

# TO THE MANOR BORN

A rural retreat with all the associated outdoor pursuits is possibly the last place one would expect to find one of the world's leading names in fashion, but with hairdresser James Brown, MELANIE MORRIS has learned to expect the unexpected. Photographs by MARK MOLLOY.

**A**s James Brown pulls up in his Land Rover, check shirt tucked into jeans which are in turn tucked into a sturdy pair of wellies, the scene is about as far removed from the world of catwalks, supermodels and international glamour that surrounds the English hairdresser for most of his year. The only concession to modern life as we meet in the village of Tynagh, Co Galway is the pack of red Marlboro cigarettes peeping out of his breast pocket. "I'm on my holidays," James Brown announces – a five-week break throughout August, but while those renowned within fashion circles spend their summer partying on yachts or Ibiza-bound, Brown throws himself into a very quiet country life.

We drive along winding roads that narrow down to the tiniest of dirt tracks before coming to a sturdy 1900 farmhouse built on 76 very remote acres of rich green land. A river runs along one side while fields spread out up to hills on the horizon. There's no sign of life other than the five cows who graze nearby. "They're The Spice Girls," remarks James. "The two bigger heifers are Victoria and Geri."

Brown bought the property over a weekend in December 2005. "At the time, I had a farmhouse in upstate New York that I was selling. I wanted another rural retreat and someone told me about this place. My parents live in Co Fermanagh so I've always spent a lot of time coming and going from Ireland. The house had been owned by an elderly gentleman who'd just passed away." It seemed the property was very unkempt. The owner didn't even use electricity and lived from one room. "The estate agent assumed I would have no interest in it when I called him on the Friday, but I persisted. I saw it on the Sunday and made an instant offer."

Since then, Brown has developed the small granary adjacent to the main house and lives there when in Galway. There are plans to develop the stable and restore the house to become his home "with enough spare rooms for my parents and nephews to visit". For now, the little granary with its crackling fire, open French doors and rustic, rural interiors have a welcoming, bohemian feel and with James Brown's ebullient, enthusiastic presence, it's immediately inviting.

First off, there's a laugh about Brown's builder. His name is Mossy. Not to be confused with his best friend, of whom there's plenty of evidence in the house. Downstairs, there's a photograph of her in a stunning canary

## WHO IS JAMES BROWN?

**BORN** Croydon, 1969 **LIVES IN** London, the West Village, NY and outside Portumna, Co Galway **KNOWN FOR** A true celebrity hairdresser, he has worked with all of fashion's most famous names, with the best magazines, and on the biggest campaigns **NEWSWORTHY** His cuts make headlines, as happened last year when he gave best friend, Kate Moss, her fashion-forward fringe.

