

Acres of space in the Rockfort file

A host of golden daffodils greeted **Tommy Barker** when he visited an extensive and oft-upgraded large home between the doorstep of West Cork and the city

There's a hideaway feel to Rockfort House, set amid farm fields and one spectacular early spring field of daffodils, just a few miles north of Cork's Innishannon.

The setting, along quiet back country roads, and 350 metres off the road along an approach avenue by its gate lodge, also sees it bounded at its eastern side by the remnants of the former West Cork railway line, and on its lower grounds it's edged by the River Brinny. Between house and river, and tucked just out of sight, is a pond, ideal for wild bathing or for tiny bouts of boating.

Quite the lifestyle property, it's not too far from significant landmarks: Innishannon is minutes away, and Cork city and airport are a 20-minute drive one way, while Bandon and routes to real West Cork and the coast out by Kinsale are 20 minutes too, give or take, in the other directions.

Once home here at Rockfort, there's 6.5 acres to disport on, so for those who'd need grass for a pony, horse, or other livestock, there's plenty here too. As it stands, it already houses organic gardens with raised vegetable and herb beds, and a polytunnel.

Rockfort is said to date to the 1700s and 1800s and has evolved and grown over time. One local version of its history recounts that at one early stage it was taken down and rebuilt using the same stone in a better position for country and valley views.

It has appeared in these pages before, and back in the 1990s was sold to a restaurant-owning duo the Kingstons, who made great use of it for 'free-range' rearing of children, with activity centre plus zip wires, etc. They put it up for sale in 2005, guiding €1m-plus as the market came to peak, but the eventual sale price is not in the public domain as this was in pre-Price Register days.

Its current owners, who'd returned to Ireland from overseas, took on another bout of investment and building fabric upgrades (it hardly needed extensions) and, as a result, it feels like an even higher-quality version of what it

was before when sold round 2005. The artworks and modern pieces scattered its many rooms and levels adds to the impression of some opulence too.

It was offered last May, at €1.15m and now, after a change of agents, minor alterations, and photography that manifestly shows its charms, it's listed with estate agent Malcolm Tyrrell of Cohalan Downing.

Unusually, there's no change, up or down, in the asking price from last May's quoted €1.15m, but now there's an option to buy it without its one-bed gate lodge, at a lower (but undisclosed) price.

That might put it on the radar of a few more buyers, or appeal to those who'd buy as one lot and consider selling off the gate lodge to recoup a bit of the overall outlay while still having a say as to who

might end up living there. In any case, as it's at the far entrance point along the very long, pine-tree lined approach avenue, it's quite effectively a different, stand-alone property.

"Normally, I'd be the first to advise anyone to keep a main house and its lodge together, but here it feels different, it's not essential to the main house," suggests Mr Tyrrell.

Once reached, Rockfort House shows its side gables and rear yard and back courtyard-like entrance as readily as it does its very wide, extended, all-stone facade.

It's sheltered to the rear by a 40' by 15' work shed and old stable block: immediately beyond, south-eastwards, are working farm buildings, which are held in separate ownership.

So, this Rockfort file really is all about what's inside, and what's outside to the front, and it's all quite intriguing.

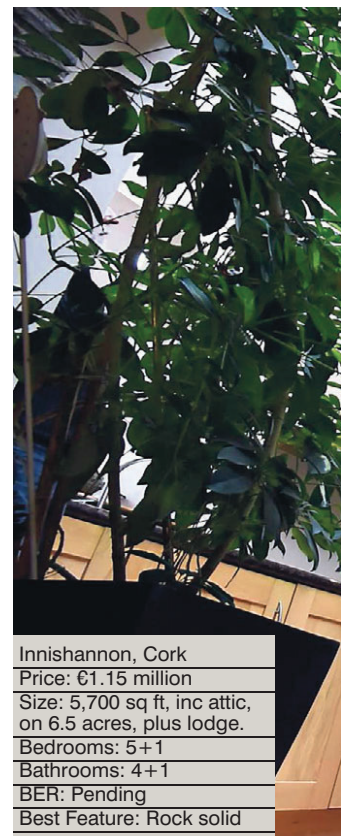
It has all the hallmarks of a three-bay, two-storey country home of some antiquity, with attic rooms under hefty timbers.

It's been added to in the distant past with wings left and right, two-storey with arched windows at ground level on the far extremity, and behind is a deep annex, stepping down in tiers and which may contain part of the oldest sections of the dwelling.

If you factor in the three attic rooms, with heavy exposed timber trusses and their two large dormer windows, and some Veluxes set in the slate, there's 5,700 sq ft in all under the unusual hipped roof (it was altered in shape by previous owners), or some 4,700 sq ft on the two lower levels. In recent ownerships, the attic rooms are let loose as all-weather play spaces.

Rockfort House is adaptable in the extreme: there's one ground-floor bedroom, giving granny flat or guest use options, plus four more first floor bedrooms, two of which are en-suite with cast iron baths, with dressing room. Several bedrooms have fireplaces, and there's also a shower room on the return, plus a laundry/ironing room.

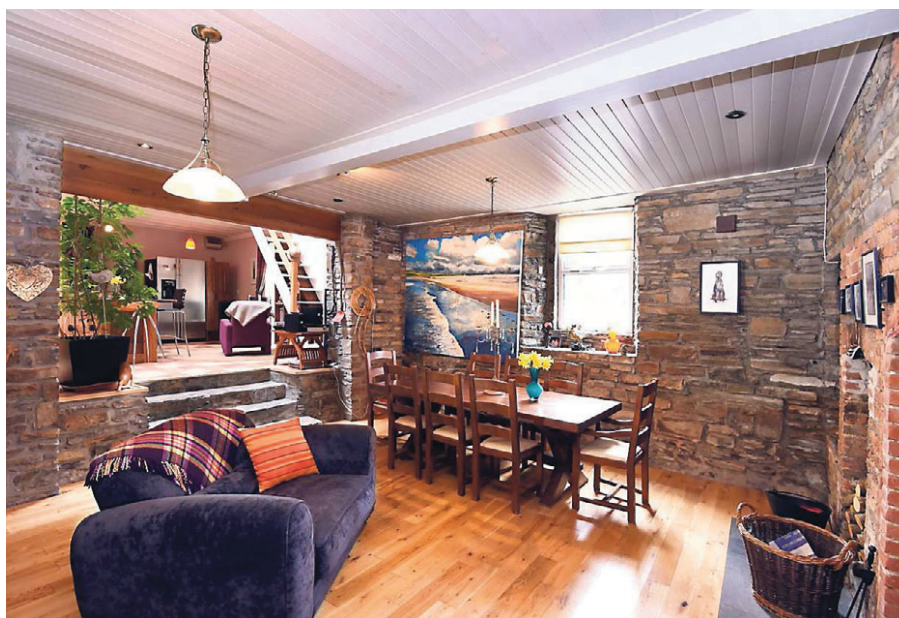
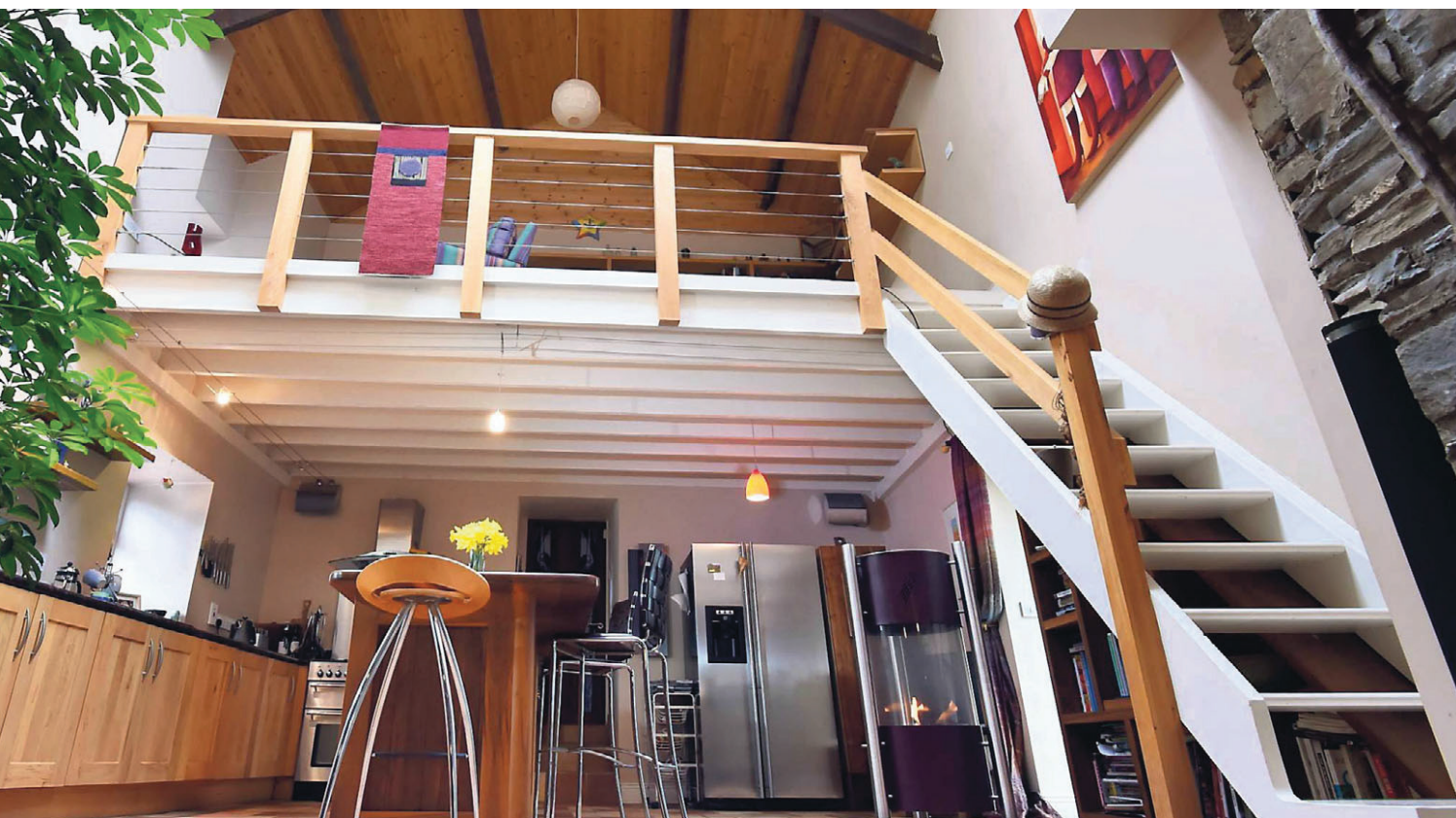
Back at ground level, there's a



Innishannon, Cork
Price: €1.15 million
Size: 5,700 sq ft, inc attic, on 6.5 acres, plus lodge.
Bedrooms: 5+1
Bathrooms: 4+1
BER: Pending
Best Feature: Rock solid



central tiled hall once in past the red, arched fan-lit front door, and there's a range of reception rooms, including a sitting room with black wood-burning stove and bay window, a marginally smaller family room with bay window, black slate fireplace, opening through an arch to a wood-floored play/snooker room, with garden



access via French doors.

There's a rear/back hall also, plus guest bedroom, shower room, pantry/store, and the real scene setter is the multi-level kitchen/diner, with overhead part-mezzanine reached up open tread steps, plus glazed roof panels and wood-panelled ceilings. Units are in maple, with granite tops, and

there's a host of integrated appliances from the likes of Smeg. The floor is tiled in a range of cream, beige and brown tiles.

Floor-to-ceiling heights are sizeable, and then drop down to the end of this already-large, airy room and go down four steps to a feature dining room with oak floor, exposed stone and brick

walls. The wood-sheeted ceiling and yet another large, purposeful, cream-coloured wood-burning stove complete the rather up-market rustic living picture.

Externally, the lake/pond rises and falls with rainfall levels and has a mini-island. There's a copse of native forestry, some hardwoods, and the valley yonder is

rural and pastoral, past post-and-rail boundary fences made from felled trees. Surrounding it are fields of grain and grazing, and parkland and bales, and many thousands of daffs.

Rockfort House came for sale a year ago as Bandon agents Sherry FitzGerald Brennan Busteed listed another quirky period Bandon

property, The Farm, Gaggin, on two acres at €1.45m, and it has remained unsold and appears to be delisted on the web since late 2016.

Strong sellers in the vicinity here so accessible to Cork city and

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airport include the Georgian home and farm Down Daniel, closer to the River Bandon and Innishannon to the south (also cut through by the West Cork railway line) which made €1.2m, and the splendidly expanded mini-Versailles estate, Garryhankard, which sold in the past two years for €1.8m.

VERDICT: If there's a look that jars amid Rockfort's earthy, stone look it's the replacement Georgian-effect pvc windows and protruding bays, which have been in place

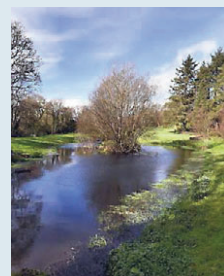
over several ownerships, doing a job, without being pretty.

Since this house was shaken up from an overgrown state back in the 1990s, the quality and pricing of more sympathetic window replacement treatments has improved in leaps and bounds. Might some new owner, flush with enthusiasm, do the right thing, and go for something more aesthetic, and even more efficient? It could, indeed, complete the picture.

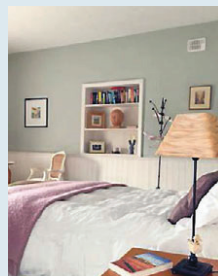
GET THE LOOK

Some great ideas for you to use in your home and where to get them

1 Go high. Large, lofty spaces and mezzanines give an automatic visual uplift to any room or space. Pair them with some distinctive art, and you're halfway home to your very own gallery



2 Float your boat with your very own pond. More and more country dwellers see the benefits of naturalistic ponds, ideal for wild bathing and wildlife. They can be fed from springs and streams. Rockfort's version has a mini-isle and a rowing dinghy



3 Got thick walls? Consider an alcove for display and storage. They barely impinge on a room's space

4 Got land? Live off it. Raised beds, orchards, a polytunnel and other horticultural attractions are part of the joys of rural living

5 Cache in the attic. There may or may not be treasure in the attic, but even the notion of extra space going a begging up top is heart-warming. Go explore and learn your purloins from your rafters. Have a beam in your eye



6 Make an entrance. Gate lodges are a reminder of days gone by, as well as a weather eye kept out on who's going by. Rockfort's mix includes over six acres, stables, a long shared approach avenue, and this cute one-bed lodge.

