

Seattle Times Sunday Feb. 30

Travel Essay

Irish guesthouse a slice of scrambled-egg heaven

BY STEPHANIE AGER KIRZ
Special to The Seattle Times

One glance at the shiny, polished Sheffield knife blades retrofitted on the hotel silver and I knew this was no ordinary Irish guesthouse.

The pedigreed pugs, Bunter and Babs, and the Maltese, Blinky, politely greeted my husband and me right along with proprietors Julia and Paddy Foyle at the Quay House in Clifden, Ireland.

A white marble staircase led to the guestrooms in the original part of the house, built 200 years ago for the harbormaster. Our suitcases were carried up the stairs on a velvety greyhound-gray carpet to one of the individually named and decorated rooms. Original oil portraits of lords and ladies smiled from

frames throughout the house. There must have been 25 or 30 of them, all suitable for a family museum or an art gallery of the distinguished who could afford immortalizing themselves in oil. Were these the Foyle ancestors, I wondered?

There were mirrors everywhere. Not measly 2-by-4-foot things, but gigantic floor-to-ceiling mirrors with beveled edges and deeply carved frames. They reflected the good taste and decorating flair of their owners.

But what I remember most besides the adorable Bunter, who gave me a goodbye kiss, was breakfast in the conservatory. It captured the simple elements of grace missing from so many meals these days.

There was fresh-squeezed orange juice. Coarse Brittany sea-salt sat in a cobalt blue glass-lined silver dish with a sterling silver spoon. Cracked pepper rested in a matching silver pot. The warm toasts with their crusts

cut off arrived in a silver toast caddy. From the time I was little, my mother would remind me, "Stephanie, eat your crust so you'll get curly hair." Disliking the crust on all bread, I still have straight strands. The cutlery was sterling silver salvaged from fine hotels, or maybe a family heirloom. The coffee was served from a French press pot into a delicately painted china cup. The eggs were scrambled so softly with piles of butter to resemble yellow clouds floating on a white plate. They were, in fact, the best scrambled eggs I have ever eaten in my life.

And so it was with the Quay House in Clifden. Just a little slice of heaven for a mere moment in time, thanks to two people who understand that old saying, "God is in the details" — or certainly in those scrambled eggs.

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