

LIVING NOTES

By Meg Walker



GREAT DANES

There really isn't much that can't be sorted with a trip to Søstrene Grene, is there? Now the Danish retailer is even offering children's interiors. What next, batteries? Oh, wait, they have those too, sostrengrene.com.

Bed sky canopy, €36.30; blanket, €15.99; cushions, €4.88 each; door sign, €1.98; boxes, from €1.13 each



FRENCH CONNECTION

The second Christian Lacroix collection for Roche Bobois is an expanded range of stunning sofas, ottomans and armchairs upholstered in dark velvets alongside beautiful bird-patterned screens and decorative pieces. Sophisticated luxury mastered. Sofa, €5,160; armchair, €3,470; rug, €4,830; screen, €7,750; cabinet, €4,165; end table, €1,400; cocktail table, €2,020; dining chair, €1,260; ottoman, €2,340; all at Roche Bobois, Beacon South Quarter, Dublin.

NECTAR OF THE GODS

With professional qualifications in both nutrition and cosmetic science, Kate O'Brien knows what makes a difference to skin health, and her latest tome, *Glow* (Gill Books, €19.99) offers a four-week plan including 60 plant-based, gut-friendly recipes to help you look and feel radiant.



WANT TO INSPIRE THE KIDS?

Airfield's self-guided trail along the woodland walk from March 24 to April 8 will feature a series of large eggs giving visitors an egg-related education on things like the life cycle of a chicken, different egg types (quail, duck, ostrich), nutrition facts, organic vs free range, and trivia. On Easter Sunday, there'll also be an egg hunt. Haven't sorted your child's camp yet? There are still spaces left in the estate's Adventurers Camp too, airfield.ie.



THE CAT'S MEOW PRACTICAL NEEDN'T BE BORING. THIS TRINKET TRAY WILL MAKE ANY FELINE FAN SMILE, €8.50 AT DOTCOMGIFTSHOP.COM.

ROCK STEADY

Having bagged the title European Young Chef 2017, 21-year-old Aisling Rock is building on her experience in the kitchen at Dromoland Castle while studying culinary arts at Galway-Mayo Institute of Technology.



JACK HARDY

WHEN DID YOU REALISE YOU WANTED TO BECOME A CHEF?

I always wanted to cook from a young age, but never saw myself doing it for a living. I initially went to college in Limerick, but soon realised I had made a mistake by not choosing culinary arts, so I left and the following September I was studying culinary arts in GMIT.

YOU'RE JUGGLING YOUR STUDIES WITH WORKING IN DROMOLAND CASTLE – HOW DO YOU MANAGE IT?

Once you get into a routine, it's hard to break that. I've been here

just under a year and am gaining more responsibility each week, which pushes me to achieve more the next week. Executive head chef David McCann and senior sous chef Nickie Flynn are very understanding when it comes to exams – they know I might need a few days off, and that support is great to have.

THE GREATEST LESSONS LEARNED SO FAR?

Once you are organised, you'll be able to achieve anything with the right mindset. People who are not chefs always have this idea that being a chef is one of the most

stressful jobs going, but I see it as it is. Any person can make any job stressful if they aren't organised.

WHAT'S YOUR COOKING PHILOSOPHY? Everything on the plate must be in season. If it's not in season where you are, it's not local. I also think that when plating a dish or thinking about a dish, everything must have a purpose, from taste to colour.

WHAT CUISINES INSPIRE YOU? French cuisine – people might think it's old fashioned, but if you don't know the basics first, how will you better yourself? It's like running before you can walk.

WHAT CAN GUESTS EXPECT WHEN DINING AT DROMOLAND CASTLE THIS SPRING? The best food, which is seasonal and full of flavours. I am more than excited for a new spring menu full of seasonal ingredients that I know guests will enjoy.

HOW DO YOU LIKE TO COOK WHEN OFF DUTY?

I live at home, and cooking dinner for the family is a big thing in my household. There is always a dinner at 6pm. Dad doesn't expand his tastebuds much – if there aren't spuds, it's not much of a dinner. So the type of food I cook is mostly good Irish dinners: bacon and cabbage, fillet steak...

WHAT WILL YOU DO NEXT?

Plans are changing in my head every day. I hope to stay in Dromoland for the summer season, and after that I plan to go to London and hopefully gain more experience and build on what I have learnt here.

WHERE DO YOU HOPE TO BE IN FIVE YEARS' TIME?

I hope to have gained as much

experience as I can and have the option to open my own restaurant back in the west coast of Ireland.

HOW DID IT FEEL TO WIN THE TITLE OF EUROPEAN YOUNG CHEF OF 2017?

To say it was unexpected would be an understatement. Although saying that, a lot of hours staying back in college getting the dish correct... there had to be a reward for it. I cannot thank my mentor, Shane Sheedy, enough, and GMIT for all they did the month leading up to the competition.

WHAT DID YOU COOK IN THE COMPETITION?

The dish was cured mackerel with raw and pickled salad and sheep's milk yoghurt. The biggest challenge was assembling the dish. In my practice runs, I was leaving myself half an hour to plate, but in the competition that half an hour felt like five minutes.

WHAT DO YOU LIKE TO COOK IN SPRING?

Spring is the best time of the year because everything is rebuilding itself after the winter and everything is fresh. In April, if you look outside, everything is turning green again, and there are newborns everywhere. I always try to have lamb because it's the best time to have it. Rack of lamb is one of my favourites. If I am off on Easter Sunday, with the help of my sister, we always put down a huge feast. I go to the local butchers and try to find the best leg or shoulder of lamb and cook it at 190°C for two hours. Serve with roasted root vegetables, creamy mashed potatoes and mint sauce. The lamb is full flavour like rosemary and garlic, and it is completely tender.

dromoland.ie @aisling_rock

CLEAR YOUR DIARY LIKE GIN? THEN YOU WON'T WANT TO MISS GIN EXPERIENCE DUBLIN, APRIL 6-7 AT DUBLIN CASTLE. THE FESTIVAL WILL SEE CONNOISSEURS AND PRODUCERS GATHER IN CELEBRATION OF THEIR FAVOURITE TIPPLE, WITH MASTERCLASSES, FOOD PAIRINGS, UNIQUE GARNISHES AND TASTINGS GALORE. GRAB YOUR FAVOURITE TONIC, GINEXPERIENCEDUBLIN.COM.

