



PERFECTLY FORMED

Gwen Wilkinson visits a talented potter in the Glen of Aherlow

For those of us sitting in our cars, bumper-to-bumper in traffic, crawling along in first gear, it's only natural to feel envy towards someone whose home-to-work commute time is approximately 10 seconds.

Such an envious position belongs to potter, Mandy Parslow, whose home, studio and showroom are located under the one roof of a restored 19 century gate lodge in the breathtaking Glen of Aherlow, Co. Tipperary.

With a degree in ceramics from Cardiff University, Mandy has worked in potteries in France, the UK and Ireland. In 1996, she bought Clonbeg Lodge, a gate lodge to Ballinacourty House. Unoccupied for over 20 years, the lodge was in an advanced state of decay. Numerous slates were missing and the rafters had collapsed. The external lime plaster was rotten and falling off in chunks. The timber sash windows, lintels and surrounding brick-work were also rotten. The surrounding woodland was quietly engulfing the entire premises.

However, none of this deterred Mandy. "I have always been interested in old ruins. When I was growing up, our family would head out on Sunday drives and, while everyone else was admiring the

Unoccupied for over 20 years, the lodge was in an advanced state of decay. The surrounding woodland was quietly engulfing the entire premises



latest bungalow, I was always much more interested in the pile of stones in a neighbouring field.”

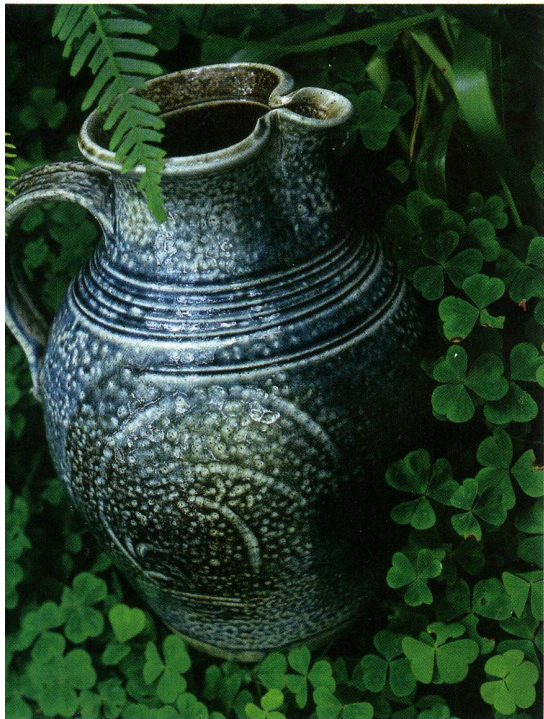
Her first step in the restoration process was to acquire planning permission to restore and extend the property. The original lodge was only 57 square metres and comprised of two small rooms, a small hall and a fireplace. In order to accommodate a studio, showroom and living quarters, Mandy drew up plans to increase the total ground-floor space to 100 square metres.

When permission was granted by Tipperary Co. Council, the next step was to remove the external plaster, a painstakingly slow task which Mandy undertook herself. Beneath the plaster she discovered cut sandstone. With its warm, subtle pink and umber hues, the local stone was simply too good to cover up, and so she made the decision not to re-plaster. In fact, the entire lodge was built with this beautiful stone. With one external and several interior walls removed to accommodate the expansion, there was enough cut stone to face the entire new extension and one wall of the kiln shed.



The original lodge was only 57 square metres and was comprised of two small rooms, a small hall and a fireplace. In order to accommodate a studio, showroom and living quarters, Mandy drew up plans to increase the total ground-floor space to 100 square metres





Though the original windows were of timber sash, no two were the same. Having studied a number of options, Mandy opted for the three panes up, two across configuration, in timber. Replacing the windows in the original lodge was a complicated task as lintels and brick-work had to be completely replaced. Apart from the retention of three external walls of the lodge, the only remaining original features included a softly-worn entrance doorstep, a boot scrape and several living-room flagstones that have been put to use in the garden. Three years later, and with the help and patience of family and friends, the lodge has been restored to its present glory.

Once the lodge was habitable, Mandy was anxious to tackle the garden. "I didn't have any grand plan. It just sort of evolved. I knew I wanted traditional cottage garden plants: fox gloves, hollyhocks, Welsh poppies, lily of the valley, cowslips, mallow and wild climbing roses. I prefer plants whose purpose is to more than just look pretty. Many of the plants have beautiful smells and can be used in cooking or infusions, so there are lots of herbs such as lavenders, feverfew, thyme, catmint and fennel."

Mandy has also planted lots of fruit trees and bushes including cherries,

"I knew I wanted traditional cottage garden plants: fox gloves, hollyhocks, Welsh poppies, lily of the valley, cowslips, mallow and wild climbing roses."



"I prefer plants whose purpose is to more than just look pretty. Many of the plants have beautiful smells and can be used in cooking or infusions, so there are lots of herbs such as lavenders, feverfew, thyme, catmint and fennel."

pears, kiwis, apples, tayberries, black and white currants, strawberries and bilberries. It will be interesting to see how the kiwis survive Irish climactic conditions.

With such a magnificent landscape and all it entails to keep it at its growing best, it's a wonder she manages to get any pottery work done at all. Fortunately, discipline does not seem to pose a problem.

"The garden and surrounding mountains are a constant source of inspiration for me. Much of my work embodies the ever-changing tones and textures of the landscape so I can't use lack of stimulation as an excuse."

If you would like to enjoy some of Mandy's appreciation of nature, you can visit her showroom, which is open to the public. Tel. 062 56011



Photography Gwen Wilkinson

"Much of my work embodies the ever-changing tones and textures of the landscape, so I can't use lack of stimulation as an excuse."

