

# WHY CLODAGH IS RELISHING THE FUTURE

Zen-like and friendly, the TV chef from Cork has hit the big time in the US but likes to keep herself grounded by focusing on her cookbooks and keeping those restaurant customers happy

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**A MIDDLE-AGED, CLEARLY STARSTRUCK** woman hovers near our table before slowly inching towards the booth where I'm enjoying coffee and a chat with Clodagh McKenna in her Blackrock restaurant, Clodagh's Kitchen.

Once she catches Clodagh's eye, she gushes in her strong Italian accent about how much her lunch party have enjoyed every morsel of their meal – from the carrot and coriander soup to the provencal herbed chicken with poached fennel and olive tapenade – while Clodagh beams and blushes shyly. 'Thanks – you're an angel,' she says, in her strong Cork accent.

A few minutes later, a waiter arrives at our table with one of Clodagh's cookery books, which another customer would like her to autograph and Clodagh obliges with a thrilled, albeit bemused, smile. But Clodagh is getting used to

the attention. She is accosted quite regularly here in her restaurant next to the entrance of the Blackrock Shopping Centre – now an unlikely mecca for her growing army of foodie 'groupies'.

'Since January I've had four groups come in from America looking for me,' says Clodagh. 'I keep thinking they will be disappointed when I meet them so I go completely overboard, sitting down and having lunch with them, all on the house. I get really nervous and feel the pressure not to let them down – some eat here every day or over in Arnotts. It's so nice.'

But Cork born and bred, Clodagh will have to stop giving away the free lunches now that she has taken the US by storm with her hit cookery show *Clodagh's Irish Food Trails* which drew audiences of some 20million.

But far from being Ireland's answer to Nigella, she reveals: 'The TV stuff is just a bit of fun.' Her

'real work', she says, is writing her cookery books and manning her 'dream' restaurant – a year old next week – where she switches between the roles of glamorous front-of-house host, and head chef in her whites, toiling over hot stoves in the open kitchen, running alongside the main dining area.

Clodagh's brand is fast morphing into a veritable food empire, which last year expanded to include her first standalone Clodagh's Kitchen restaurant, after two years running Clodagh's Kitchen Homemade in Arnotts.

'On my last trip over to New York a guy stopped me at the airport and said, "I love you" and asked for a photo,' she adds.

'I was going red and thinking, "Jesus he's after getting me mixed up with somebody else" – it was so embarrassing. I was like, "Thank you but I have to burst your bubble, you've got me mixed up." I told him my name was Clodagh and he ▶