



A LAKESIDE IDYLL

Words & Photographs by Alixandra Fazzina

Slowing down at Fernwood Farm.

“The bog is stunning. Walking out there I feel blessed. It’s the softness, the colours, the smell of the bog myrtle on a hot day, the bog cotton, the lakes and the old dwellings. It used to be such a thing to go out to the bog as a child. It was part of our summer holidays - being out there with a sandwich and a bottle of milk. I suppose it’s an experience that’s gone for many now.”

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Having grown up in Connemara, Anne Ashe and her family are passionate about the landscape that surrounds them. So in 2013, seizing upon an opportunity too good to pass up, they invested in a 150-hectare site with views stretching out to the peaks of The Twelve Bens, and made it their ‘forever home’. Found on what Anne describes as “a vast amount of unique space”, the lakeside idyll of Fernwood Farm encompasses some of the region’s most pristine native woodlands and borders a swathe of untouched bog.

The Ashes embarked on their farming adventure with a herd of miniature red and black native Dexter cows, adept at treading lightly on the soft ground, and now have vegetable gardens, chickens and donkeys Xander and Killy. Striving to be self-sustainable, the environment and regeneration of the landscape are key to the Fernwood ethos.

Nature trails meander through the vine-draped woods, and among the old stone walls and pools of light is an adult’s playground waiting to be explored. Swings hang from the boughs of trees, a rope bridge cuts above a tumbling waterfall, and a giant green bird box reveals itself as a secret sauna with views out across the water through a huge circular window.

Anne’s playful philosophy and forward-thinking eye for design extended to Fernwood’s eco accommodation. Designed in partnership with some of Ireland’s most creative architects, the discreet and distinctly different self-contained spaces are hidden revelations. There’s a tree house dome with its own private deck, a contemporary studio housed in a rustic barn and a curved stilt house reminiscent of a floating pavilion. While each structure is entirely original, they all share contemplative vistas and an understated, carefully curated decor. “Our ethos is living simply,” says Anne. “It’s an experience that lets couples get into the heart of nature in a way that’s really comfortable.”

Within walking distance of the lively market town of Clifden, Fernwood is also located on Ireland’s latest Greenway - a network of cycles lanes reclaimed from former railway lines. With Connemara National Park and the white-sand beaches of Roundstone on its doorstep, it’s an ideal base for adventures. But so restful is Fernwood that, for Anne, the greatest compliment is that the escape she has created is enough. “If you sit here, slow down and just look, what you see is remarkable. The amount of people that come here and just don’t leave says it all.”

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