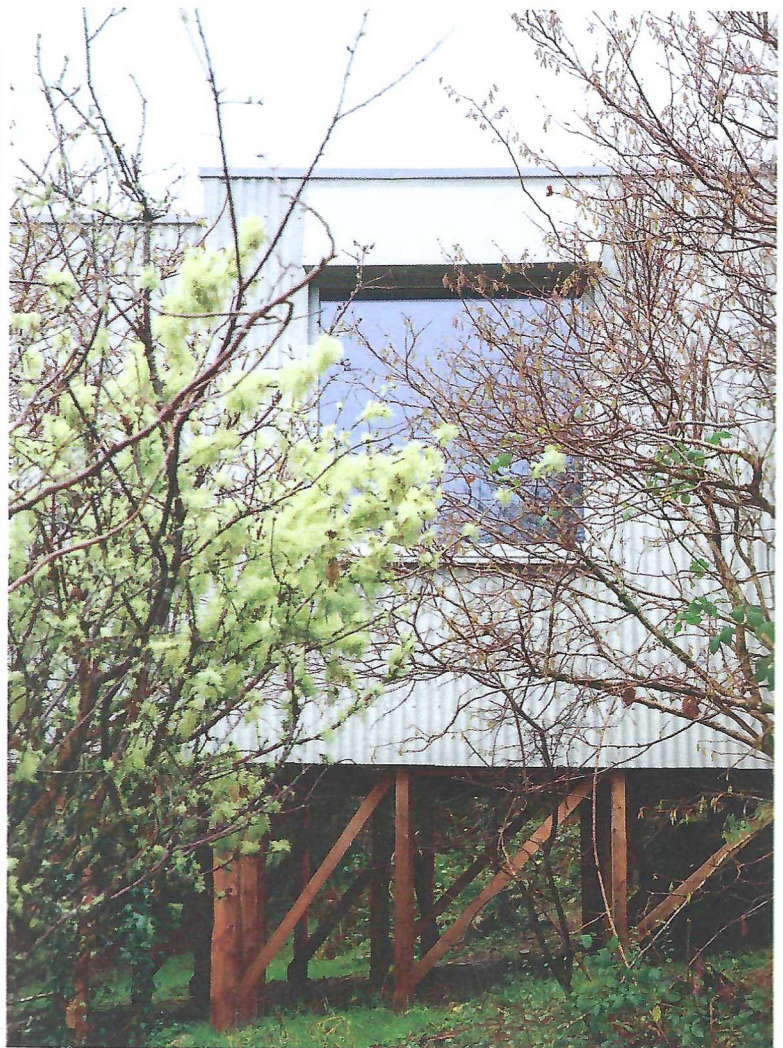


BIRD'S EYE VIEW

Take your holiday hideaway to new heights, with these self-contained nests sure to ease you into relaxation.

Words Michelle Hanley and Doreen Kilfeather





STILT HOUSE

FERNWOOD FARM

photography and words Doreen Kilfeather

Nestled amid the trees of native Irish woodland, set on Fernwood Farm just outside Clifden in Connemara, is the Stilt House, the latest addition to Anne and Simon Ashe's clachan of luxury eco hideaways. I arrive at night. It's cold, it's dark, it's raining. I park at the edge of the woods. Hidden from view, I know the Stilt House is at the end of the winding (and thankfully short) trail through the woods ahead of me.

Half an hour later, I'm cosied up on that rarest of things: a cool yet comfortable armchair. In front of me a window – floor to ceiling and spanning one side of the living room to the other – I have my very own real-time forest movie. The same cinematic window features are echoed in the bedroom. The bed is sublime. I fall asleep to the sounds of wind in the trees and rain on the roof, feeling cocooned and safe.

At the centre of the house is a circular wooden wall, around which is wrapped the living, kitchen, hall and sleeping spaces. As you move from space to space, the wall invites you to trail a hand along it, giving the feeling of drifting rather than walking. Underfoot, cork tiles lend another layer of tactility and a delicious feeling of connection with nature. The minimal aesthetic, its sparseness, its clean lines, its textures, its shapes are so pleasing – all right angles or continuous curves, and nothing in between. It's not just a physical space – it's a headspace.

The next day, I wake to a glorious spring morning, and head out to wander through the woods. Twisted trees and gnarly roots throng the pathways which lead to a lakeside sauna in one direction, a rope bridge in another, and a salt lake and bog lands beyond. The air smells of earth and rain. The light changes constantly and with it the delicious colours and textures of spring all around me change too. There is a peace and serenity to be found here – a rootedness to the earth and to nature. I make a mental note to reread Wendell Berry's *The Peace of Wild Things*, and a promise to return to this long-legged house often.

WHAT TO BRING Rain gear, walking shoes, bug spray in the summer, a hot water bottle (I bring one everywhere), a swimsuit for the sauna, and art supplies – you'll be inspired to capture your surroundings.

WHAT TO DO The whole idea of coming to Fernwood is that, for a short stay, you don't have to leave! Choose from woodland walking trails, lake swimming, and the sauna, and they have bicycles available for guests to use on the Connemara Greenway, which goes from right outside the gate.

WHERE TO EAT NEARBY All accommodation is self-catering, so stock up at Sullivan's Grocery in Oughterard en route: they have speciality coffee, breads, and a fine array of fresh local produce. If you fancy going out for food, Misunderstood Heron on the shores of Killary Fjord in Leenane is an absolute must, and Dooncastle Oysters seafood truck is also a highlight – both represent all that is seriously good and exciting in the Irish food scene.

LEAVE ROOM FOR A decorative plate from the eponymous Roundstone Ceramics.

A two-night minimum stay starts at €600. fernwood.eco

