

IRELAND

OF THE WELCOMES

Vol. 68 No. 3 May/June 2019

HEROES OF OLD

*The people who
shaped us*

*Cork's best
kept secret*

Ballyvolane House

*Forgotten
Ireland*

*Visiting Monaghan,
Connemara & The Blasket Islands*

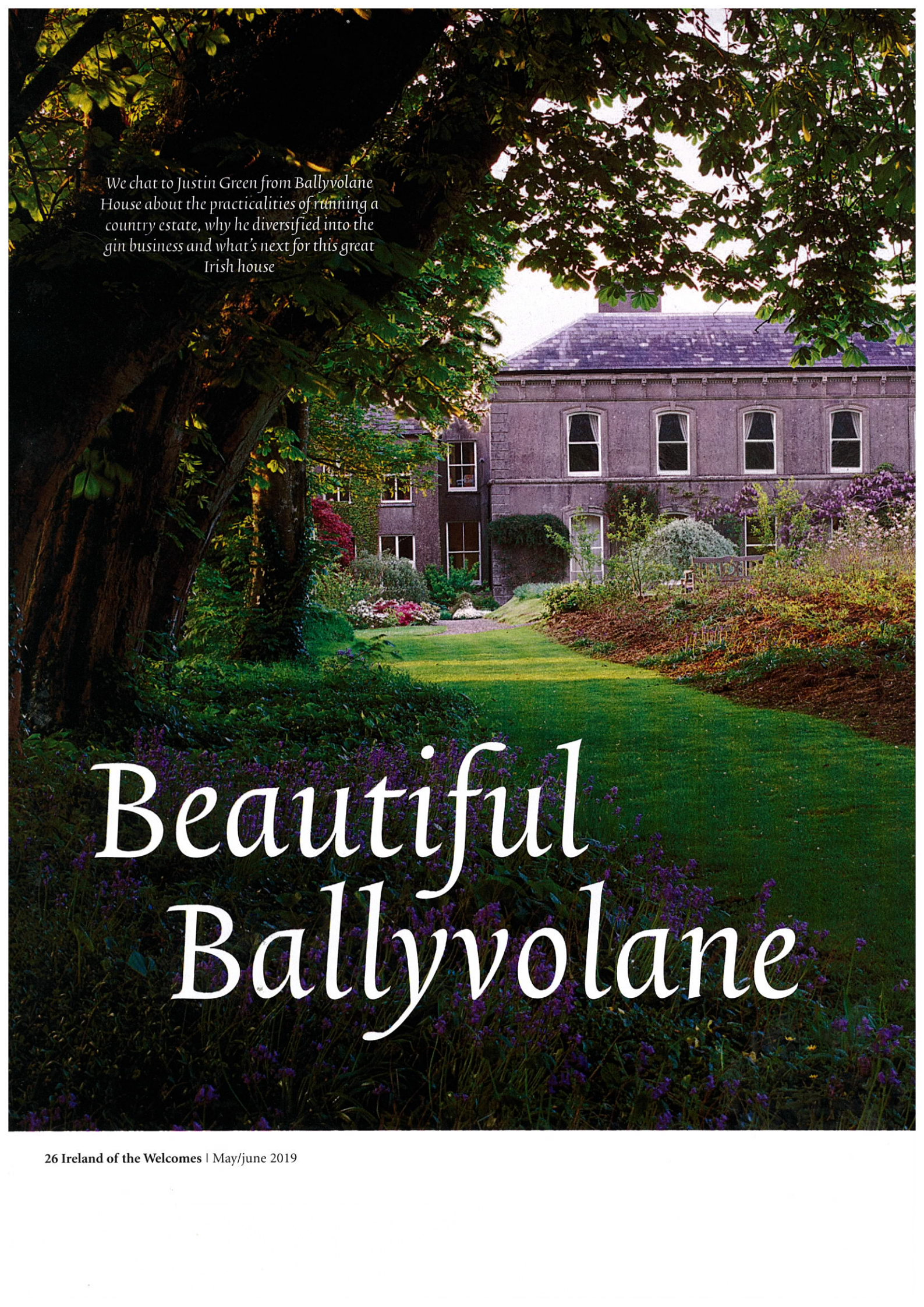


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We chat to Justin Green from Ballyvolane House about the practicalities of running a country estate, why he diversified into the gin business and what's next for this great Irish house

Beautiful Ballyvolane

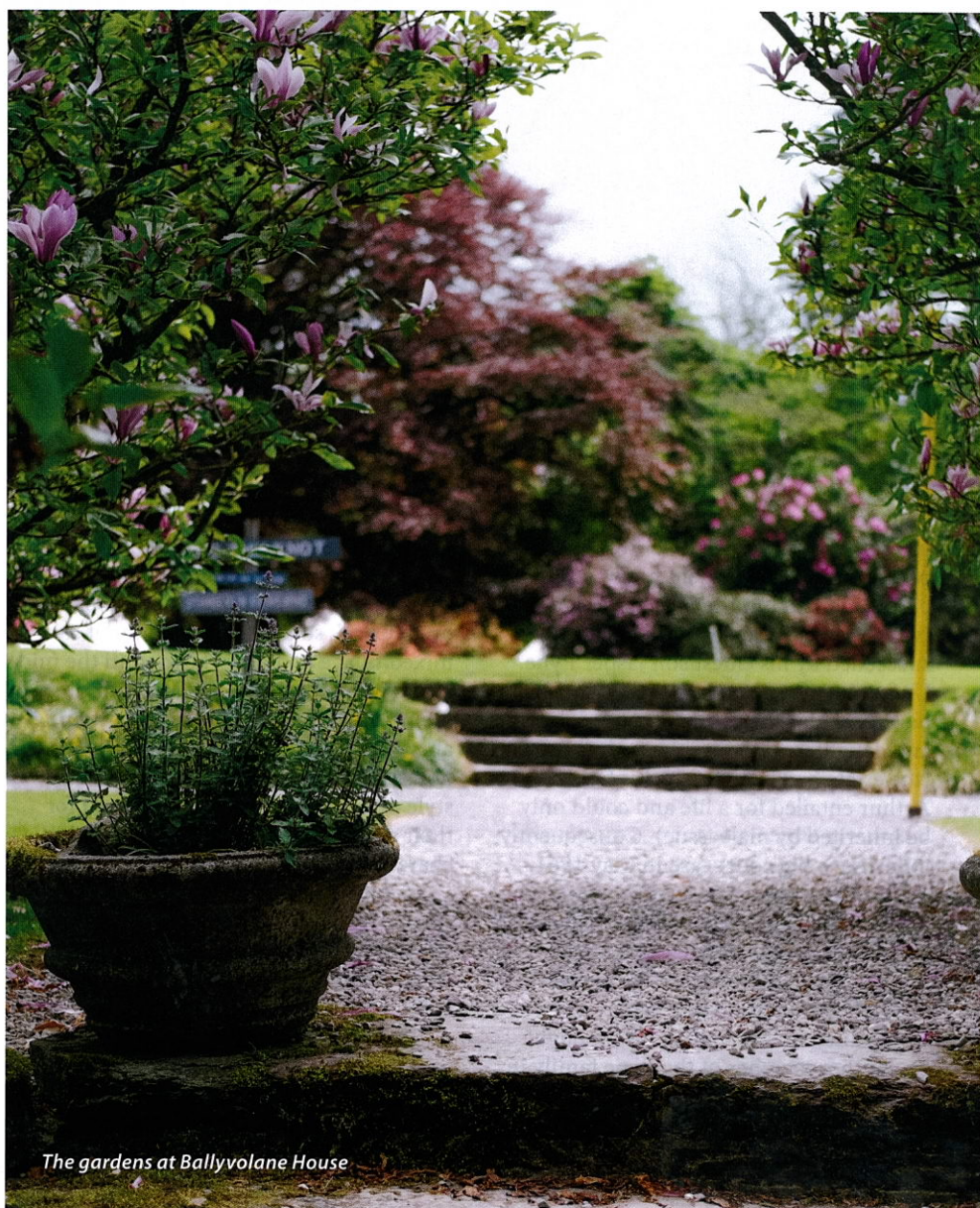
Ballyvolane House is a property with a lot of history, and if current owners Jenny and Justin Green have anything to do with that, the history is set to continue! A 300-year old house which has been turned into a hotel, a wedding venue, and now a distillery producing Ireland's first milk gin, Ballyvolane is nothing if not versatile.

Originally built in 1728 by Sir Richard Pyne, a retired Lord Chief Justice of Ireland, Ballyvolane was designed in the classic Georgian country house style with three storeys, as illustrated in the old Estate book. An amorous descendent, Arthur Pyne, acquired sufficient capital from his marriage to three wealthy women to have the house considerably enlarged in the early 19th century.

The three-storey house was again modified in 1872 by George Pyne. He had the building pulled apart and then, by removing the top storey, recreated a two-storey house rendered in Italianate style, with an extensive west end wing.

Recent research carried out by Terence Reeves-Smyth unearthed tender documents for the remodelling of Ballyvolane from this time - the architect was Richard Rolt Brash (1817-1876), a Cork architect, whose father and brother were well known builders in the city. RB Brash is better known as a very active antiquarian and friend of John Windele - he was especially interested in round towers.

The rebuilding/remodelling in the early 1870s followed the re-acquisition of the



The gardens at Ballyvolane House

The main sitting room, which is open to guests



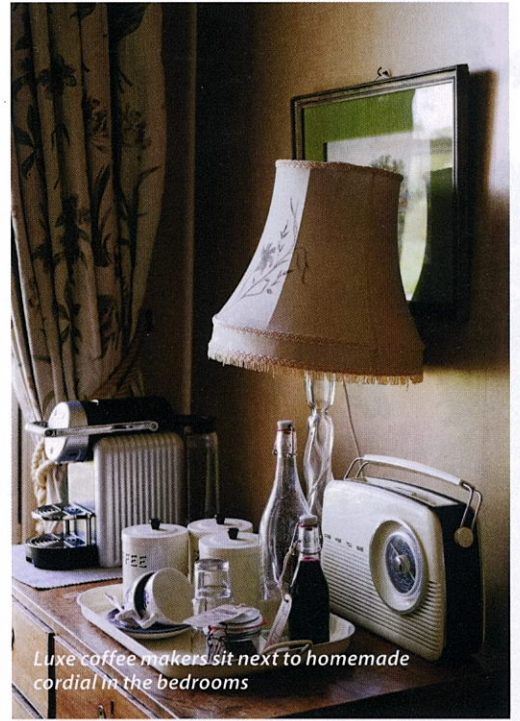
house and demesne by the Pyne family in 1869. Arthur Pyne (1747-1839) who probably built the present house around c1800 and laid out the present parkland (which looks Regency in date), was succeeded by his eldest son Jasper Pyne. Unfortunately, when Jasper died in 1860-1 he left no male heirs and as a result his wife and daughters did not inherit the property (the estate had been left by his father Arthur entailed for a life and could only be inherited by male issue). Consequently, following a big court case in May 1861, the property passed to Jasper's younger brother, the Rev. William Masters Pyne, Rector of Oxted in Surrey. In March 1864 the Rev Pyne put the place on the market through the Encumbered Estates Courts. It remained on the market until bought by another member of the Pyne family in January 1869.

The Pynes built the present house and lived here until 1953, when it was bought

by the late Cyril Hall Green and his wife Joyce, on their return from Malaya, where Cyril had managed rubber plantations since the 1930s. Ballyvolane was passed on to Cyril's son, Jeremy, who ran it as a mixed tillage and dairy farm until the mid 1980s when it became one of the founding members of the Hidden Ireland group, an association of town and country houses offering a unique and exclusive style of accommodation and chosen for their architectural merit and interesting characteristics.

Ballyvolane was managed as a successful country house guesthouse by Jeremy and his wife, Merrie until January 2004, when the reins were handed to his son Justin and his wife, Jenny.

Three generations of the Green family now live at Ballyvolane and we caught up with Justin to discuss the realities of living in a great Irish home.



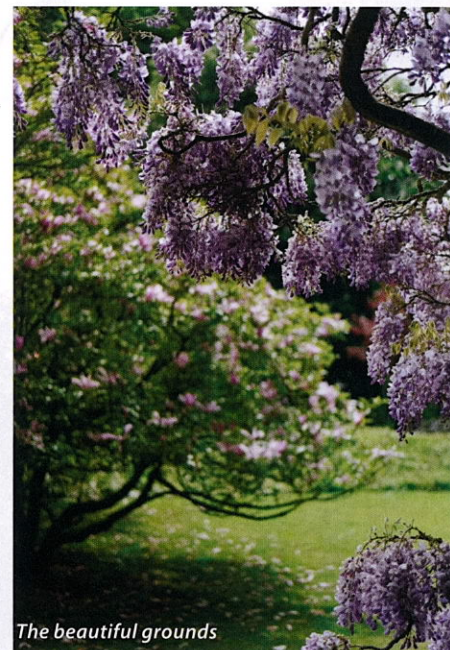
Luxe coffee makers sit next to homemade cordial in the bedrooms



An ensuite bathroom in Ballyvolane House



Set for a party



The beautiful grounds

How long has Ballyvolane been in your family?

Since 1953. My grandparents Squirrel and Joyce Green purchased the property after their retirement from Malaya. Squirrel was a rubber planter in Malaya since the 1930's.

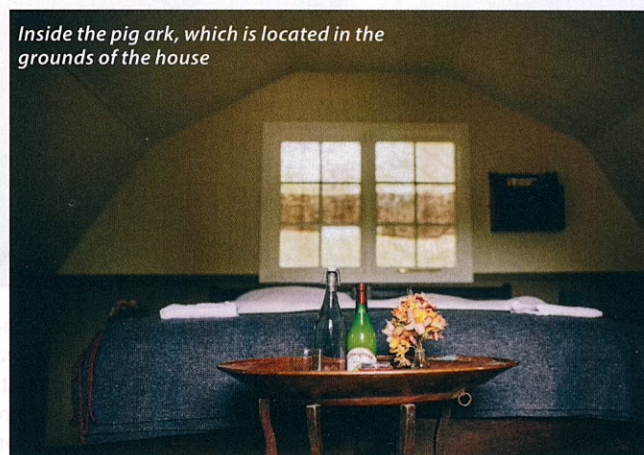
When did you guys decide to return and turn it into your family home, and what sort of a transition was that?

We moved back and took over the reins in 2004 just after my mum passed away. The house was always our family home and we still regard it as our home, albeit a busy one full of people. The house purrs when it is full of people celebrating. When we returned, my father Jeremy was brilliant and gave us a masterclass on how to hand over from one generation to the next. He is still a great help and looks after the gardens. We didn't change much at first as we wanted to get a feel for the business. The recession hit us badly with business dropping by 60% between 2008 and 2010. We diversified into weddings and events and that really took off. Although the vibe is authentic and relaxed at Ballyvolane House, the attention to detail is top notch. My wife Jenny and I were able to draw on our hotel experience having worked in luxury hotels for over 20 years in Switzerland, Hong Kong, Dubai, Bali and the UK.

What might people be surprised to know about the realities of living in a home like Ballyvolane?

We love the place and we appreciate how lucky we are to live here. It's a beautiful house surrounded by vast gardens, parkland and woods in verdant east County Cork. We do enjoy the variety to our lives, from feeding the pigs to mowing the lawn, digging spuds, greeting guests, hosting The Prince

Inside the pig ark, which is located in the grounds of the house



Relaxing in the glamping area of Ballyvolane House



Glamping at Ballyvolane is available from May to September



The quirky grounds



The glamping Pig Ark



Ballyvolane hosts yoga retreats

of Wales and the Duchess of Cornwall last summer, distilling Bertha's Revenge Gin, hosting weddings, putting up the glamping tents, plumping up the cushions, adjusting the lighting, running a driven shoot in the winter, wine sommelier, chainsawing fallen trees, plumbing, mixing cocktails, social media posts, yoga retreats, house parties, brainstorming sessions and meetings for corporate groups.

We do struggle with the rising costs of business (Brexit and the VAT increase aren't helping either). We are highly regulated which is expensive, onerous and incredibly time-consuming. We feel it's a little unfair as we have to comply with same rules as a new-build B&B. Ballyvolane House is almost 300 years old and we should be given a little leeway. Maintaining the integrity of the property is vital as houses like Ballyvolane are an important part of Irish heritage. Airbnb (which I am a big fan of and use on a regular basis) is a threat to our tourism business as they are unregulated and don't have any of the associated costs (fire,

health, food safety etc). As a result, they are great value and we cannot compete on price. It's not a level playing field for tourism providers in Ireland and I fear it will put some operators out of business. The insurance costs are also a major threat to the viability of our business. I also worry about the environment and the government needs to provide far more incentives to wean citizens off fossil fuels, promote biodiversity in farming and ban harmful pesticides. The litter and fly-tipping of rubbish along the country roads around us is getting worse too. It doesn't look good and it shows a lack of respect for the environment. Our guests comment on this too.

Do you feel a huge sense of responsibility to maintain the house and grounds?

For sure. We see ourselves as caretakers. We will try our best to keep it in good condition and we hope our businesses will secure the long-term future of the house. Owning and operating an historic Irish

country house is a big responsibility and we take this seriously. We work tirelessly to preserve the integrity of the place, that sense of mystery that people love about these old houses. We are constantly restoring the house and the gardens as well as renovating old farm buildings. It is our duty to preserve these heritage properties. They are an important part of our culture.

What's your favourite thing about the house?

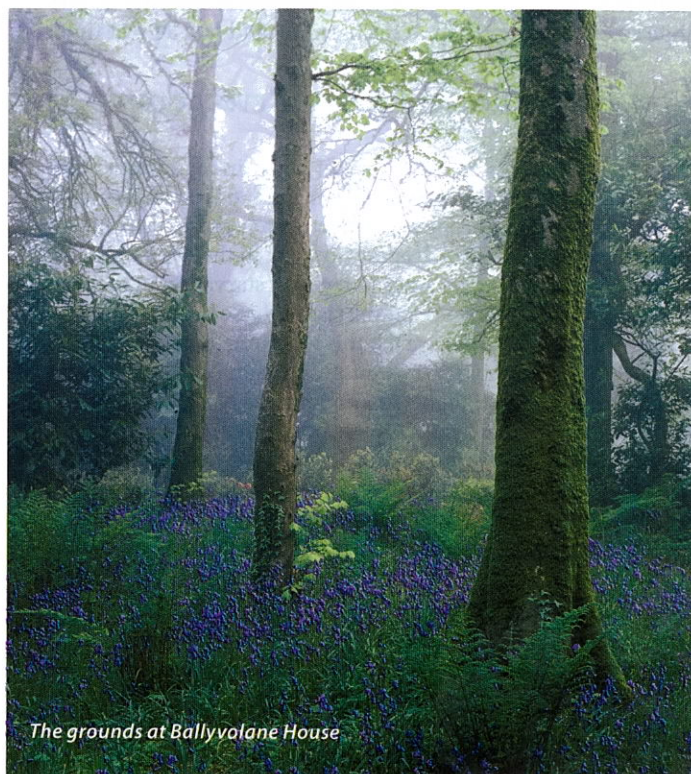
The ambience. We offer a relaxed, authentic Irish country house ambience and the decor, books, food and drinks are all carefully curated to ensure guests are on an Irish cultural roller coaster. The smell of the woodsmoke from the fire when guests



arrive, the dogs, the eclectic furniture and gardens all set the tone. Guests feel a real connection with rural Ireland when they stay. It's not just the ambience that is authentic, it's the food and drinks. We keep pigs and poultry and grow a vast amount of vegetables and fruit in the walled-garden. Guests are always welcome to help feed the piggies and collect the eggs after breakfast. We often mix Bertha's Revenge cocktails for guests before dinner, which is taken communally in the grand dining room. The vibe here is more 'house party' than hotel with good chat, good company, good food and ambience. The staff members are super-friendly too and add massively to the wellbeing of Ballyvolane House and guests.

What's your favourite story about the house, including ghosts!

The ghost story is a good one and can be found on our website but my favourite story involves my father Jeremy and a French couple. My parents Jeremy and Merrie opened the house to paying guests (PGs as they used to call them) in the 1980's. They would sometimes have to move out of their own bedroom when the house was fully booked. On one occasion, my dad went shooting and came back home very late one night and forgot that he had to move to another room. He crept into the bedroom quietly, got undressed and hopped into bed with a French couple! The monsieur said 'pardon' and they didn't seem to mind a bit (typical French). My dad grabbed his clothes, shot out the door and took off down the long corridor like a greyhound. He apologized





Justin Green and Antony Jackson, founders of Bertha's Revenge Gin

profusely to the French couple the next morning. They took it all very well and I am sure they have been dining out on that story ever since. We used to not have locks on the bedroom doors and a hotel inspector visited the house a few years back and asked if any of the guests have entered the wrong room by mistake. I told her the story about my father and reassured her that it won't happen again as he has moved out! We also had HRH The Prince of Wales and HRH The Duchess of Cornwall to stay last summer. It was quite an experience. They were charming and had a great time.

How did the idea for Bertha's Revenge come about?

Our tourism business is very seasonal - busy in the summer but quiet in the winter months. We live on an island, off an island, off the mainland of Europe and unfortunately there aren't many tourists travelling around deepest Co Cork in the winter months. We are always looking for ways to fend-off starvation in the winter and having cast a beady eye on the rise and rise of craft gin in the UK over the last 10 years, we felt this was something we could have a crack at. In November 2014, Antony Jackson (my Bertha business partner) and I booked flights to London on a recce. We had an epiphany! Bertha's Revenge Gin was born. We felt if we could create a premium gin that we are passionate about, tastes delicious and that would reflect well on the house, we could focus on export markets around the globe. We wouldn't have to rely on a small domestic market or seasonal tourism. It has been success thus far and we are exporting to several countries in Europe, to the US and the Far East. The journey so far has been very enjoyable. 🍀



A cocktail made with Bertha's Revenge

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 For more information on visiting Ballyvolane visit ballyvolanehouse.ie
 or call +353 25 36349