

#greatstaysoftheworld

Seek rest and restoration and make yourself at home at Ireland's Ballyfin

Story by **Jennifer Brady**



The immaculate driveway snaking its way to Ballyfin is designed to ensure you see nothing of the house until, suddenly, you see everything. And there it is: a magnificent Georgian retreat at the foot of the Slieve Bloom Mountains, the butlers, polished but jovial, lined up under the grand pillars to greet every guest. It's hard to believe that just 16 years ago parts of the ceilings were collapsing from wet rot, the stonework was crumbling and the conservatory was a tangle of vegetation and broken glass.

Originally the private home of the Cooté family and later on a rather unlikely school, Ballyfin in Ireland's County Laois was purchased by electronics magnate Fred Krehbiel

Ballyfin displays its art on the walls and on the plate, thanks to five-year Michelin-starred chef Sam Moody

● Rooms from £495 per night. The Gardener's Cottage, from £1,768 per night. ballyfin.com

in 2002 and painstakingly transformed into a luxurious country hotel. It may be the centrepiece of 614 green acres of ancient woods, parkland and walled gardens, but there are just 20 splendid suites here, each with a riot of art and antiques that jostle with just enough hi-tech gadgets and homely touches. It feels, quite deliberately, like you happen to be visiting a very well-to-do friend.

You can explore the grounds by foot, bicycle, golf buggy or even horse-drawn carriage and never see another soul. Enjoy archery, shooting and falconry, order a hamper for two in the secluded picnic house – or, for an extra layer of privacy, stay in the new, handsomely decorated Gardener's Cottage, complete with hot tub and views over the vast kitchen gardens.

Head chef Sam Moody, who held a Michelin star for five years at The Bath Priory, takes his cues for his restaurant menu from the herbs, fruits and vegetables that explode from these gardens' limey soil. His evening dishes – always expertly executed and brimming with fresh, hyper-local produce – are as showstopping as Ballyfin itself. **GQ**