



Living it up at Longueville

Lionel Richie and Billy Joel have been some of William and Aisling O'Callaghan's most famous guests, but you don't have to be a celebrity to feel like an A-lister at Longueville House in Mallow, writes Maria Moynihan.

Let's get the puns out of the way first. You could presume that Lionel Richie was practically dancing on the (ornate Italian) ceiling with delight when he stayed at Longueville House in July 2007, while uptown guy Billy Joel felt very much at home in the 18th century Georgian mansion set on a 500-acre estate and farm in Cork's Blackwater valley.

"I was driving around Mallow trying to find peanut M&Ms," laughs Aisling O'Callaghan, recalling the preparations for the popstar pair, who jetted in to perform at JP McManus' daughter's wedding in Limerick.

"Lionel Richie was a total gentleman. He made sure to say hello and goodbye and thank you to all the staff, and he was going around like any other customer, taking photographs and messing around saying: 'Welcome to my house!'"

LONGUEVILLE LINEAGE

As the third generation of O'Callaghans to live at Longueville, William and Aisling can actually trace their ancestry right back to Donough O'Callaghan, who lost the lands during the Cromwellian confiscation.

Banished to hell or to Connacht – though some had the sense to escape to Spain – the estate became home to the Longfield family, who built Longueville House in 1720, adding the distinctive Victorian conservatory in 1866.

However, in 1938, William's grandfather bought back Longueville, and in 1967 the country house was opened to guests by William's parents Michael and Jane.

Then, as now, local produce was the lynchpin of success.

"I can remember the first kiwi arriving in the kitchen," recalls William. "But everything was local, and you ate veg by the season. Back then, you did things the way they are supposed to be done."

"We always had sheep and tillage, and the beet would have gone to the sugar factory. I can remember taking the milk to the creamery in churns in the back of the trailer."

William's apprenticeship to the family business started with childhood chores like fruit picking, carrot peeling and bottle scrubbing. Hooked, he studied Hotel Management at DIT, where he met Aisling, a solicitor's daughter from Kilkenny.

The couple married in 1993 and set about attracting Irish visitors to Longueville to replace the English and American markets that collapsed during the Troubles and after 9/11. However, they were determined not to take the swimming pool and spa route to success.

"This is an old country house estate, and we try to be true to its origin," explains Aisling.

FLAVOUR OF NORTH CORK

William's forté is food with a distinct North Cork flavour. Menus at Longueville include pork, lamb and game from the farm, vegetables, fruit and herbs from the two-acre walled garden and salmon from the Blackwater River that runs through the farm.

"What we can't do ourselves on the property, we try to source locally and spend our money in the area," stresses William, listing Kanturk Dairies, Ardrahan cheese, butchers TD Cronin in Newmarket and

Jack McCarthy in Kanturk and the Castletownbere Fisherman's Co-op as long-time suppliers.

"We can't get chickens anywhere, though," he adds. "It's ridiculous; we have to drive down to East Cork if we want to buy chickens."

Signature dishes at Longueville include Kenmare Bay mussels baked with a herb crust, Newmarket sirloin beef with olive and garden herb potato cake and red wine sauce and pan-fried scallop of cod citrus, not forgetting heart-warming desserts like chocolate and praline parfait.

Prices start at €29 for Sunday lunch, €39 for a three-course mid-week menu with coffee, €65 for a seven-course "tasting menu" and €90 for full-blown indulgence. And you might just bump into Michael Flatley or '60s pop-icon Donovan, both of whom have been known to dine at Longueville.

LIVING LONGUEVILLE

While William has cemented Longueville's reputation for fine food, Aisling has concentrated on promoting the house as the perfect location for a blissful country break.

Staying true to tradition, on-site activities include duck and pheasant shooting in winter and fishing for wild river salmon and brown trout in summer.

Dawn chorus walks throughout May, mushroom hunts in October and a Christmas shopping evening are annual attractions, while local amenities including Doneraill and Millstreet country parks, Ballyhass activity centre, Mallow Racecourse and the Ballyhouras make the Blackwater region an attractive alternative to West Cork.

For visitors, value for money is key, with mid-week packages including one night's B&B and evening meal starting at €110pps. "People still want the quality, but they want it at a more affordable rate," says Aisling.

"We've come up with some very good packages, and rather than getting somebody who might say: 'We'll see you in two or three years

time,' we're doing it now in such a way that we could get them back twice a year."

THE FAMILY WAY

In recent years, Longueville has become renowned for exclusive weddings for 20-130 guests. Indeed, Peter Kelly, aka "Franc" recently held a photo shoot for his bridal magazine on the grounds.

Another growing business is an artisan food range, including chutneys, jams, preserves, fruit liquors and an apple brandy from Longueville's own orchards. William's late father Michael, who sadly passed away in March, was the distiller extraordinaire of the family who was well known for making his own wine, so guests could quite literally request the "house red".

As for the next generation of O'Callaghans, Elena (14) has inherited the family food gene and loves baking with her grandmother Jane. Meanwhile Mikey (8) is more of an outdoors enthusiast.

"He'll be a real little country squire," laughs Aisling.

"He'll have to do a bit of work as well!" adds William wryly. **CL**



William and Aisling O'Callaghan with their children Elena (14) and Mikey (8).

Picture: Donal O'Leary

