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"I am a perfectionist"

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What's cooking, Clodagh?

*We chat to Clodagh McKenna
about success, good food
and being a perfectionist*

Strolling into Clodagh's Kitchen in Blackrock, Dublin gives you a little glimpse into the psyche of its creator. Clodagh oversaw every part of the design of the restaurant which opened in 2013. Perfectly matched furniture and a cool blue colour scheme give it chic look, there is a place for everything and everything has its place. We sat down in the restaurant over breakfast with Clodagh to talk about her newest book *Clodagh's Irish Kitchen*, coming home and why family are so important to her.

What made you choose an Irish theme for your latest book?

I started collecting the recipes for this five years ago, I felt that Irish food had evolved and had changed so much. I'm lucky that my work takes to me to the States as well and I could see their vision of Irish food wasn't how we are here. They still feel that we're the bacon and cabbage nation... but we are so much more than that.

What was the idea behind the book?

When I moved back from Italy five years ago I took all the culinary knowledge I learned from there and then tried to marry it with great local Irish ingredients. I really wanted to create a book that would represent where I feel Irish food is at at the moment.

Did moving to Italy reinvigorate your love for food?

In Italy, I think your culinary knowledge grows so much and you become very confident and I really honed in on my style of cooking. [I was out there] four years... I miss the ingredients and the food, everything actually, the way of life there, the way they take everything so slowly.

Are you settled now you're back in Ireland?

I'm in Monkstown now, I've been here for over five years, and yeah, I'm loving being back. I knew when I was in Italy that I wanted to come home and open up a restaurant or something like that and now I have.

You opened your Arnotts restaurant in 2011 and your restaurant here in Blackrock in 2013. Were you scared about that?

People were saying, "two restaurants, be cautious." We were lucky to start out with a very established department store so they have an incredibly loyal customer so there wasn't that much risk involved there. Then here [Blackrock] we opened up in 2013 and the first six months were really, really hard. Nobody can prepare you. The hardest six months of my life I think.

Do you think you're a perfectionist with your restaurants?

I am a perfectionist, one hundred per cent, I'm controlling in how I like things. But every business owner should be like that. Because they look to me for guidance and if I'm not precise in how I want something done then it will never be done like that.

You're very involved in your business...

I want someone to come here and have a really lovely experience, feel that they've been really looked after, that they've had something a little bit more special than where they might have been before.

Are you price conscious?

Absolutely, I always run the prices by my mam because she would be in a rural setting and I would be in an urban setting... I don't want anybody to ever feel anxious about the cost when they come in.

When you started out did you envisage you'd have two restaurants?

No, I was young and I was in such a bubble of food and it was before food became cool and hip. I [trained] with Darina Allen for three months and then I was in Ballymaloe House with [Darina's brother] Rory O'Connell.

Are you still friendly with Darina?

Oh yes, I'm going to see her in New York in a few weeks time. I spent so much time

"I've so many females that I look up to in my world"



with them in Ballymaloe and they were such a massive part of my life, they're really special to me, Darina, Rachel and Rory. I'd do anything for them, I worked with them but we were really close friends as well.

Did you come from a foodie background?

My mam grew up in a really special

CLODAGH'S FAVOURITE THINGS**HIGHSTREET BRAND?**

Topshop, I love, love, love it.

IRISH DESIGNERS?

I love Eilish Boyle, she's in the Powerscourt Centre, Dublin. I bought her scarves for this winter, they were my winter buy.

BEAUTY PRODUCTS? I love Dermalogica, I got a Clarisonic, I use it twice a week. I wouldn't have the best skin in the world so I need to look after it.

environment in that her father was a fisherman and they had their own jetty and they grew everything. So they had their own hens, they had their own fruit... and fish came in fresh every night. So she has that ingrained in her.

And what about your dad?

My dad passed away last year and he was really, really into cooking. He was probably the biggest influence to me, him and my mother equally. But when we were growing up we would come home from school and he would have made a list of all of the chores for us to do to have dinner ready, that's starter, main course and dessert. It would be very, very simple... but we always had to dress the table, put linen on and flowers on. It was good in so many ways, it taught us a work ethic, and the importance of our family.

You're huge in the US, was breaking America something you'd wanted to do?

No, it wasn't in my plan. I didn't even know that PBS were contacting me about the series [Clodagh's Irish Food Trails]. I didn't go over there looking for TV it just happened. People magazine are running my recipes, it's really exciting!

You are turning 40 this year in May, are you going to have a big party?

I will, I was thinking of doing it in London or France but I think I'm going to do it in Ireland and rent out a lovely house in the country and get all my family together and then all my close friends. I'd love to have everybody that I really love.

Are you concerned about turning 40?

Not really, I've so many females that I look up to in my world and I'm lucky that I'm in a job that isn't reflective of your age. I think you make what you are, I think even if there weren't people in my line of work that were older I'd still feel okay about it because I truly believe that you make everything that you want.

What are your plans for the future?

Somebody said to me once, "What's your five-year plan?" it was actually the Taoiseach [Enda Kenny] we were having dinner one night.

You had dinner with Enda?

I was cooking for him, he came here to the restaurant for, every year I do the Make A Wish dinner. Any time I meet someone who is a very big businessman they always ask, "What's your five-year plan?" It's been asked to me so many times I need to make one. I think I should probably make one because it's obviously a good thing to do because I've never, ever, ever done one before. **WW**

Clodagh's Irish Kitchen by Clodagh McKenna (Kyle Books, €25.99) is out now. With thanks to Arnotts for clothing provided for the shoot

