

# Image conscious

A US photographer switched her focus from the rich and famous to Ballilogue in Co Kilkenny. By *Linda Daly*

In her 35 years as a fashion, interiors and lifestyle photographer, Colleen Duffley has captured high-profile people from the actor Jeff Bridges to the US presidential candidate Hillary Clinton. Her international work has seen her do shoots at the Vatican and the White House. She lists the members of the Dixie Chicks and India Hicks, the former fashion model and heiress, among her friends, and has photographed their houses, as well as sprawling 3,000 sq m mansions in the Hamptons seaside communities in Long Island.

Yet it has been the smaller properties, the cut-stone cottages of Italy and Ireland, that have really excited the Florida- and Dallas-based photographer.

Duffley first visited Ireland 20 years ago to do a shoot for British magazine Home & Gardens. “My mum was English, from Yorkshire, but I fell in love with Ireland. I stayed after the shoot and produced stories for a few American magazines. I’ve been smitten ever since,” she says.

Over the years, she’s photographed Darina Allen’s Ballymaloe cookery

school, fashion designer Louise Kennedy at her Georgian home in Dublin, and furniture designer Joseph Walsh at his studio in Cork. When Duffley was photographing Kennedy – for the second time – last August, the designer encouraged Duffley to take a trip to Ballilogue in Co Kilkenny, to see the restored collection of stone buildings that have been transformed into holiday rental and wedding accommodation.

“Ballilogue is so special. The mix of modern interiors and the historic buildings [some of which date back to 1700] is wonderful,” she says. “In the renovation they’ve managed to get that perfect blend of the minimalism of the design and the quaintness of the architecture.”

“When shooting it, I wanted to try to capture the essence of what the designer was doing. I wanted to show how it feels when you’re in the room. A lot of the time people use too wide a lens and then the room looks too cold. I always try to use the longest lens possible.”

On her website, Duffley has a quote from a US interiors magazine editor that says, “Looking at one of her images can

almost tell you what a room smells like, how a fabric feels beneath your hand, or the joke someone just told. She puts you in the scene. Plus, she’s really cool to hang out with”.

Duffley spent the day at Ballilogue, styling it with fruit and flowers, and items that were already there – “it was like a prop house, there was so much already there,” she says – and waiting in between rain showers for the perfect shots.

“The weather was crazy. It would be pouring rain and then the sun would come out, so whenever I saw good light, I would try to take good shots.”

It was a love of light that made 54-year-old Duffley take up photography. “I was an athlete in high school and was on my way to a game when I ‘saw light’ for the first time,” she says.

“I realised that none of my friends and team mates even noticed it. It was kind of a religious experience for me and it was then that I realised I wanted to be a photographer and get people to see the things that they don’t normally see.”

She started working in fashion photography in Miami, but made the transition to interiors when she was employed at Time Warner, which had a number of interiors magazines in its stable. She has worked for many titles since, including Elle Decor and Coastal Living. “Interiors magazines tend to like me because a lot of interiors photographers don’t like to shoot people but I do. I love magazines that show people in their spaces, even if it is a blurred kid running by. It gives a sense of life.”

Her reputation for using light and “making things look natural even when they’re not” came about after shooting the catalogues for American stores Pottery Barn and Neiman Marcus, the retailer famed for its Christmas Book of fantasy gifts – she was one of the first photographers taking catalogues out of the studio and on location.

“Photography is lighting, so whether I’m shooting a model, a car or interiors, it’s all lighting and composition.”

Duffley has divided her time between Florida and Texas since she divorced seven years ago. In Florida, she lives in a former beach house in the quaint town of Seaside, the waterside community where The Truman Show, the 1998 film starring Jim Carrey, was filmed. She regularly organises shoots on the white sandy beaches of Santa Rosa and Seagrove.

“My house in Florida is filled with a collection of things. I like modern but I like mid-century and antiques, so it’s an eclectic style. I have a big iron bed. In Dallas, I live above my studio in a 2,500 sq ft loft that is open plan and minimalist.”

When it comes to interiors photography, Duffley says she tries to avoid making rooms seem “cavernous and cold”. “Great interior design and great architecture is about proportion. I don’t believe in showing a room all in one shot. Sometimes the details are what tell the story, so definitely use the longest lens possible and still get what you want to show in the image.”

Styling rooms for shoots is essential,



The renovated stone buildings at Ballilogue blend clean minimalist lines inside with the quaintness of the 18th-century architecture, below; Duffley, in her studio in Dallas, above, spent a day at Ballilogue, capturing outdoor shots when the sun came out, left



## FAMILY VALUES WHERE DID MY STUDY GO?

It started innocently enough, writes Nick Greenslade. It always does. To be precise, it started with the table football. There we were, late on Christmas Eve 2015, my father and I, constructing it to give to my seven-year-old, Patrick, the next morning. Truth be told, Nick was doing most of the constructing, as I cursed the instructions and my own DIY inadequacies. Then it struck me: where were we going to put it?

“Oh, we’ll put it here in the study,” my wife, Denise, breezily intervened. As Chamberlain would realise in the months that followed Munich – where the stakes were arguably higher – I see now that I should have stood firm. Instead, I was tired, frustrated and had had a few beers. For the sake of a peaceful Christmas, I acquiesced. Big, big mistake.

The short-term inconvenience was, in fact, limited. The table saw plenty of action from Patrick and his younger brother, Morgan, over the festive period. Most of this, however, took place

before I got home in the evening or on Saturdays, when, like many people on this paper, I am at work.

There would be a few times in the week when I would have to share the study with them. Like most young children with Christmas presents, however, they grew tired of it and moved on to other interests. The precedent had been set, though.

Some background here. We moved into our three-bedroom bungalow in Kent in 2008. Two years later, following the birth of Morgan, we moved in with my parents while our home was transformed into a four-bedroom, two-storey house. As these things do, that took longer (and cost more) than it was supposed to. As the delays and costs mounted, however, one of the consolations was that when we finally moved back, I would have my own study.

This, let me make it clear, was not a “man cave”. Yes, one of the first things I did on moving back in was to get a TV installed and hooked up to Sky. The more important



Nick Greenslade with sons Patrick and Morgan and their table football game in 'his' study

elements, however, were to be my desk, laptop, filing cabinet, books and a small sofa.

This would be a place of retreat where I could read the papers or casually grab a book from the shelves and pass half an hour. Or watch cricket on Sky Sports. Sharing it with two excitable children was not part of the plan.

Having seen the incursions

prompted by the table football recede, I thought I had come through the worst. Then along came Christmas (again!) to unsettle my equilibrium.

By this time, our third child, Emmet, was getting on for three and had discovered the joys of CBeebies, which meant there was competition for the remote control and the main TV. That created some minor tensions as the other two retreated into the study to watch their preferred programmes. Yet it also led to some bonding on Sunday afternoons, as the three of us watched the Premier League game of the day together.

What did the real damage was Patrick’s 2016 Christmas

present – an Xbox. There was only going to be one location for this, and you can guess where. First came the various football and cricket games, then, at the start of this year, Fortnite arrived on the scene. Like any parent whose children have become hooked on this in recent months, I hope the devil is keeping a special place in hell for the creators of and profiteers from Fortnite.

Could we have installed it elsewhere? Well, there was the drawing room. My wife had decided, though, that this was out of bounds. And yes, I did wonder aloud why the room she prized the most was to be left untouched while my bolthole was sacrificed.

I realise, of course, that this lament represents a first world problem and, since I am not getting any great sympathy from my wife – are you reading this, dearest, in the comfort of your nice, tidy drawing room? – I am not asking for much from anyone else. All I will do, then, is offer a few reflections for those among you presented with similar domestic space issues, to avoid rising blood pressure, raised voices and temper tantrums. (Put me down for all three of those.)

I should have set some ground rules from the outset. I am a stickler for tidiness and everything being put in its place. I am not so obsessive as to expect children to match these standards, but sweet papers left lying around, pillows thrown on the floor and other debris casually strewn should be picked up and/or disposed of.

I should have discussed this with my wife, too, because she would largely have shouldered the responsibility of enforcement. As any parent knows, if you don’t lay down the law from the start, it becomes much harder to enact later on.

I should also have positioned all childish distractions further from the bookcases. It’s not really their fault, but it barely registers with young boys when they lean for a moment on one of the shelves and inadvertently knock a book to the floor. The

thought of them touching it with hands that have recently held a chocolate bar or rummaged through a crisp packet makes me shiver.

I see also that, having never played video games as a child, teenager or young man, I failed to appreciate how addictive they can be, and the noise and excitability levels that come with them.

We should have set definitive limits, too, on the amount of time our oldest two could spend in the, sorry, my study. We do this now and it is slowly making for a calmer life, though it does bring the added stress of remembering where we have put the key when we hide it after locking the door.

As for the table football, it is still there, in good condition, which is not surprising – it hasn’t been touched for nearly two years. Anyone who wants it is welcome to get in touch.

Actually, on second thoughts, don’t bother. The idea of chopping it up into small pieces and burning it on the fire is a pleasure I really should not forgo.