with precision and colour.

Information on family tartans and kilt-making will be provided by kilt maker Bonnie Heather Greene, while those with more athletic taste can take in a workshop by Scottish Highland Games world record holder, Frazer Pehmoeller. Yet another option is a Celtic art workshop led by artist, lecturer and master printmaker, Patrick Gallagher.

No Scottish weekend would be complete without a bit of whisky tasting, so a selection of single malts will be available. Scotch distributor Rick Long will guide aficionados through samplings of Tullibardine's 225 Sauternes, 228 Burgundy and 500 Sherry (PX) in 20 and 25-year-old vintages.

Mohonk Mountain House boasts more wood-burning fireplaces than any other resort in the US, and Scottish Weekend visitors have a wide range of cottages and rooms to choose from. By Sunday noon, most will be packing up to gather for the singing of Auld Lang Syne, as they are piped into the dining room for a farewell dinner, and perhaps a chorus of another old Scottish standard, Lady Nairne's heart-felt Will Ye No' Come Back Again?"

www.mohonk.com





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- Mallaig & the Glenfinnan Monument
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Kristin Papillon

Even a working visit to Scotland can uncover precious pieces of the ancestry puzzle

"I felt like a great explorer when I returned to Canada," says Kristin Papillon, communications advisor for WestJet Airlines in Calgary, Alberta, and the corporate editor of the company's in-flight publication. "I had such treasures to share with my family."

Papillon, whose maiden name is MacCallum, grew up knowing she had Scottish and French roots. When her long-time employer sent her to Scotland for some promotional work last year, the possibility of discovering something about her largely unknown great-grandfather suddenly loomed large.

"I travelled with members of WestJet's Creative Services team to film a Scotland destination video for our airline, to document the making of our WestJet tartan, and to gather information for stories for our internal and external communications," she explains.

Team members put her in contact with George MacKenzie, chair of the Scottish Ancestral Tourism Group, and Iain Ferguson, ScotlandsPeople Centre manager. She also visited the Mitchell Library in Glasgow where she was able to work with genealogists to see what clues existed in the meager family information she brought with her.

"Working with these individuals to find out more about my roots was exhilarating. Researching my family history was hands down my favourite part of the visit to Scotland. I feel such a connection to the country and the residents there now and I can't wait to return."

Papillon's search was to find John Whyte MacCallum, a man who passed away when his son - Papillon's grandfather - was just nine years old, and about whom his descendents knew little.

"I found John, and I feel like a huge part of the family puzzle was revealed to me. Having never met him, I almost feel like I know him now. I especially enjoyed sharing the information with my father – John was the grandfather he had never met. I only wish my grandfather was still alive, I think he would be pretty pleased how interested I am in our family genealogy."

Like others who have painstakingly sifted through endless possibilities in search of a single hard fact, Papillon grew more motivated as one piece of information led to another.

"Since I've been home, I've done extensive work on my Scottish (paternal) family tree. I've worked my way back to the early 1600s. My Scottish roots run very deep."

Papillon considers herself a researcher by nature, so once her interest was piqued she went looking for resources. She points out other "30-somethings" like her read blogs, listen to podcasts and follow groups through various social media channels.

"We also love to travel, and I think that is an area (for Scottish Ancestral Tourism) to partner with. Sure, it's fun to go on a beach holiday or to that must-see destination, but there is something about travelling to the country where your lineage began. It can be life-changing to discover - and see in person - the places where your family lived."

Papillon warns that ancestry research takes time and patience, two commodities generally in short supply for most people, but she knows perseverance pays off.

"Start early! Also, talk to your parents and grandparents while they are still alive. I wish I talked to my grandfather more about his family when he was alive, so I encourage everyone to sit down with the family they have and talk about family roots. Even if you do nothing with the information right away, you still have it for future use."

A few months after Papillon's Scottish adventure, WestJet had its inaugural flight from Halifax, Nova Scotia to Glasgow.

"Seeing how excited all our guests were brought me right back to my visit back to Scotland. My family loved all the information I was able to share – now I just need to travel back to Scotland and take them with me so they can walk in the same places our ancestors did."

Papillon also wants to visit the Canadian Immigration Museum at Pier 21 in Halifax.

"I know the boat that my great-grandmother travelled on (Lake Erie) but I want to find more information on John's travels to Canada. I'm also hoping to dig up some photos of him so I can put a face to the name."

Her research showed her that part of what she considered to be her French background is also Scottish.

"I now consider myself more than half Scottish with a little French, Polish and German in the mix. Canadians have roots all over the world, which is why it is sometimes easier just to call yourself Canadian."

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CelticQuiltTours

Travelers who find an Irish Chain or a Belfast Patchwork as enticing as the Book of Kells or Culloden Moor are lining up for Celtic Quilt Tours

A young company founded by a couple of adventure-loving quilters, Celtic Quilt Tours treks a wee bit differently. Travelers see the Blarney Stone and enjoy the pub experience, but the tour is interspersed with stops at fabric shops and traditional and modern quilting demonstrations and exhibits.

Debbi Cagney of Houston, Texas, was on a quilt tour of Ireland when she began counting ways the experience could be enhanced. She approached her friend Kim Caskey of Edmonton, Alberta, who has been quilting for more than 20 years, and the pair opted to put together their own tours.

"We wanted to offer travelers a true quilt experience, including meeting authentic Irish quilters and visiting local shops," says Cagney, a life-long sewing and crafts enthusiast. "We reached out to friends in the Irish quilting community and were welcomed with open arms."

Together, the pair organized a pilot tour that included a "quilt shop-hop" and quilt classes with international instructors, tied in with traditional sightseeing opportunities. The debut was a success, and this year they are expanding their options with tours of Ireland, Scotland and France.

"Quilting has come a long way from the utilitarian quilts made in the early days. Quilters are a diverse group – traditional, modern, art quilter, women and men from a variety of backgrounds, all with a passion to express themselves in the art of quilting."

And while quilting continues to be a much-loved pastime, it is increasingly regarded as an authentic art form.

"With the availability of quality fabrics, specialty shops and quilt guilds, quilters are sharing and exchanging ideas, taking lessons and exploring their own creative and artistic sides like never before," explains Cagney.

She says the internet and social media have led to the formation of international quilting groups working together on global, collaborative projects, contributing to dramatic growth in the quilting community.

Most touring quilters come from the United States and Canada, though they have been joined by Mexican, Irish and Scottish quilters. The level of expertise covers the range from fledgling beginner to accomplished and award-winning quilter.

"We limit our tours to one coach per 45 travelers," shares Cagney. "This allows everyone to get to know each other. All you need is a love of travel, an interest in meeting new people, and a willingness to have fun."

Because it is a small company, Cagney and Caskey have direct contact with their travelers, via telephone or e-mail, in advance of the trip.

"We stay in touch with everyone each month prior to travel with a newsletter, keeping them up to date with details of their tour. We introduce the special quilters we will meet, the quilt shops we will visit, and historical information on the stops we will explore."

Over time, friendships have been formed with other quilters around the world.

"One special friendship is with Ann Hill, a prolific quilter in Scotland, well known for her work with Alzheimer Scotland. Ann joined us in Ireland in 2014 as a guest speaker at our International Gathering of the Guilds. Following her presentation, she asked when we were coming to Scotland."

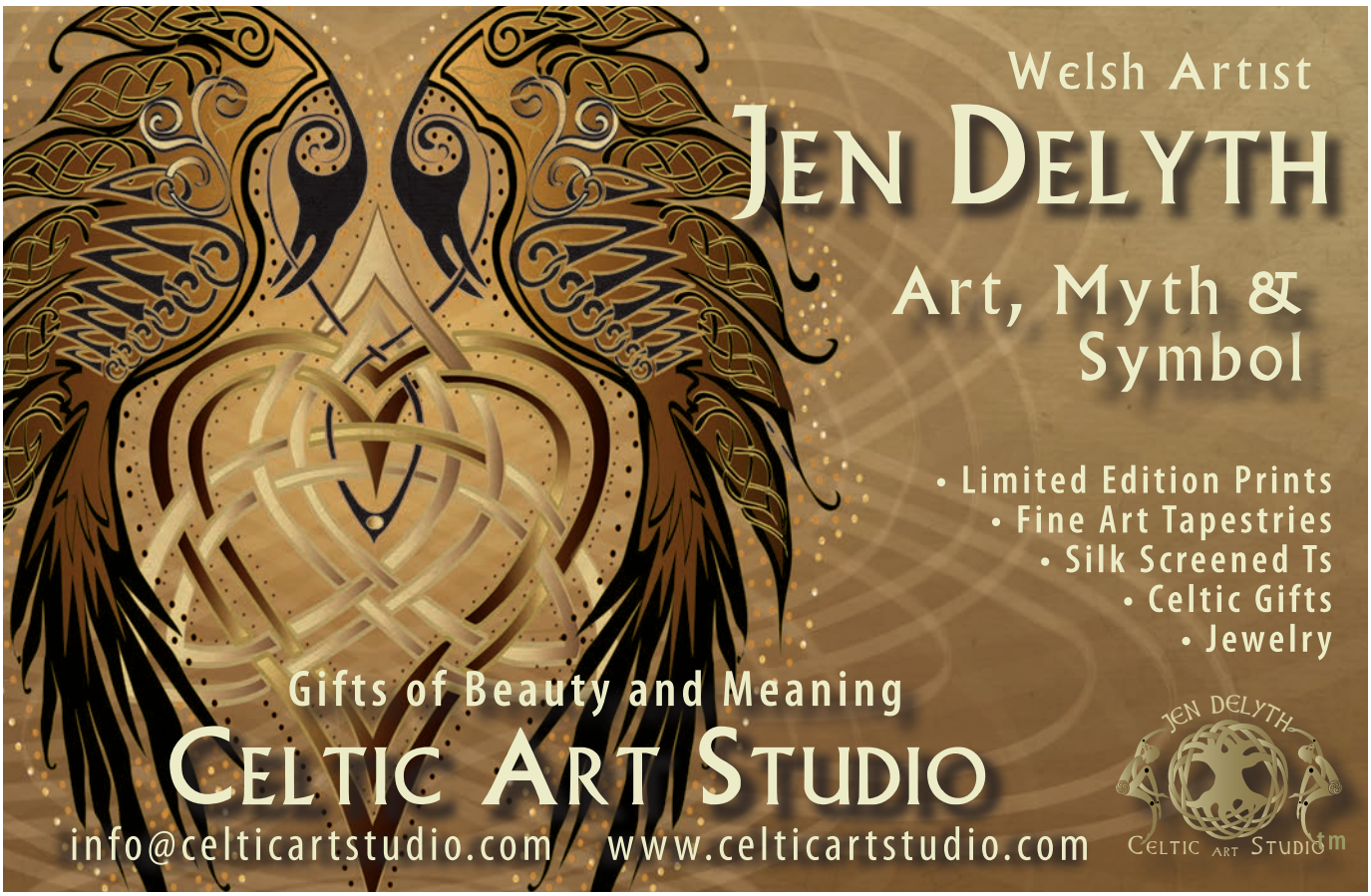
As a result of that invitation, Celtic Quilt Tours will be conducting the first-ever quilt tour of Scotland this coming September.

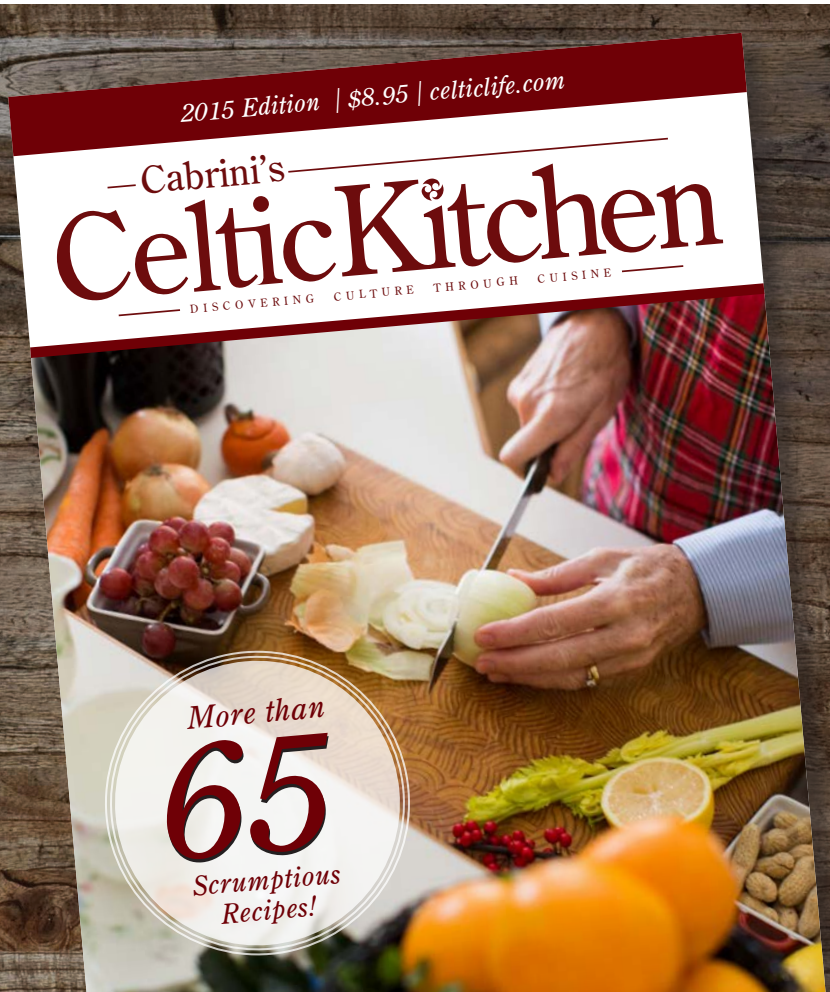
At Quilt Canada 2016, Celtic Quilt Tours will host the first International Gathering of the Guilds in North America in Toronto on June 17. As in Ireland last year, quilters from around the world are expected. Paula Rafferty of Limerick will be a guest speaker, and there will also be a Show and Share quilt parade - a highlight of previous gatherings.

Other events planned for 2016 include a Quilt Shop and Textile Tour of Ireland, June 4-16; Kilts and Quilts Textile Tour to Scotland with Patience Griffin (author of the Kilts and Quilts book series) September 19-October 1; and Alsace France and the European Patchwork Meeting, September 12-19.

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Tarta de *Santiago*

This delicious almond cake is named in honour of Santiago - St. James - the patron saint of Spain. The feast day of St. James is celebrated nationally every July 25. His remains are buried in the city of Santiago de Compostela, Galicia. During the Middle Ages, the pilgrimage to Santiago was the most important pilgrimage of the Christian world. Today many people still make the trip to Santiago not just for religious reasons, but as a cultural, historical or active vacation. The cake's origin is not certain, but it may have been brought to Galicia by a pilgrim. Today, this cake is sold all over Santiago de Compostela and is popular with tourists and pilgrims.

INGREDIENTS

2 2/3 cup ground almonds
¾ cup flour
1 ¼ cup sugar
4 eggs
8 tbsp butter (1 cube), at room temperature
½ tsp baking powder
½ cup water
Zest of 1 lemon
Powdered sugar to decorate

INSTRUCTIONS

• Blanch the almonds then, using a grinder or a food processor, grind the almonds until fine and set aside.

• Heat the oven to 350 F degrees. Grease a round 8-inch pan.

• In a large mixing bowl, beat the eggs and sugar together. Add the butter, flour, baking powder and water, and heat until thoroughly mixed. Stir the almonds into the batter. Grate the lemon and add the zest and stir until thoroughly mixed.

• Pour batter into cake pan. Bake in oven on the middle shelf at 350 F degrees for approximately 45 – 50 minutes. Check doneness after 45 minutes. Cake is done if a toothpick inserted into the center of the cake comes out clean.

• The traditional way to decorate is to sprinkle powdered sugar on top, with a cut-out of St. James or a cross on top. To create a cross, use any clean piece of paper folded and cut out a cross. Then, after the cake has cooled, place the cross in the centre of the cake and dust the top with powdered sugar. A small flour sifter works well for the job.

• The St. James cake recipe serves approximately 8.

Ith do shàth! Cabrini

P.S: I would like to invite all readers to send me their favourite recipes, and their favourite memories that go with them. Please send to: cabrini@celticlife.ca

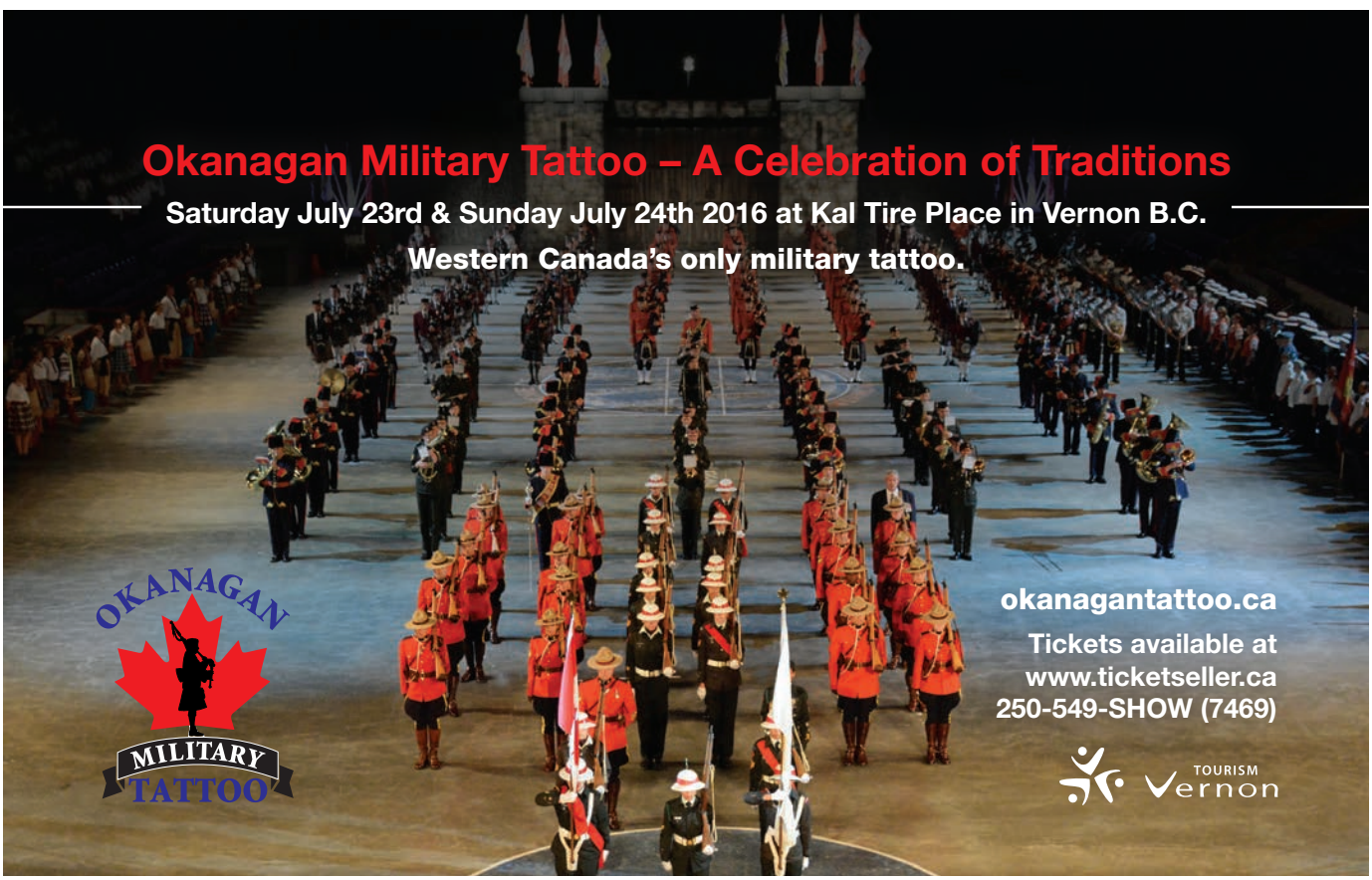
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Dram with Andrew Ferguson



People of Jura

In the 1960s, Scotland's wild and remote west coast island of Jura was in a desperate state, as the islet's population had fallen from over 1,000 people to barely 100 in less than a century. Unlike other parts of Scotland, however, where forced clearances left the land barren of residents, Jura's exodus would be attributed to poverty, hunger and the draw of urbanization. It was a self-perpetuating problem; as more people left fewer wanted to remain. Diurachs (people of Jura) were moving from isolated crofts on the island to Scotland's cities, and further afield to North America.

At that time, two of the area's large estate owners - Robin Fletcher and Tony Riley-Smith - hatched a plan to revive the island's fortunes by rebuilding the Jura Distillery.

Originally founded in 1810 in the town of Craighouse by Archibald Campbell, the Jura Distillery was first named the Small Isles Distillery. Illegal distillation was likely taking place on the island well before the founding of the distillery, and probably while it operated through the 1800s. Jura is a rugged, mountainous island with no shortage of places to hide a still or two. In 1876, the distillery came into the possession of James Ferguson & Sons. They operated it until 1901 when it was closed after a dispute with the landowner. In Scotland you can own a building, but not necessarily the land it sits on – thus, you are required to pay rents and tax so long as the building has a roof. James Ferguson and the landowner couldn't agree who was to be responsible for the costs to rebuild the town pier in Craighouse, so Ferguson did what only seemed natural to him. He stripped the distillery of its equipment, removed the roof and left Jura to set up shop elsewhere.

There is a great legend surrounding the Isle of Jura and the Campbell Clan who once owned it. In the 1700s, the Campbells of Jura evicted a wise old woman who prophesized that the last Campbell on Jura would leave the island blind in one eye, with all his possessions on a cart drawn by a single white horse. Oddly, in 1938 - whether you believe in such tales or not - Charles Campbell, blind in one eye from the Great War, and having fallen on hard times, left the island for the last time from the old pier. He made the journey with all of his possessions loaded in a cart pulled by a single white horse.

Almost three decades later, the rebuilding of the distillery was tasked to the architect William Delme-Evans, who designed many of the region's distilleries that were built or rebuilt in the latter half of the 20th Century.

The thinking was that with good employment opportunities, islanders would no longer have a reason to leave! The distillery, a large commercial operation, was rebuilt from scratch and was up and running by 1963. It had the desired effect; the island's population rebounded to almost 200, and it has been stable ever since. Today Jura is widely available as a single malt, one of the two principal brands in the Whyte & MacKay portfolio. It is very unlikely the island's population will ever rebound to 1,000, but every year it draws more and more tourists, lured from all over the world by its wild untamed beauty, the 4,000 deer that call it home, and the whisky which bears its name.



Jura 10 Year Origin –The distillery's flagship bottling is excellent value and a very pleasant, easy drinking whisky with notes of honey, white fruits and chewy malt. **- $58.99**

Jura Superstition –A lightly peated offering that marries the distillery's principal unpeated style with its heavily peated version. Clean smoke and maritime notes complement honey, chocolate and spices. **- $81.99**

Jura Prophecy – Named for the prophetic legend, this heavily peated whisky has a soft finesse. Rich with peat smoke and maritime notes, but also layers of fruit, juicy malt, spices and chocolate. My favourite expression of Jura. - **$104.99**

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For visitors with Welsh ancestry Dragon Tours offers a service to help you trace your family tree in Wales. Mike has helped numerous clients in this way and can even provide a genealogy tracing service prior to your arrival and can assist in your use of libraries, record offices and archives when you are here. We have helped many people find 'the old family home' and even long-lost relatives! We can plan your tour around places where your Welsh ancestors lived and/or combine a general tour of Wales with visits to places of family interest.

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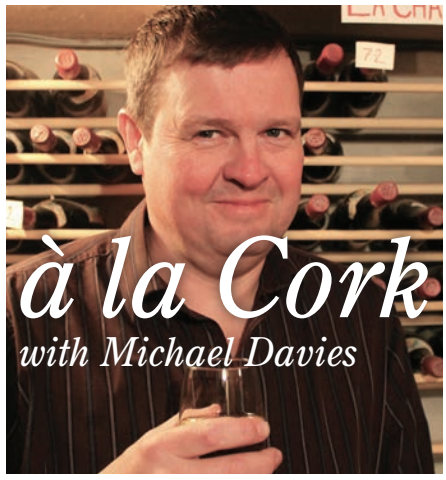
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Letter From *Armorica*



à la Cork

with Michael Davies

If you are from Wales, travelling through Brittany on the Atlantic seaboard of France is, I believe, an even more interesting experience than it might be for other visitors. As well as taking in the amazing landscape, history, food and drink, a Welshman will find things to remind him of home, including place names, saints' names, house names and other signs of a once-common language. Welsh and Breton share the same Celtic language roots, and despite the fact that the two peoples have been separated for around 1500 years, a Welsh speaker and a Breton speaker can still converse on a basic level today.

Some years ago I was in Brittany for a wedding. Our hostess introduced her Mastiff dog to me as 'Pen Du'. When I said "Oh, Black Head," she was amazed that someone from the British Isles could understand Breton (it means exactly the same thing in Welsh). Interestingly, the Breton anthem uses the same tune and, essentially, the same words as the Welsh national anthem. Brittany also hosts the world renowned Festival Interceltique every August, where Celts from all over the world visit, bringing their own music, costumes and languages in a celebration of all things Celtic. At around the same time every year in Wales we have the National Eisteddfod.

Brittany, and its neighboring regions (most notably Normandy), are perhaps better known for drinks such as cider, beer and calvados than wine. However, there is one particular wine that needs to be sampled when visiting Brittany - Muscadet - because it matches so well with the amazing seafood on offer in the region, and is such good value for the money. The home of Muscadet is the Pays Nantais - sometimes known as 'Neptune's Vineyard' - because of its proximity to the west coast and all the wonderful seafood. The wine seems so perfectly in tune with the local oysters, mussels and prawns that any visit to a seafront restaurant in the area demands a nicely chilled bottle alongside.

Muscadet is made from a grape variety called Melon de Bourgogne – a relative of Chardonnay. It is very dry, but not particularly acidic. It can have a slightly salty quality that again works well with the seafood. Without seafood, the wine can be a little too dry for some palates, but it is worth paying a little extra for a bottle because the wine is tremendously good value and the better labels can make a very interesting drink, even without food.

One Muscadet producer who is very proud of his Celtic roots is Pierre-Yves' Lusseaud. His vineyard at Chateau De La Galissonnière is in the heart of Brittany's wine growing region and is named after Admiral De La Galissonnière, a one time French governor of New France (the French territories in North America). The chateau dates from the 16th century and its gardens contain trees and plants brought back from the New World by the admiral. It is also a B&B where wine lovers can stay and sample the wines. It is located in le Pallet, which has a wine museum and is a great base for visiting the sights and sampling the tastes of the region.

Pierre-Yves has recently launched a new range of wines that aim to emphasise the region's Celtic connections. The new wines are labelled with the 'Celticae' name, and include Muscadet and an intriguing sparking wine called 'The First Spark of Armoric'. Armorica was the ancient name given to this part of Brittany.

Pierre-Yves Muscadet is a "sur lie." This phrase can be seen on many bottles of his wines, and refers to the traditional way of bottling the wine – straight from the fermentation vat. This method is used for the lees to improve the texture and flavor of the wine. When examining a bottle of Muscadet, having 'sur lie' on the label is normally a good indication that the wine is well made and is likely to be good quality.

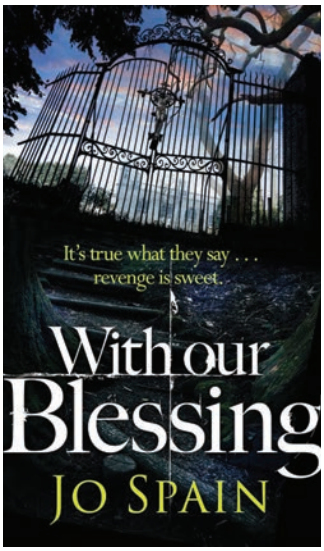
Another producer in the Pays Nantais worth considering is Pierre Sauvion. Pierre is the fourth generation of his family to produce wines at Château du Cléray. He returned to the family vines after some years in the industry in California, Australia and Bordeaux. He has been involved in winemaking since his youth and claims that his youthful appearance is all down to his drinking of Muscadet since the age of three!

Pierre makes a special prestige cuvée that is only made in the best years and is blended from a variety of sources. It is called Muscadet Sèvre-et-Maine sur lie 'Cardinal Richard'. This is a very good quality Muscadet and, when you consider that it can be bought for well under £10 GBP a bottle, you can appreciate what a bargain Muscadet can be.

After the excesses of the Christmas period, I am looking forward to heading back to the Breton coast for more excellent seafood and a fresh salty bottle of Muscadet.

Dr. Michael Davies is an author, historian and wine expert in Wales.
www.dragon-tours.com





With Our Blessing

By Jo Spain
Quercus / 544pp / $15.99

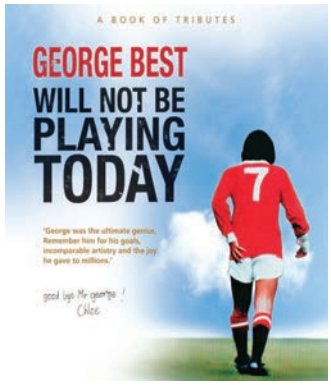
All of the hype and hoopla surrounding Jo Spain's debut novel are well deserved. The Irish author hits the nail on the head with this historical thriller that has spent months atop Ireland's bestseller list. Based upon revelations surrounding the "Magdalene laundries" scandal that haunted the Emerald Isle for generations, Spain has woven threads of fact and fiction into a tight, dim cloak of murder, mystery and intrigue. Characters leap off the page over a soaring narrative arc, where the most miniature of details carry great weight and meaning. Solid dialogue and a quickly paced plot will only heighten readers' needs to turn the page. Both entertaining and educational, With Our Blessing opens the door on a dark past that can never be closed again. ~ SPC

Irish Thatch

By Emma Byrne
O'Brien Press / 192pp / €24.99

Multi-award winning graphic designer and artist Emma Byrne has a flair for the beautiful. The County Wexford native brings her passion for colour, design and tradition together with this warm and wonderful coffee-table tome. Alongside simple and stunning photographs of Irish homes - past and present - tidbits of trivial text recount the history and heritage of both the structures and the area in which they sit. What becomes clear is that Ireland has done well to preserve its past, as evidenced by the growing number of visitors who come to the Emerald Isle each year in search of authentic experiences. More than an architectural exercise, Irish Thatch is a series of snapshots into the country's rich traditions, and the people who lived them. ~ SPC





George Best Will Not Be Playing Today

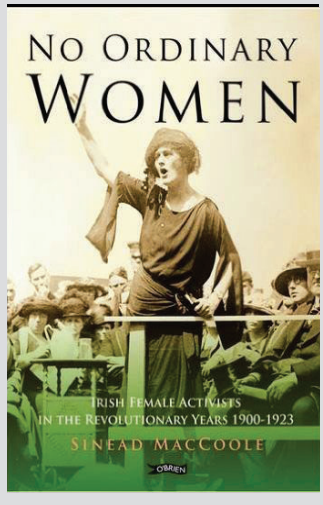
Edited by Mark Campbell, Jonathan Hamill, Barbara McNarry
Ulster Historical Foundation / 176pp / $49.95

Fans of the "beautiful game" will know that Belfast-born George Best was one of its most beautiful players. Also well-documented were his off-field antics, which were often forgiven for his on-field prowess. On the tenth anniversary of his passing, the Ulster Historical Foundation has pieced together this compelling collection of tributes to a colourful and complex man. Chock full of rare family photos, quotes and notes from friends and fans, sporting memorabilia, and other meaningful mementos, the 176-page hardcover edition offers up a collage of curiosities from those who knew and loved the man. The result is a unique and intimate portrait of a father, son, brother, friend and professional footballer whose lust for life was evident, and sadly, eventually got the better of him. ~ SPC

No Ordinary Women

By Sinead MacCoole
O'Brien Press / 320pp / €16.99

With Ireland celebrating the 100th anniversary of the Easter Rising in 2016, the spotlight on the individuals and events of that time has never been brighter. While the heroics of Patrick Pearse, James Connolly, Tom Clarke and other revolutionary male figures are well documented, there were as many – if not more – brave women and girls working behind the scenes for the cause. Thankfully, author and historian Sinead MacCoole gives them their proper due with this updated series of engaging and enlightening profiles, reminding us that the seeds of Irish independence would not have been sown without the unsung efforts of these female fighters. Most prolific, perhaps, is that the likes of Mary Colum, Maire Nic Shiubhlaigh and Molly O'Reilly pulled double-duty as mothers and housewives. ~ SPC





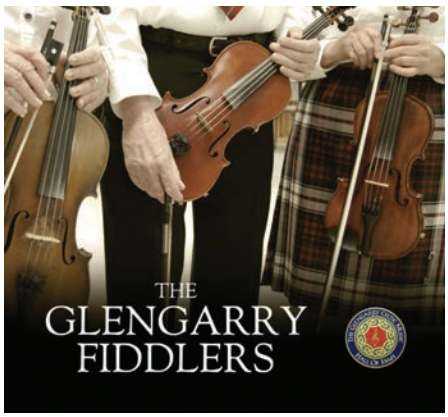
Celtic Colours Live
Volume 3

By all accounts, 2015's Celtic Colours International Festival in Cape Breton was a massive success, with more artists and attendees than ever before. Though a challenge to condense the size and scope of the nine-day experience, event organizers bring the sonic gathering to scale with Celtic Colours Live; Volume 3. The terrific 14-track CD is a testament to the talent and range of the performers. In particular, standout numbers from The String Sisters, Annbjorg Lien, Aiden O'Donnell and Liz Doherty emphasize the festival's strong multinational flavor, while homegrown artists Kenneth MacKenzie, J.P. Cormier and The Barra MacNeils highlight the region's Celtic roots. Hopefully, this superb recording will entice listeners to make the trip to this year's CCIF, which celebrates its 20th anniversary this coming October. ~ SPC

Nuallan
The EP: Gaelic-Dance Piping From Cape Breton Island



It's no secret Cape Breton is the heart of Celtic North America. When the first Scottish settlers arrived to the region more than 200 years ago, they brought with them the musical traditions of their homeland. Those customs continue to thrive today, due in large part to the efforts of Nova Scotia's Gaelic College. The cultural institution is responsible for Nuallan – pipers Keith MacDonald, Kevin Dugas and Kenneth MacKenzie. Their Kickstarter-funded, debut six-song recording does well to capture, convey and carry-on the area's melodic history and heritage, tracing its rustic roots back hundreds of years to 'ye' ould country'. Accompanied by some of the province's finest musicians, the young trio succeeds at showcasing the spirit and soul of a people, their landscape and their lineage. ~ SPC



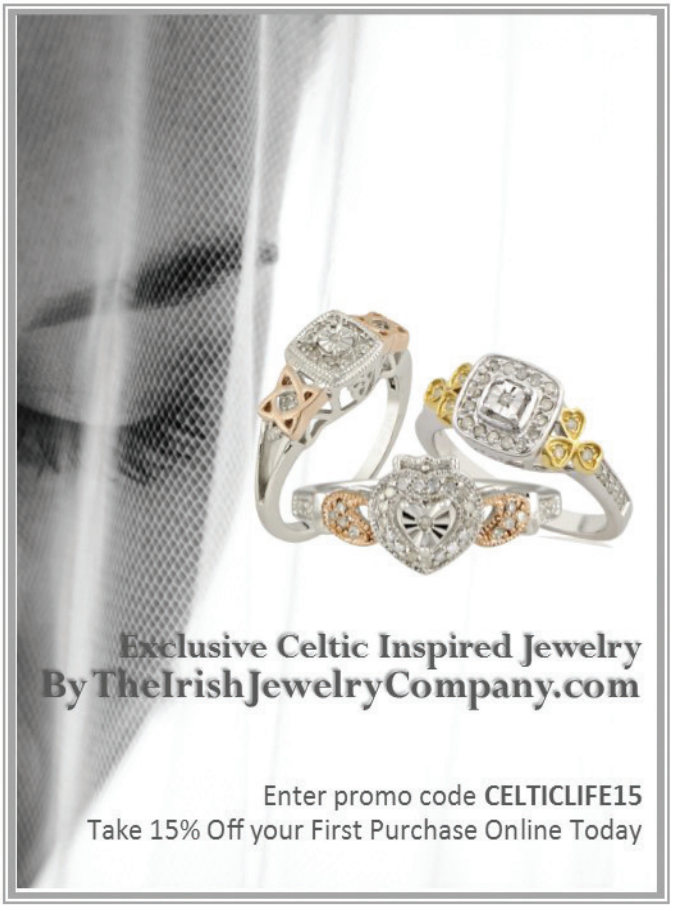
The Glengarry Fiddlers
The Glengarry Fiddlers

Over 1,000 kilometers to the west of Cape Breton Island is Canada's other Celtic heartland of eastern Ontario. There, the Glengarry Highland Games in Maxville draws tens of thousands of Celts to the region each year. Maxville is also home to The Glengarry Fiddlers, a 50 member+ ensemble led by legendary teacher Ian R. MacLeod. Their self-titled debut CD is sonic joy; from the opening notes of A Hundred Thousand Welcomes to the closing chorus of We're a Hundred Pipers, the group weaves a warm and wonderful melodic Celtic knot with 15 traditional jigs, reels and strathspeys. MacLeod and his students offer up more than an exercise in musical academia, however; this rootsy recording shines a light on the country's Celtic past, present and future. ~ SPC

Pevarlamm
Deltu



Across the waters, Bretagne continues to enjoy and celebrate a Celtic cultural revival through music and dance. Both disciplines are detailed with Pevarlamm's latest musical effort Deltu. Led by multi-instrumentalist Konogan an Habask, the sonic sextet rips and roars its way through 14 classic and contemporary tunes with uilleann pipes, fiddle, guitar, mandolin, whistles, bouzouki, and more. Vocalist Elsa Corre brings traditional tales to life with passion and precision, drawing inspiration from the likes of Sinead O'Connor, Mary Jane Lamond, Bjork, and Lhasa de Sela. Though perhaps overly experimental at times – the tracks Hunvre and Ton Sioul in particular - this recording nonetheless gives listeners the chance to savour the flavour of a great Celtic nation whose cultural impact and importance, too often, gets overlooked. ~ SPC



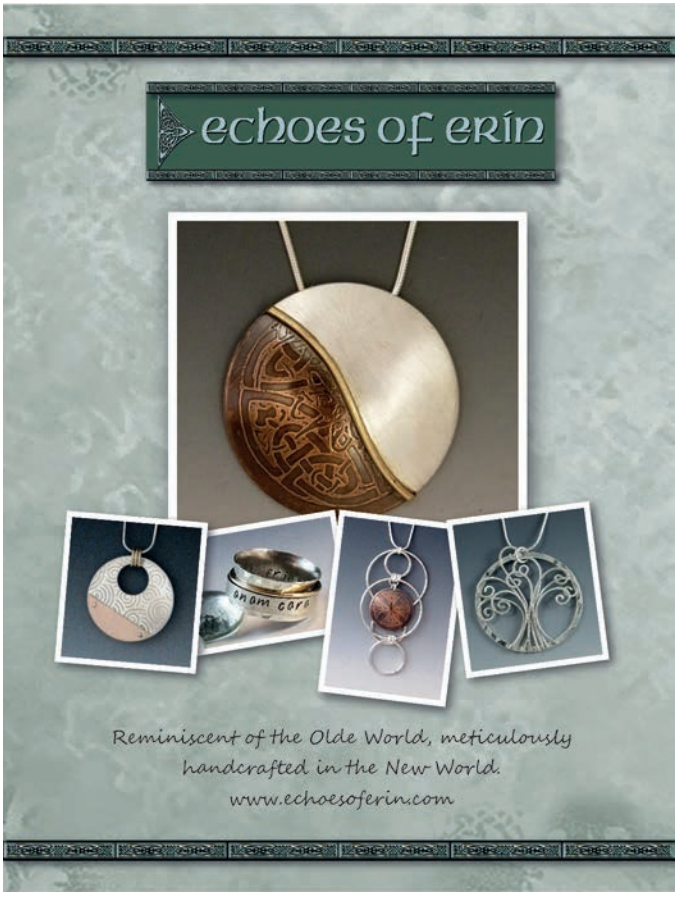


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Tradition, heritage, and the musical vibes of Cuba meld seamlessly when Sorah Rionda plays both the gaita asturiana – a lesser known bagpipe once common in the north of Spain – and the more widely played uilleann pipes

Sorah Rionda

"Without realizing it, I developed my own version of pipe music," explains the 26-year-old, who has been piping for eight years.

"The reasons I play and sing today are simple – the sound of the instruments, the joy when I am playing them, and the magical melodies I discover."

The gaita asturiana, the first pipes Rionda learned to play, are believed to have been brought to Galicia by the ancient Celts. Their use declined over many years, but recently the music has been experiencing a revival.

Though she now makes her home in Italy, Rionda is Cuban-born, with family roots in Spain, Africa and Asia. She credits her great-grandmother with igniting her passion for music.

"During my childhood in Cuba I used to spend the evenings with her – she was a passionate lover of music. We cooked together, listening to the wonderful trova tradicional Cubana on the radio, and she often sang and played guitar for me."

Rionda believes it was those melodic evenings that started her on the path to a music degree in guitar and singing. She began studying guitar as a young child, and was 13 when her mother gave her a cassette of José Ángel Hevia Velasco, known professionally as Hevia, playing the Asturian pipes or gaita.

"I quickly fell in love with the gaita's sound," she recalls.

Five years later, while on her way to a choir rehearsal, Rionda discovered the Asociación Asturiana in the same building.

"I knew a girl, a bagpiper, who told me about their Asturian bagpipe band and the following week I started playing the gaita asturiana, becoming a member of the Banda de Gaitas de la Habana. I was very curious about this instrument, which was, at that time, not very well known among Cubans. Through the help of teachers, and people in the international Celtic music field, I was able to broaden my musical horizons."

Band instructor Flavio R. Benito guided her through a repertoire that included traditional compositions by legendary gaiteros such as José Remis Ovalle and the gaitero Libardón.

"After learning the traditional music, dances and culture from Asturias and Castilla y Léon, as well as the uillean pipes and beautiful tunes from Ireland, I arrived at a point where I mixed in Cuban melodies."

After participating in the Brintaal Celtic Folk Festival in Italy in 2013, Rionda was inspired by the variety of music, the drive of fellow musicians and the enthusiasm of fans, to begin work on her first recording, Hebra de luz.

"It is a thread of words and melodies that hug me like whispers," she explains about her self-produced album.

Hebra de luz, she contends, is the tale of her origins, stories and influences, told through ancient airs, folk pieces and her own compositions, which gently alternate traditional Celtic and modern elements.

"The CD contains a song of my great-uncle Graciano Gómez, a famous songwriter and instrumentalist in the trova tradicional Cubana," she says, adding, "It combines the colourful and endless fusion inside Cuban music with the unmistakable gaita asturiana."

Rionda is excited by the growing prominence of Celtic music in Cuba as a result of workshops, concerts and broadcasting, and she points to increasing interest in Italy, also.

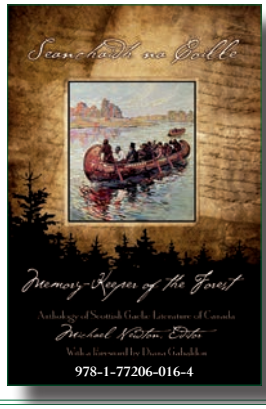
"Many Cuban bagpipers have been studying uillean pipes since childhood. And here in Italy we have an Italian Uillean Pipers' Association, of which I am a member. It was founded recently, and its objective is to introduce the instrument through more workshops, concerts, sessions and festivals."

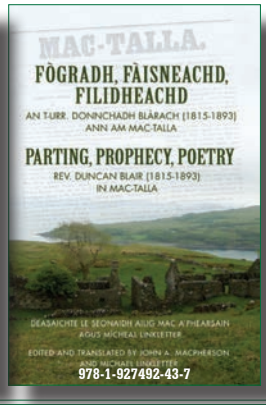
While working as a guitar teacher at various music academies, Rionda presents the bagpipes, hoping that she can "wake up" the curiosity of young musicians. She also plans to seize every opportunity to further study the uillean pipes and Irish culture.

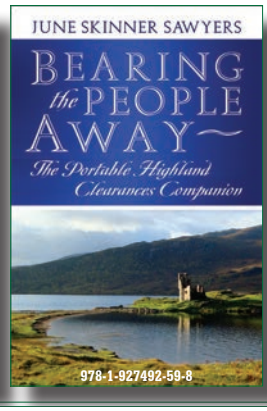
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Alana Cline

Fiddler Alana Cline is equally adept at a fast-paced Cape Breton reel or a sentimental Irish air

A student of music, as well as a performer, the Toronto resident can also deconstruct pieces for in-depth analysis.

Cline began studying the classical violin at the age of seven, but Cape Breton fiddling soon caught her fancy.

"I don't have any family roots in Cape Breton but my father, musician Leigh Cline, was friends with (renowned Cape Breton musician) John Allan Cameron, who put us in touch with Sandy MacIntyre who taught me Cape Breton fiddle for years."

She notes that her father was the director of the Mariposa Folk Festival when Cameron, MacIntyre and Winston "Scotty" Fitzgerald were hired for their first major performances outside of Cape Breton.

As a teenager, Cline attended Colaisde na Gàidhlig (The Gaelic College) in Nova Scotia for a memorable summer of practicing and playing with Cape Breton fiddlers. In 2008, she was the first Canadian to be accepted to the Meitheal School of Irish Traditional Music in Limerick.

"After attending Meitheal I fell in love with Irish music and started to play more Irish music as well as Scottish music. I was lucky enough to study with Maeve Donnelly, who has won multiple All-Ireland titles."

Cline has a Bachelor of Fine Arts honours degree in music, summa cum laude, from York University in Toronto, where she also played in the Celtic Ensemble. During her four years there, she completed an independent study of regional styles in Irish fiddling, specifically comparing and contrasting musical styles from Donegal and Cape Breton.

"While the sound and style of Irish music differs from Cape Breton music, there are many similarities in the types of tunes played, as well as in playing techniques. I grew to have a particular interest in the music of Donegal, as the music there has a lot of Scottish influences in it."

Cline has been combining Irish, Scottish and Cape Breton styles to create a distinctive Celtic sound of her own, but she also enjoys playing Greek and Turkish sets with her father, and the duo is in the process of compiling their first full-length album.

"I work mostly with my father, who accompanies my fiddling on guitar, and because of his influence and style of playing, we play real dance-style music. We include some Balkan tunes in our sets as my father has played Greek and Turkish music for decades, as well as Celtic music. Because of this, there are some Greek violin techniques that I incorporate into my Celtic fiddle style."

Whether it is a fiddle tune or a song with words, the key is the melody, Cline insists.

"It doesn't necessarily have to be a complicated melody – some of my favourite songs have relatively simple melodies, but they are incredibly singable and have memorable lyrics."

She admits that her inspiration is most likely to strike after spending time searching for new tunes and techniques, as well as practicing and listening. Over the past few summers she has taught fiddle at a children's camp and been delighted to find so many children genuinely excited to learn the instrument.

Between her family background, attending an arts high school and studying music in university, Cline has had great opportunities to appreciate various forms of music, but she is always happy to see the attention generated by Celtic music.

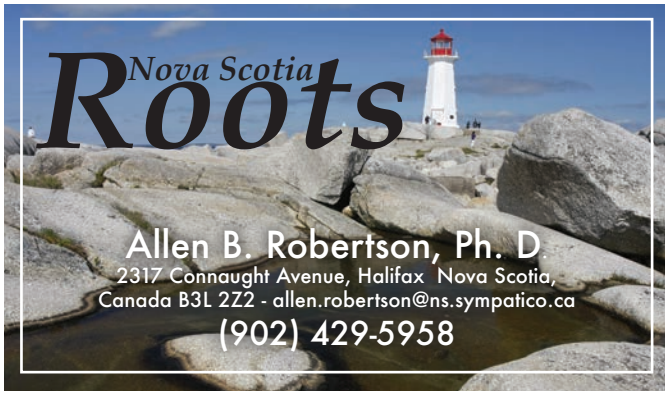
"A lot is being done to preserve and promote Celtic culture generally, whether it is through Celtic music, dance, arts, language or other facets of Celtic culture."

While she hopes to tour with her father in 2016, one of the highlights of her career to date has been running a session at An Sibin Pub in Toronto .

"When the pub opened in 2012, I was asked to organize and lead a session, and it has been running successfully ever since. We have many musicians from different styles of Celtic music at the session, and several major Celtic artists have dropped in."

Playing Canada Day performances in Toronto at Yonge-Dundas Square and at Mel Lastman Square is always a highlight, and Cline frequently appears at Ontario festivals such as the Trenton Scottish Irish Festival and Music Niagara.

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Alicia Mosti

Mexico's Alicia Mosti traded a lifetime of ballet for the chance to learn Irish dancing

It was Riverdance, the acclaimed Irish music and stage production, that brought Mosti to the abrupt crossroads in her career. While her love affair may have been ignited by Moya Doherty and John McColgan's Irish musical, which premiered in Dublin in 1995, it is a passion that continues to burn vibrantly. For more than a decade, she has been teaching young and not-so-young students to step it out in Irish style. In places such as Mexico City, Tijuana and Cancun, where modern commerce, historical sites or splendid beaches beckon, it is no longer unusual to be entertained by youngsters kicking up their heels and tapping their toes to songs such as I'll Tell Me Ma.

"I was dancing professionally and teaching ballet until I saw the Riverdance show in 2000," explains Mosti. "I dropped the ballet career and started training as an Irish dancer until I took my exams in 2002. I was so in love with the dance I just had to bring it to Mexico, as nobody was dancing it here then."

Enthralled by the high energy and drama of Riverdance, which put Irish dancing on an international stage and became one of the most successful dance productions in the world, Mosti began to recognize pleasing similarities with Mexico's regional dance forms.

"Irish is such an appealing dance, practically and visually, and given the Spanish background in the Mexican people – flamenco and Spanish regional dances are based on treble steps – Irish dancing comes easily to talented Mexican dancers."

Many aspiring Mexican dancers get their first exposure to Irish dance through video presentations of Riverdance or Lord of the Dance, another Irish musical and dance production created, choreographed and produced by world-renowned dancer Michael Flatley. What they see triggers



an interest in learning, either to perform a few steps for their own satisfaction or to become a competitive Irish dancer.

Mosti points out that a show called Jarocho was choreographed by Riverdance's Richard O'Neal, and it captures the essence of Mexican traditional dance. She also acknowledges it is possible her ethnic origins predispose her to have an appreciation of Irish dance.

"We are the only Mosti family in Mexico and my background is a mix of Italian, French, Spanish and Irish from all grandparents."



Growing up in a family that appreciated music, she was exposed to a wide variety of styles. But because she began ballet at the age of three, classical was foremost. Her own 17-year-old daughter began Irish dance at an early age, and today is an Open champion, while three of her sisters' children were all accomplished dancers before going off to university.

Mosti estimates that she has taught more than 2,000 students over the years, and many return for lessons. Recently some of her early pupils have opened branch studios in association with her school, Irish Dance de Mexico, helping to spread Irish dance across the country. Some of the instructors continue their regular lessons with Mosti.

"We handle traditional Irish dance, so they start with the soft shoe dances such as reels and light jigs, and then we go to the hard shoe dances starting with the treble jig, then hornpipes."

Her own favourite dances, which are not for beginners, are non-traditional, including The Wandering Musician and The Hunt.

As well, for the past 10 years, Mosti has been organizing Feis de Mexico, an Irish dance competition which has grown to include 400 dancers performing in categories from Under 8 to adult.

"It is a large event with a high standard of competition and international judges. Dancers come from all over Mexico to compete."

Mosti, herself, is currently working to get her certification as an Irish dance judge.

"Irish dancing is growing, it is getting big. I have my fingers crossed on becoming a judge."

While Mosti's engagement with Irish culture is confined to dance, the Irish are generally well-regarded in Mexico. This is partly due to the celebrated St. Patrick's Battalion which was part of the Mexican army that fought against a United States invasion between 1846 and 1848.

www.irishdancingmexico.com



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www.clanscottsociety.org



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Jim Sinclair, National President
P: 604-542-2703
E: jim@clansinclair.ca
Roger Sinclair, Nova Scotia President
88 Slayter St., Dartmouth, NS, Canada B3A 2A6
P: 902-425-6438
E: roger@clansinclair.ca
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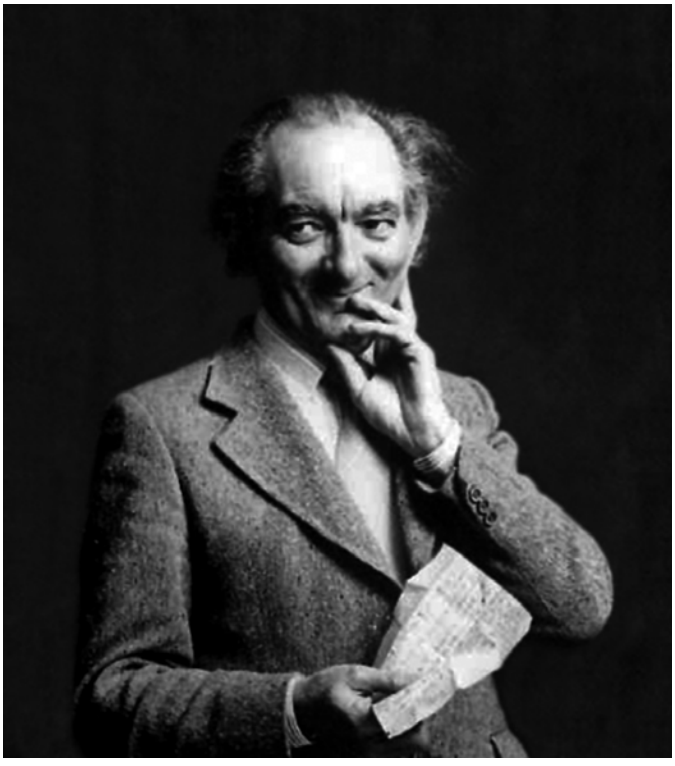
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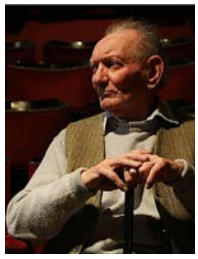
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United Kingdom
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Canada: Clan Young Canada
E: Doug Young; clanyoung@hotmail.com



Clans and Scottish Societies of Canada (CASSOC)
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Brian Friel's Final Act



Recently, seeing pallbearers convey playwright Brian Friel's coffin of wicker to his grave in Glenties - his mother's vil-lage - against the backdrop of bevel hills, heather and wildflowers, brought many thoughts of the man and his work into one frame: gaiety and tragedy, celebration and loss, home place and exile - all in gentle contrast.

Brian Friel's life as a dramatist began after a series of false starts, writing in other media. A newspaper columnist as a young man, he seemed comfortable in gossipy and self-revelatory idiom before he became a regular short story writer for The New York-er. He also wrote radio plays. Like his father, Friel was an active member of the Nationalist Party in Derry City in the 1960s and he seemed destined for a life of teaching, writing and making a contribution to local politics. Instead, local politics were unrecog-nizably recast by the 1960s generation in the North, and so too was the young scribe.

Tyrone Guthrie, the visionary theatre director, saw Friel's potential and invited him to the Guthrie Theater in Minneapolis for four months as an observer in 1963. This period provoked in Friel "some kind of explosion in the head." He had brought his family to America and witnessed the workings of a professional theatre, thought about exile and emigration, Ireland and modernity. Out of all this, he turned out a play, Philadelphia, Here I Come! the following year.

His dramatic ingenuity was apparent from the first. In Philadelphia, Here I Come! Friel splits his protagonist, Gar O'Donnell, into two characters: one, a sulky and lonely man, facing the prospect of leaving his father behind to die when he departs from Donegal for a new life in Philadelphia: the other, an exuberant inner version of the self, a mouth in a world of inarticulacy, a mixture of pathos and exaltation. Here are two selves torn, old Ireland and the new United States, the past and the future.

Much as international success lifted Friel, it also grounded him. A few years after Philadelphia opened, he moved from Derry City to a house in Donegal where he would write about his ongoing concern with what has been called the "glocal" - the worldly import of local matters.

He found in Ballybeg (literally, small town) a metaphor that formed much of the dramatic context for his work. Occasionally in his work, Ballybeg can be anywhere in rural Donegal. At other times, it clearly mutates from one part of the county to another. In Dancing at Lughnasa, dedicated to the memory of "those five brave Glenties women," Friel writes about his mother's home place. In Translations, as his diary on May 14th, 1979, states, "Went to Urris today, the setting of the hedge-school in the play-in-the-head…no response to this remote, bleak, desolate strip of land attenuated between mountain and sea." Urris, at almost the northernmost tip of Ireland, is not only majestic, but its sense of enclosure, of being beyond the mountain and nearly swallowed up by the sea, remains.

The fact that Urris/Ballybeg was Irish-speaking when Translations was set (1833), and English-speaking by the 20th century, provided Friel with one of his greatest inspirations about Irish identity. In a television interview to promote the work, Friel was asked to explain the implications of language in a divided Northern Ireland as he understood them. He replied, "Loyalty, treason, patriotism, republicanism and homeland are words which we think we share and which are, in fact, barriers to communication."

Out of Translations came one of Friel's most lasting contributions to Irish theatre, the company he founded with Stephen Rea to create a way for art to address the Northern Irish crisis: Field Day. Friel was quite explicit about the need for artists to help to create "a cultural state, not a political state; out of that cultural state, a possibility of a political state follows - that is always the sequence." Field Day expanded to become a literary publishing enterprise, and spawned many other plays. Its archive in the National Library of Ireland is by turns deeply serious and hilarious, as Friel himself was in person.

After he left Field Day in 1990, Friel became difficult to access. Interviews dried up completely, and it was clear that he had no time for the limelight. Yet his modesty and shyness did not preclude many a tussle with theatre directors. In fact, he wished he could almost dispense with them entirely. When they tampered with his text he was apt to make them pay for their interference.

In the end was his beginning. Donegal, where Friel lived for most of his life, and also had a holiday home, is his natural resting place. Of his four grandparents who hailed from Donegal, two were illiterate and two could speak Irish only. Like the title of a volume of oral history Friel edited, The Last of the Name, he embodied both the end of an Irish-speaking oral tradition and the reinvigoration of that into a new tradition of world class drama. He is remembered for that, for the thirty plays he has left us with, and for many other achievements,

By Maurice Fitzpatrick

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