



*Chef Special:*  
**Richard Corrigan**

*Dream Escape* meets multi-award-winning Irish chef Richard Corrigan to talk about his passion for season-driven, down-to-earth food, his beautiful estate in Ireland and the stories behind some of his luxurious London restaurants

WORDS | SOPHIE FARRAH

**A**CCLAIMED IRISH CHEF Richard Corrigan has cooked for the Queen, Concorde and everyone in between, but despite dozens of awards and a fleet of hugely successful restaurants in London and Ireland, his celebrated food remains hearty and humble, much like the man himself.

“Everything can become so stylised so easily,” he muses. “It can become about ego and ambition, and then you end up with a microscope trying to see what’s on your plate – micro herbs and all this nonsense!” he laughs.

Forget foams and molecular flourishes, this gregarious chef’s renowned food combines modern luxury with unpretentious, home-inspired cooking. He is passionate about seasonality and ingredients sourced in Britain and Ireland, and when he begins to talk about

his upbringing, in his lilting Irish accent, it’s clear to see why.

“I was brought up with nature (Corrigan grew up on a 25-acre farm in Ireland’s County Meath) – long grasses and wild meadows, seeing cattle and sheep and birds come and go, and every day I watched my mother make bread in the farmhouse and that stayed with me.

Now we bake all our own bread in our restaurants and have done for 30 years. I just love the smell of it,” he explains.

Corrigan’s bucolic childhood quickly began to develop into an incredible culinary journey, one which started with a part-time job in the kitchen of a local hotel.

“I decided then that it was what I wanted to do. I knew I wasn’t going to be a philosopher or do a master’s degree; I am a boy from the country! Food was right up my street.” →



**“We use beautiful produce from all over the UK... That’s my soul. I am not looking for daintiness, I want food that’s intelligent, seasonal and elegant”**

it’s about the season and the day of the week. We use beautiful produce from all over the UK and try to encompass the best of farming. That’s really what it’s all about. That’s my soul. I am not looking for daintiness, I want food that’s intelligent, seasonal and elegant.”

In addition to serving brimming shellfish platters, traditional fish and chips, and hunks of sirloin steak, in



**Pictured from left to right: Corrigan’s Mayfair restaurant; Bentley’s traditional Fish & Chips; Virginia Park Lodge**



He then spent several years in the Netherlands, and in 1987 jumped into the sweltering kitchens of London’s top restaurants, where he picked up two Michelin stars in 1994 and 1997 respectively.

“I thought London was quite Dickensian at first – I came from a nice apartment in Amsterdam to an absolute hovel on Camden Road. I wanted to pack my cases and head out of there as soon as possible! But London grows on you. It pulls you in, starts to mould you, and you start getting a feeling that it’s your town,” he explains. “Dreams can be made in London – I am living proof of that.”

Today, Corrigan’s restaurants are enormously popular, and *Dream Escape’s* travel designers can organise a choice of unforgettable stays nearby. Corrigan’s impressive London portfolio includes Bentley’s, a timeless oyster and seafood restaurant just off Piccadilly; and the sumptuous Corrigan’s Mayfair,

which reimagines the concept of modern British and Irish cuisine, combining premium seasonal produce with Corrigan’s unique style. More recent additions include Daffodil Mulligan, a lively restaurant and bar in the heart of London’s arty Shoreditch, and Virginia Park Lodge, a beautiful 150-acre estate in Ireland’s County Cavan. Each one has its own personality and offers something to suit all tastes.

“At Bentley’s we do a wonderful ceviche of native lobster with watermelon, coriander and a squeeze of lime. The flavours will blow your head off and make you go ‘wow,’” Corrigan enthuses.

“In Mayfair we’ve got a wood pigeon pie, which sounds heavy, but it’s actually really refined. It’s like a little ballet going on your plate. I hate the expression ‘fine dining’ – I would call it ‘dining in a fine environment,’” he adds.

“They’re all different – it’s not about signature dishes,

arrangement with *Dream Escape’s* travel designers, Bentley’s also host regular oyster masterclasses.

A must for any seafood lover, these fascinating 90-minute sessions include Champagne on arrival, oyster identification and tasting with sommelier-matched wine, and a recipe card and shucking knife to take home.

“You’re also shown how to open oysters – but before you drink the Champagne,” Corrigan chuckles.

Thanks to Corrigan’s famous hospitality, his restaurants are home to a catalogue of colourful stories involving VIP guests and legendary St Patrick’s Day parties, and even the moment when culinary queen Prue Leith tried her very first oyster at Bentley’s. And are the rumours true about a certain of member of the Royal Family being a fan? →



Pictured: Bentley's Classic Fish Pie;  
Richard Corrigan in the kitchen;  
Right: Royal Seafood Platter

**“Yes, the Queen has visited my restaurant – I cooked for her on her birthday, and she didn’t leave early! She had a fantastic time”**

“Yes, the Queen has visited my restaurant – I cooked for her on her birthday, and she didn’t leave early! She had a fantastic time,” Corrigan beams.

To cater for such clientele, each of Corrigan’s venues have impressive private dining rooms. These include the aptly named Crustacea Room at Bentley’s, which features pictures from Corrigan’s personal art collection (he can often be found in one of London’s many galleries), to the legendary Chef’s Table at Corrigan’s Mayfair, where diners watch the theatre of the kitchen unfold through a large glass window, while feasting on wild game, foraged vegetables, organic fruits and sustainable fish.

“I’ll be honest with you, our private dining rooms have hosted everyone: kings, queens, prime ministers – you name it,” says Corrigan.

“But you know, Tom Jones always says to me, ‘I love coming here because there’s never a camera outside,’ and that says a lot about me and my team. We’re discreet and that’s so important. For a guy who likes to talk, I know how to keep my mouth shut.”

Corrigan’s restaurants may *feel* exclusive, but the price tag doesn’t have to be; in London’s luxurious Mayfair, the very reasonable lunchtime set menu at Corrigan’s includes three delicious courses, wine and a glass of Champagne.

“And it is Champagne by the way – Grand Cru – not sparkling wine,” he laughs.

His restaurants are also much loved for their atmosphere; this is in part down to Corrigan’s spirit, but also the history he shares with each one. For example, he was once head chef at Bentley’s 28 years ago, before he bought the restaurant in 2005, and has since breathed new life into it. Often referred to as ‘The Grand Dame of Swallow Street’, it is today considered



a London institution. Similarly, great care has been taken with Virginia Park Lodge in Ireland: a grand 18th century country estate set in 100 acres of beautiful countryside overlooking Lough Ramor. This too has been a labour of love and holds a unique place in Corrigan’s heart, namely because it is where he married his wife Maria in 1985.

“On my wedding night I thought ‘if this place ever comes on the market, I’ll buy it,’” he recalls.

“I’ve poured everything I own into it.”

Originally built as a hunting lodge for the first Earl of Bective, Lord Headfort, Virginia Park Lodge has been meticulously and lovingly restored by Corrigan and his team. Self-sufficiency is key; he proudly goes

into detail about his vast composting system and that everything, where possible, is thoughtfully upcycled and repurposed. Conveniently located just 50 minutes from Dublin and 90 minutes from Belfast, Virginia Park Lodge is available for, via *Dream Escape’s* travel designers, individual stays as well as exclusive hire of the entire estate.

“It’s not been done like a group of hotels – it’s a bit eccentric, it’s a bit mad, and maybe that’s what I’ve learned about England. I love a bit of English madness, I do.”

The main house has 23 en-suite bedrooms, many of which showcase views of the lake. There are a further 15 stylish cottages and the latest addition is 12 luxurious →



shepherd's huts; these private and serene spaces are nestled on the edge of the estate's Deerpark Forest and offer comfortable double beds, solid oak flooring, shaker style kitchens and cosy log burners. Whichever type of accommodation is preferred, 'a multitude of memorable activities await, including horse riding, boating, canoeing and fishing, while land-based options include archery, skeet shooting and golf. There are also numerous beautiful gardens and orchards to explore. The food offering is a perfect example of Corrigan's passion for wild, flavour-rich, down-to-earth cooking, with menus compiled entirely from what is grown on site; the vast garden operation at Virginia Park Lodge not only supplies its own kitchens, but all of Corrigan's London restaurants too.



Pictured clockwise from top left: New luxurious shepherd's huts at Virginia Park Lodge; Bentley's Oyster Bar & Grill in London's Picadilly; Daffodil Mulligan, bar and restaurant in London's Shoreditch

"We cook from the land and whatever's around us - I've been busy picking beans and tomatoes recently, and we've got two acres of kale," he says.

"When you grow it yourself, it tastes better. End of story." Today, Corrigan's empire is very much a family affair; his eldest son Richie and daughter Jess are both involved and his youngest son, Robbie, is studying to do the same. Despite his success, Corrigan remains very hands-on, whether it's gardening, cooking, or even making furniture; he was with a master carpenter during this interview, learning how to make a chair.

"I want all the shepherd's huts at Virginia Park to have a lovely wooden table and chair outside, but I want us to make them on-site," he explains.

"I don't want new or off the peg, how about a bit of personality?"

Something that Richard Corrigan has in spades. 🍷



Find out more



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**Sue Morris, Head of Marketing**

"Having been a guest on the Chef's Table at Corrigan's Mayfair, I will never forget the personalised vegan menu that was given to me. It read 'Keep it simple', and was signed by Richard Corrigan. It was an exceptional gastronomic experience in the heart of Mayfair."

◆  
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