



R&R *in the* WEST

Ruth and Stuart Morgan's stylish B&B in Clifden combines her skills as a textile designer with the fascinating memorabilia he has collected over the years as a guitar tech for U2

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In 2003, Ruth and Stuart Morgan made Hillside Lodge, a B&B on the Sky Road in Clifden their home. The move from a two bedroom basement apartment in Dun Laoghaire to a 10 bedroom B&B in the West urgently in need of an injection of style was more challenging than either had anticipated. But over the years they have created a homely and inviting space filled with personality, and unique pieces with stories to tell. "We thought it would be easy and that we would be sitting around all day reading the papers. We jumped in with two feet and just started swimming," Stuart says. "It was daunting to furnish a house this size, especially to do it the way we wanted to." It's hard to imagine the home hasn't always looked as it does now. "It was raspberry ripple pink on the outside, and there was pink carpet in the breakfast room," Ruth says. "Replacing that with wood flooring was one of the first big tasks we took on, and I thought we'd never be able to cover the pink walls!" Now a fresh white on the outside, the aesthetic of Hillside Lodge is clean and contemporary, and Ruth wasn't afraid to use colour for the interiors, with greens and blues throughout as a nod to the Connemara landscape. No pink in sight.

Running the B&B has also been challenging as Stuart is away so much with work. For the past 25 years he has worked as a guitar tech for Adam Clayton of U2, so he tours the world with the band for up to six months of the



year. His work is very much a part of Hillside Lodge. The living room area is filled with books on music, and the halls are lined with memorabilia and instruments, including a guitar signed by Sting. As well as U2, he has worked with Sinéad O'Connor, Sharon Shannon, The Killers, Sting, Paul Brady and more, so there's plenty of news articles, tour photos and set lists music buffs will have fun perusing. Two rooms in the B&B are themed, the Beatles Room and the U2 room. "We definitely didn't want a completely themed B&B as we wouldn't want to put off visitors that aren't musically minded, but just having these two rooms means we could have fun with it and we had the pieces from our collections to make it work," Ruth explains. "I've tempered the music stuff, it's about striking a balance, and being subtle about it. But I also like to change up how we have everything displayed, as we have so many return visitors." And though he has travelled the world, Clifden is where Stuart wants to be. "My family moved around a lot so I was always nomadic. I'm not a spiritual person but I just feel a connection to here



and to Ireland even though I was born and bred in England. Moving here was like finding a home I never had."

There are instruments throughout the home, guitars in the B&B from different tours that Stuart has worked on and a collection of Beatles guitars in the private living room. There's also a fiddle on display in the living area of the B&B, as Ruth and their 10-year-old daughter Molly both play.

Ruth studied textile design at NCAD, and also spent time working in fashion design, and her creativity and eye for what works together really shows throughout the house. "In the Connemara bedroom for example, I used colours inspired by the photograph on the wall through-



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out the room, including the throw from Avoca.” Work by Irish creatives is used as a focal point throughout the home. The deluxe room features Clover Rua cushions, designed by her college friend Anita Elliott. The Jimmy Lawlor painting in the breakfast room is certainly commanding, and so Ruth picked up tea towels in Habitat in complementary patterns to cover the chairs.

“I was trying to be economical but now I think it really adds character. I also picked up coasters for the tables in Tiger. It shows you don't have to spend a lot to get the look you want.” When working as a designer, Ruth would never get to see how people react to her work, but now having put her stamp on Hillside Lodge she has the thrill of impressing her guests.

“You don't get that feedback when you're working behind the scenes in design, but now when I answer the door and show someone to their room they're wowed right before you and it is the biggest buzz.”

Where they have invested is in special pieces of furniture. Stuart loves discovering items on his travels which he inevitably can't leave behind. “Stuart is more impul-

sive than me and he is definitely a spender,” Ruth says. “I always end up loving the pieces but it drives me mad trying to find the perfect place to put them!”

The Spina chandelier in the living area was one Stuart heard Madonna raving about so he decided he had to have it too. He arrived home with an unusually shaped silk chair from Galway years ago that has only now found its home in the Connemara room. The private area of the home is a treasure trove of finds from around the world and around Ireland, creating a look that is a degree more eclectic in taste than the B&B area. In the bathroom, above the bath is a chandelier the couple discovered on holidays in Cape Cod and had shipped home, and the light fixture above the mirror is from Los Angeles. The insect collection on the walls has grown over time. “I received the spider first as a Christmas present from a friend, and I just thought it looked cool,” Stuart says.

“Then we were on holidays in South Africa and I found more bugs that I knew would look great with the spider, and it’s funny to have then in the bathroom, with one friend we had to take them all down before she’d use it.” For the kitchen, Stuart bought Italian casino chairs, which are ‘the most comfy dining chairs you’ll ever sit in’ and unique art for the walls. “I found them in San Francisco, they are pieces of fruit and vegetables like blood orange that have been sliced very thinly and dried to make a collage.” The old schoolhouse clock in the kitchen he picked up in Dun Laoghaire.

“When I’m on the phone to Ruth from anywhere in the world, I can hear that clock ticking and it’s really nice to have that familiar sound to remind you of home.” ☺

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