



CLOCKWISE FROM FAR LEFT Riding coat at the ready; candles play a significant part in adding atmosphere; Staffordshire china in Valencia design; Dolly Daydream cushion on a bedroom chair; the cosy bed with torn silk lamps; James Brown London products from the latest, soon-to-launch range; antique crystal chandelier

yellow dress, taken by Mary McCartney for an upcoming event. Upstairs in the bedroom, there's a handcrafted cushion – a sort of deconstructed Union Jack with added appliqué and embroidery. "That's done by Kate's housekeeper," James comments. "She makes them under the name of Dolly Daydream". In the beams across the bedroom hang some crystal rosary beads given to James by Pete Doherty. But that's where the fabulosity ends. Brown's home is very much a rural retreat for a country gentleman – from the Hermès horse blanket draped over the banisters, to the highly sought after copy of *Fox Hunting* by The Duke of Beaufort, "which I have to hide in a drawer to prevent any of my friends from pinching it", Brown laughs.

A lot of the furniture has come from the New York farm, with added pieces sourced locally. There's a beautiful Staffordshire dinner service, which looks perfectly in place, displayed in an old wooden rack in the kitchen and bought from an antique shop in America. James Brown has a fascination with antiques and vintage stores and when recently in Dublin, top of his list was to check out Dirty Fabulous, a new vintage store on Lower Baggot Street. That was after he'd been to visit Louise Kennedy's emporium, where he picked up a stunning mink shrug for Kate. James Brown is the original fashion magpie. His eye is razor-sharp and matched with a knowledge about cut, finish, fabric and style that is far superior than the most dedicated of fashionistas.

The 38-year-old hairdresser has a look that belies his age, his mop of blonde hair being a trademark. Often this is hidden under a range of hats, many of which are lined up, hanging over the wide doors to his Galway home. "I pick up a hat wherever I am in the world, I need to have a regular supply as I'm always losing them." There's also

a row of riding hats on display – black, brown and navy blue. And a fox's head stares out from the wall beside the fireplace. As Master of the Roscommon Hounds, James's life in Ireland is one with a heavily equestrian emphasis and he rides out daily, keeping horses at a nearby stables. Much has been written about James's superstar life – his jetting from shoot to shoot in the company of celebrity models, photographers and designers – but he has a refreshingly real quality and an enthusiasm for life that is startling beside the many world-weary types he must come into contact with. "I remember my start well," he comments, "and I've never forgotten those early breaks. So I also try to help people get a foot on the ladder." True to his word, a few days later he's filming for *Off the Rails* and has brought the local grocer's teenage son on set for a day's work experience.

When he's at home in Galway, the days pass with a certain routine. Feeding The Spice Girls, heading to the stables, fishing, shooting and hunting. Friends and family visit. Even though the space is limited, the sofas open out into the comfiest beds in the world and the stereo has a constant supply of CDs on play. As we shoot, the eclectic repertoire includes Kate Bush, The Smiths, Donovan and even some Carpenters. The cold daylight starts to fade and the fire roars up a notch, heating the living room and upstairs to James's bedroom and bathroom (which is refreshingly bereft of products, bar a few favourites from his James Brown London hair range). Time is religiously made for *Coronation Street*. "I don't really go out when I'm here," Brown remarks, although he has so many Irish friends and is known so well around the country, there never seems to be a shortage of entertainment. If variety is the spice of life, James Brown's is – like his preferred style of Bloody Mary – extra, extra hot. ■

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