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Property

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Schull around the corner:

West Cork home hits a sweet spot

Upmarket home is a true one-off

Tommy Barker visits a distinctive large home in Schull which was built (and rebuilt) to the highest specifications

There are so many elements to The Weavers, it's hard to know where to start: best to pull up a seat on the terrace, pour a cold drink, or a hot one, and begin to ponder and savour.

Set in one of the very best locations around chi-chi Schull in West Cork, at a spot called Cooradarrigan by the old golf course, this one-off/twice-built home excels on lots of fronts: setting, site size, house size too, its build and finish quality, plus a measure of quirkiness, as well as great gardens and sunken terraces.

Oh, and there's also a hard surface, fenced in tennis court, and a purpose-built 16-track music recording studio, that has hosted the likes of Glen Hansard, plus a whole host more of top Irish musicians, over many years.

The Weavers is the much-loved family home of Vincent and Maureen O'Farrell. As they put it on the open market for sale this week they have totted up, and reckoned that in their c 50 years of marriage they have lived in up to 30 houses (and on the odd boat), in Ireland and abroad. But this one is more than special.

The couple acquired two very rare, prime Schull-facing sites back in the 1980s, precious and pricey even back then, and started to build The Weavers with the input of a committed local builder.

They then built a second, smaller house a few years later so as not to lose the second planning permission. In more recent years, that nearby second build became the home of their son, acclaimed musician, songwriter and, in latter years, artist Fergus O'Farrell who, after his move to Schull, built a music studio between the two homes.

Fergus O'Farrell's band Interference flew under the radar for many years, yet was always highly rated by musical cognoscenti and by fellow musicians like Glen Hansard, the Frames, and The Stunning. One of his songs, *Gold*, features in the Oscar-winning movie *Once*.

After O'Farrell passed away in 2016, aged 48 some 40 years after a childhood diagnosis of the degenerative illness muscular dys-

trophy his life and talent were celebrated with an enormous party and music in Schull, and with anniversary Interference gigs in Cork Opera House and Dublin's Vicar Street. A documentary on Fergus's life, *Breaking Out*, is currently in production.

It's not just the roll-call of famous names and voice and talents that strolled the grounds and roads around Cooradarrigan that gives The Weavers its special edge and aura. It is special, onto itself.

Having being built in a first iteration in 1982, and knowing their way around building, renovations and extensions, Vincent and Maureen O'Farrell 'went at' the house again in 2000, removing a front section, adding on a large double-gable-fronted extension and other sections, knitting it all back into a highly functional and aesthetic suite of space.

Now, the entire quite seamlessly stretches languorously to 3,000 sq ft, and all of the key rooms have engaging garden, harbour, island or boating views. Naturally, there are several access points too from inside to the gardens which are such a key part of the package. Pretty much all of it is down to Maureen O'Farrell's efforts, and horticultural skill: "I garden, and Vincent golfs," she says equably.

Now, it's downsizing time, they aim not to move too far (ie, to the house next door) and estate agents Jackie Cohalan of Cohalan Downing, jointly with local Schull auctioneer James Lyons O'Keeffe, are charged with the sale of top-quality The Weavers, on a precious acre of gardens which work so well with the indentations and rocky outcrops of ground.

Guide price is €925,000, so it's at the upper end of the Schull scale in recent years, but this area, like the Colla Road, is deemed about the best there is in Schull, with Cooradarrigan just nicely off the the tourist-beaten track, with several tiny coves dotted about too.

Views from the property are toward the south west, scanning Long Island, harbour navigation points, all the to-ings and fro-ings of island ferries, fishing boats, yachts, RIBs and dinghies, as well as seals, other marine life and birdlife too.

Jackie Cohalan admires the way the house sits with the rise and fall of the site's topography, the way the naturalistic planting works with exposed shoulders of rock, the privacy it has retained, and the tranquillity of the grounds.

Also of practical note, are its siting-out areas, with a choice of terraced spots for al fresco dining, depending on the fall of light, and the direction of the wind. (Maureen has stitched in several wind-breaks, she's experienced the place in all seasons and conditions, and the tarmac tennis court has its own special wind-screening too for some level of equity as to who plays in what direction.)

Inside, all is snug as a bug, and the generously-specced home has at its very core an enormous wood-burning stove, set in a large, den-like central TV room/library, in the midst of a traditional stone hearth. Here, and elsewhere and especially in the kitchen, much of the feature timber is old, reclaimed pitch pine, salvaged from a Leinster mill.

While that TV room is a real, evening-time retreat, the real scene-setting room, day or night, is the super-sized front wing, about 34' by 16', with a double-pitched roof, finished in lime-washed pine boards, with Veluxes on high to flood the place in light, and with discrete uplighters too for evening mood setting.

It's a great, voluminous triple-aspect space, with large windows, and achieves a sort of natural maritime beach-house/Hamptons feel, made all the more exotic by the multitude of mementos, memorabilia, paintings, photos, and art pieces from travels around the world, speaking so fondly of family.

For the home's next occupants, of any age, it's accommodating. The current owners have what is, in effect, a ground-floor apartment to one side at ground level, with double-aspect bedroom with harbour views to be had. This suite has a fine en-suite with Jacuzzi bath, large shower, and there's a separate WC, as well as two spacious dressing rooms — 'his' and 'hers'. The latter has a day bed

surrounded with very old timber carvings.

A wide staircase is set in a double-height stairwell, ringed with overhead clerestory windows as a particular feature, and upstairs beyond are three bedrooms, much loved by visiting grandchildren. One's en-suite, and there's a shower room, and also at an upper deck level is a very long, attic-style room under pitched, wood-sheeted ceilings, used as a busy home office, and with access to oodles of eaves storage. Also dotted about are valuable niches like store rooms and linen rooms: you get the impression this house was done first, and second time around, by a couple who knew how to make a hospitable home work for themselves, for extended family, friends and visitors.

Back downstairs, there's a hard-working kitchen with Neff appliances and feature pitch pine timbers, dining section off, with terrace access, a pantry, sanctuary-like study/library, and large utility, with a second, back-up gas fire oven and hob, handy in case of any power cuts, and even more useful for frying up fish and any other aromatic foods so that smells don't linger. (House heating is via gas, and hits a great B2 BER.)

As neat is a covered-in rear courtyard linking to a garage/store, with side wall panelling which allows breezes through, ideal for drying clothes and outdoor gear in any weather.

The house's main approach is framed by a pergola with rampant climbers, and a backdrop of the site's rocky outcrop, bookended by the purpose-built spacious recording studio, currently home to a grand piano; it's a separate space with many other alternative uses.

Agent Jackie Cohalan describes The Weavers as "a picture-perfect home, it's got a host of attractive features and rooms that radiate with charm and personality."

She and Schull-based auctioneer Jim O'Keeffe expect interest to come from a select niche, from home and abroad, for a mint, walk-in condition property package that would be hard to replicate in such a select Schull setting.

VERDICT: Hits all the right notes.

Schull, West Cork

€925,000

Size: 284 sq m (3,000 sq ft)

Bedrooms: 4/5

Bathrooms: 3

BER: B2



