

# Enchanting Castle Leslie will place you under its 'amazing' spell...



By Catherine Corr

Is it just me or has anyone else noticed that nowadays the word 'amazing' is used to describe, well, everything? I have to admit I'm guilty of using it myself. Without really thinking about what it means, I often find myself describing everything from food to clothes to locations as 'amazing' – I think I need to stop reading fashion magazines and listening to Radio 1.

I'm pleased to say that my partner (his favourite word at the minute is lethal, the result of living with Tyrone boys) and I genuinely discovered somewhere 'amazing' when we stayed at Castle Leslie recently. Not only has this majestic building with its picturesque setting in the quaint village of Glaslough in Co Monaghan attracted celebrities, politicians, poets, ambassadors and even Louis Walsh and his *X Factor* hopefuls, through its grand doors, but its reputation as one of the most luxurious wedding venues in Ireland is undoubtedly the reason why Macca chose it as the ideal venue for his marriage to Heather Mills – 'amazing'? We definitely thought so.

Nestled on 1,000 acres of unspoilt Irish countryside, dotted with ancient woodlands and glistening lakes, Castle Leslie is one of the last great Irish castle estates still in the hands of its founding family. Since the 1660s the Leslie family have lived on the castle estate making their home into one of the finest and luxurious hotels Ireland has to offer. The castle has a variety of supreme accommodation for guests to choose from. As well as staying in the grand castle, visitors can take advantage of the five star self catering cottages (perfect for families or large groups) and The Lodge, which is where we had the pleasure of spending the night.

The Lodge is a country house boutique hotel on the castle grounds and offers five star service and accommodation. It is also home to the AA Rosette winning Snaffles Restaurant, the luxurious Victorian Treatment Rooms and the castle's famous equestrian centre, which many of the rooms overlook. We arrived at The Lodge's grand reception on the Saturday evening. The castle's connection to all things equine is evident as soon as you arrive. We were impressed by the collection of captivating portraits and pictures that adorned the walls of the reception and the corridor leading to the sleeping quarters.

Opening the door to our room we were simply speechless, it was breathtaking. With its rich furnishings, luscious plum coloured walls, a king sized bed, a spacious marble bathroom with a free standing bath and wet room and a balcony, it was the epitome of luxury.

The bedrooms in The Lodge have been carefully decorated in keeping with the building's period features and designed with comfort in mind. With bespoke and individual artwork coupled with expertly sourced furniture it was obvious why Castle Leslie is considered one of the finest hotels in Ireland.

With a table booked, I couldn't wait for dinner in Snaffles Restaurant. Located on the mezzanine floor of the building, Snaffles is an open-plan brasserie with a dramatic hand carved ceiling and robust oak beams, which blend in effortlessly with a striking wall of contemporary glass. Superb locally sourced food is prepared by award winning chefs in the open kitchen as diners look on. Studying the extensive menu, we knew we were in for a treat. For starters my partner had the tempura Dublin Bay prawn tails served with mango and cucumber salsa and lime and coriander creme fraiche, while I tucked into a duo of smoked and barbecued Irish salmon with marinated cucumber and horseradish cream and smoked paprika oil. Next we were treated to an appetiser of vegetable soup, which was served in a miniature china cup and saucer - very impressive. Our main courses consisted of a trio of ravioli for my partner, containing mouthwatering ingredients such as aubergine, spinach, garlic, sun dried tomatoes, cream cheese, roast bell pepper and basil cream – simply delicious. I had the corn fed roast chicken supreme with fondant potatoes, cream leeks and wild mushroom sauce. For dessert we both tucked into the warm apple and pear crumble with brown bread ice cream. The fact that everything is sourced locally is evident from the taste and freshness of the food - we simply loved every minute of it.

After dinner we made our way downstairs to Conor's Bar – the social hub of the estate. Here



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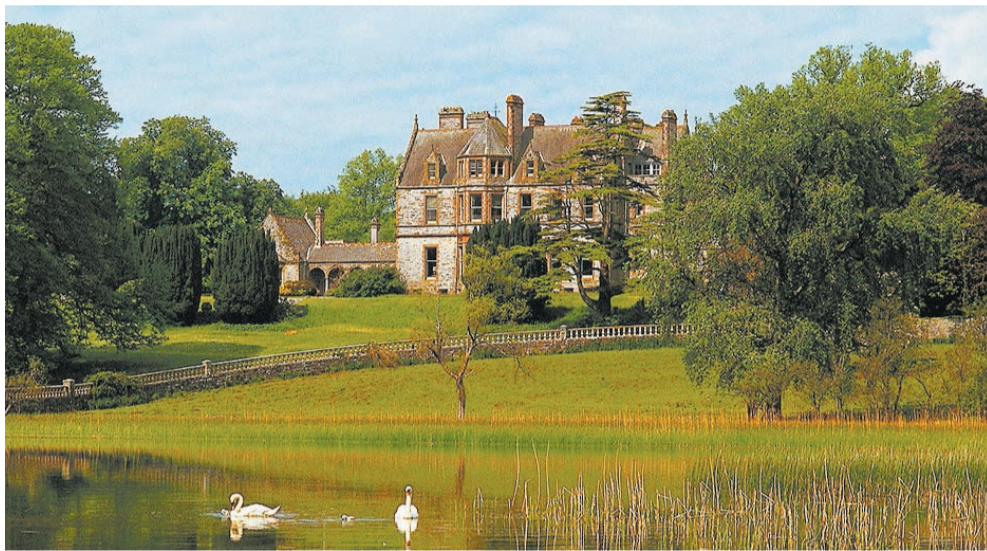
guests will find the ideal spot to relax and enjoy pre or post dinner drinks. Locals and guests can join together in an atmosphere of conviviality and comfort. Conor's Bar also serves a variety of dishes throughout the day, with great music and friendly banter in abundance.

The next morning and with a slightly heavy head, it was time for a welcomed breakfast in Snaffles and again the choice was endless. We both decided on a hot buffet breakfast/feast with lashings of freshly baked wheaten bread. Breakfast time in Castle Leslie again caters for all tastes with everything from a continental breakfast to Irish smoked salmon and sweet French toast on the packed menu.

Following breakfast, I took myself off to The Victorian Treatment Rooms for a well deserved hot stone massage. The popular spa with its organic products, consists of seven treatment rooms, two Victorian steam boxes, a relaxation area and hot tubs overlooking the stables. Highly trained therapists pamper guests with a range of traditional organic therapies from the Eminence Organics range. For a blissful hour and a half I enjoyed the most wonderful hot stone massage and the fact that the staff were so friendly and welcoming, made the experience all the more relaxing – a real treat.

Fully rejuvenated and totally relaxed it was time to hit the road. Even though Castle Leslie is only 20 minutes from my home, it's a world apart and its obvious to see why the rich and famous fall so in love with it.

So, back to the real world, I have already planned a return visit to Castle Leslie and the Victorian Treatment Rooms with my mum, and I bet I can guess the first word she says when we arrive.... yes, "amazing"!



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