

# EMERALD STATUS



A quiet moment  
in the Burren and  
(opposite) Louis  
Mulcahy pottery.



An introduction  
to **Ireland**  
through its  
craft traditions.

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I'VE ALWAYS BEEN  
DRAWN TO  
BEAUTIFUL THINGS.

I'm an art director and photographer by trade, and I dabble in painting and knitting, calligraphy and baking, and other creative pursuits. It's true that I once traveled solo to southern France for a pastry workshop that, for me, was almost as much about photos of the cream puffs and financiers as about the sweets themselves. A trip to Amsterdam and its museums led to my just-for-fun, Dutch masters-inspired still-life photo series.

So when an opportunity to visit Ireland came up, I thought, what better way to get to know the country than through its creative traditions – and the creative types keeping them alive? The well-connected people at on-site tour company Dream Escape (they work with Virtuoso travel advisors to craft trips and experiences in Ireland, Scotland, England, and Wales) delivered my maker-centric itinerary. With my guide, I'd visit Ireland's western coast and southern counties, as well as Dublin, meeting some of the country's most talented artisans along the way – and staying at some unforgettable hotels.

The journey kicked off at 800-year-old Ashford Castle, former summer home of the Guinness family in County Mayo – and current haunt of two Irish wolfhounds, Cronan and Garvan. Afternoon tea there was as impressive as the property itself, with a tiered stand of treats as tall as I am and, at my selection, strawberry-and-cream tea.

My Irish craft immersion began the following morning in County Clare, site of the Burren, a lunar-looking landscape that's rich in



A selection of custom-dyed wool at Lisbeth Mulcahy's studio. Opposite, clockwise from top left: John Sheehy, a thrower at Louis Mulcahy's pottery studio; the Dingle Peninsula; Sonia Reynolds, co-founder of Stable of Ireland; and a sweet surprise along Conor Pass.





geologic and botanical resources. My guide introduced me to The Burren Perfumery, where owner Sadie Chowen and her staff make natural and organic perfumes, soaps, and skincare products inspired by the surrounding flora. Scent families are grouped by geographic zone and bottled and labeled by hand at the perfumery. Along with a parcel of products, I left with the recipe for the perfumery tearoom’s just-right tomato soup.

At the neo-Gothic Adare Manor in County Limerick, I met another craftsman in mixologist Ariel Sanecki, who serves his innovative cocktails in over-the-top glasses, which he also designs. My favorite: the hand-blown swan, a vessel for the vodka, rhubarb, and pink peppercorn Cocktail King.

**A waterfall along Conor Pass. Opposite, clockwise from top left: Local flora, scops owl Tiny at Adare Manor, a Georgian door in Dublin, a classic martini at Dublin’s Westbury hotel, Ashford Castle’s grounds, the Gold Drawing Room at Ballyfin, and Ashford Castle’s general manager Niall Rochford with resident Irish wolfhounds Garvan and Cronan.**

We explored the Dingle Peninsula next, motoring along steep, narrow curves on Conor Pass, a section of Ireland’s 1,500-mile-long coastal Wild Atlantic Way. In the town of Dingle, weaver Lisbeth Mulcahy’s studio houses two sizable looms and shelves of colorful custom-dyed yarn upstairs. In the main-floor shop, her rich scarves, throws, and wall hangings are on display. Farther down the rugged coast, Lisbeth’s husband, potter Louis Mulcahy, and his team of skilled ceramists turn out the graceful stoneware/porcelain-blend pieces that earned Louis an honorary degree from the National University of Ireland. The Design & Crafts Council of Ireland described him as “the godfather of Irish craft.” The ocean view from his workshop clearly influences his color palettes.

Irish butter kicked my nondairy diet out the window on my first day – this is a country where they do dairy right. Further dairy enticement popped up in County Cork, where we met farmer Johnny Lynch, owner of Macroom Buffalo Mozzarella – and a two-day-old baby buffalo, the newest addition to the country’s first herd of Italian milking water buffalo.

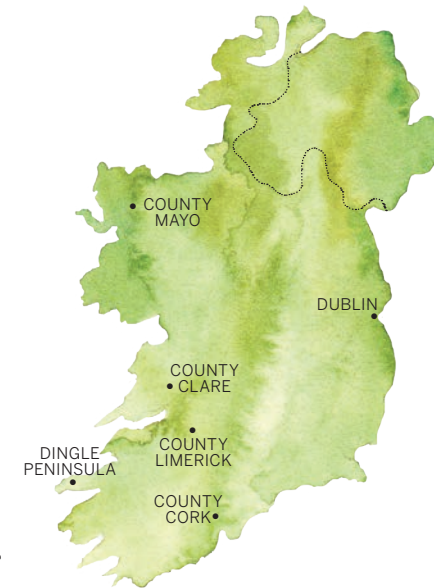
Back in Dublin, adjacent to The Westbury hotel, I discovered a pocket of artisanal joy in The Westbury Mall, a collection of boutiques with an emphasis on local tradition. There’s Stable, with handmade Irish wool and linen from around the island; Madigan, with Elaine Madigan’s contemporary cashmere pieces; and – be still my heart – Paula Rowan’s buttery bespoke gloves. I returned home, my suitcase heavier with tangible reminders of still-thriving Irish traditions and my memory bank richer with the images I collected.







Clockwise from left: The Burren Perfumery; Elaine Madigan, owner and designer of Madigan cashmere in The Westbury Mall; The Burren Perfumery goods; and cheeses from Macroom Buffalo Mozzarella.



## IRISH INSIGHT

Where to stay and how to go.

**60** On-site travel-design company **Dream Escape** can work with Virtuoso travel advisors to organize custom journeys in Ireland, England, Scotland, and Wales, tailored to just about any interest. A two-week trip through Ireland and Scotland, for instance, has stops for single-malt tasting, golfing at St Andrews, falconry with Harris's hawks, an insider's look at Dublin, and more.

**STAY** At **Adare Manor** in County Limerick, views across manicured golf greens contrast with plush interiors, including dramatic freestanding black bathtubs and ornate tapestries. The 104-room hotel's resident falconers introduce guests to Adare's birds of prey, which range from Tiny, a petite scops owl, to Saoirse, an American bald eagle. *Doubles from \$400, including breakfast daily, complimentary valet parking, and afternoon tea for two once during stay.*

**Ashford Castle's** 83 rooms and suites are soaked with color – emerald, ruby, cobalt – and swathed in silk, satin, velvet, and brocade. The property, reopened in 2015 after a \$100 million cellars-to-chandeliers restoration by Red Carnation hotels, has a spa housed in a conservatory and a sixteenth-century coal bunker that's now a snug wine cellar. *Doubles from \$360, including breakfast daily and a \$100 dining credit.*

**Ballyfin** has just 21 rooms, set in a Regency mansion on a 614-acre estate at the foot of the Slieve Bloom Mountains. George and Amal have vacationed here, in appropriately ornate surroundings – carved and canopied French beds, early Georgian paintings, and rococo flourishes rule this gilt-to-the-max country escape. *Doubles from \$990, including all meals and a \$100 spa credit.*

In Dublin, **The Westbury** is a coolly sophisticated 205-room spot adjacent to Grafton Street shopping. The on-site retail offerings are not to be missed: The boutique Westbury Mall houses shops that trade in Irish-made goods, from jewelry to custom leather gloves and, of course, wool and linen. *Doubles from \$420, including breakfast daily and one lunch or dinner for two. VI.*

## TIP

"If you're staying at Ballyfin, don't miss a tour of the Irish National Stud & Gardens in Tully, County Kildare, birthplace of many champion racehorses. The impressive Japanese gardens were created in the early 1900s by master horticulturist Tassa Eida and his son Minoru."

– Ginny Caragol, Virtuoso travel advisor, New York City

