

A MODERN FAIRY TALE ON  
THE EMERALD ISLE

# BALLYFIN

WHERE OLD-WORLD CHARM  
MEETS MODERN LUXURY

Once upon a time, Ireland's Baronet Sir Charles Cooté and his young bride set about making their home the most opulent in the land. The year was 1820, and the newlyweds spared no expense in rivalling the finest country estates and palaces of Europe. The Cootés travelled the world to ensure their labour of love was a monument to the utmost in opulence, as they procured rare antiquities and went about a lavish decorative adventure with precise attention to every gold-dripping detail—from the Clonaslee sandstone façade, to the acoustically eerie whispering room and obsessive symmetry in the gardens, décor and architecture of the estate. 2,000-year-old Roman floors, Chippendale mirrors, mons-

trous French chandeliers, a chimney pot for every week of the year—to emphasize the land baron's bottomless wealth, even the servants' quarters were designed with sail-vaulted ceilings.

But by the Irish War of Independence, the demesne dwindled into a state of disrepair—an opulent estate no more, it somehow ended up a boarding school for boys run by Patricians.

Luckily for today's traveller, fairy tales have happy endings. Enter the 21st century and a new couple to rekindle the Cooté's labour of love: Chicago-based electronic magnate Fred Krehbiel and his Irish wife had a vision to recreate the property in all its original glory, while offering guests an unparalleled luxury five-star all-inclusive experience.





### THE MOST SPLENDID IN ALL OF IRELAND

After almost a decade of collaboration with historians, landscape architects and interior designers, Ballyfin is Europe's newest neoclassical resort and is once again Ireland's most lavish estate with a multitude of both original treasures and modern luxuries. The Krehbiels poured the equivalent of CAD 22 million into its restoration. Although the house is a modern-day resort, the European architectural and arts communities may well see the spectacular feat as a philanthropic gesture, as so much has been collected and preserved from not only the original 1800s shopping spree, but also personal portraits and belongings handed down from Coote family members.

If you venture beyond the iron gates of Ballyfin, you've managed to travel back in time. The 200-year-old regency guest mansion lies at the foot of Ireland's emerald Slieve Bloom Mountains and the scene is as dramatic as the story behind its restoration.

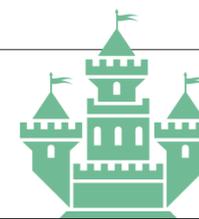
Ballyfin's vibe is distinctly both aristocratic and relaxed. If you enjoy a stay at this 20-suite manor an hour southwest of Dublin, you'll find yourself padding around like Lord and Lady of the Manor or a royal house guest on a weekend retreat. Some of the staff are fourth generation estate workers and former boarding school students who take pride in the stunning grounds and personify endearing Irish hospitality. Service is attentive, yet unobtrusive, allowing for snooping of the highest order.



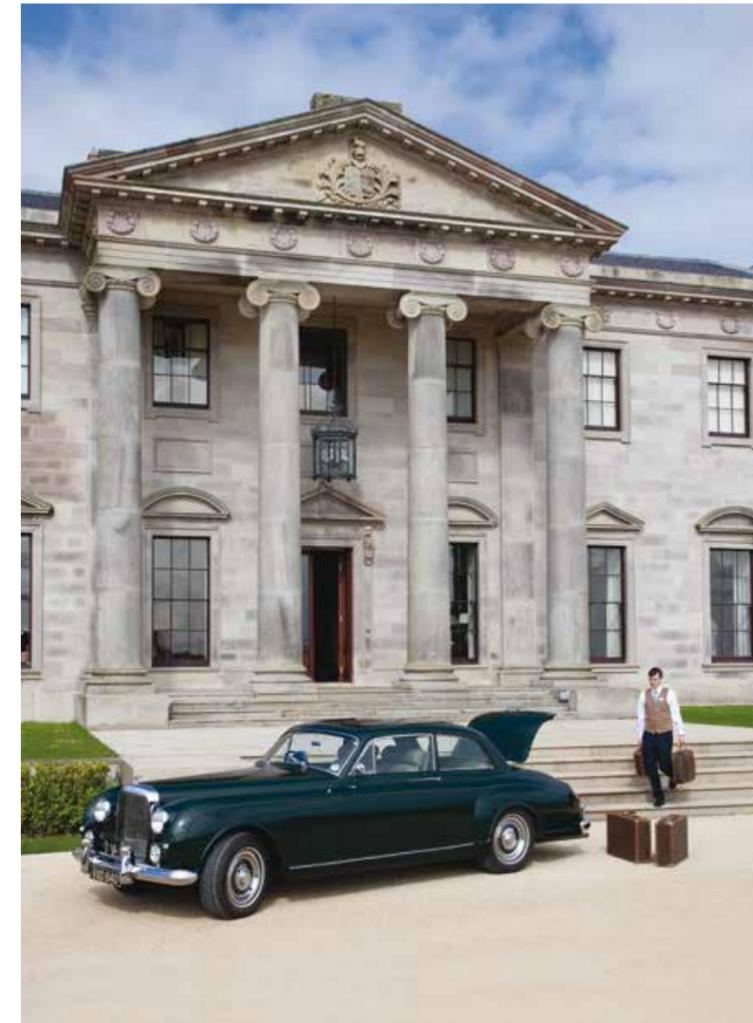
### GOURMET SOPHISTICATION

It's a historical journey to enter the 5,000 antique book library stateroom, with its three 19th-century carpets echoing the semblance of the Victorian-Edwardian era and a gasolier that once hung in London's Royal Academy of Arts. You'll discover one of the storied walls to be a secret door that leads to the glass conservatory. Here, lunch is served amidst the sparkling views of the estate that include a cascading waterfall down the sloping grounds beneath a Claudian temple. Cuisine is local, organic and innovative. You may be delighted by an amuse-bouche of whipped foie gras, deceptively crafted to look like a Ferrero Rocher chocolate. The tasting menu thereafter, however, is a distinct symphony of Irish fare. On the chef's tasting menu you'll find Wicklow quail, Carlingford Lough hand-dived scallops, Connemara Hill lamb and Kilmore Quay line-caught Halibut. A selection of Irish farmhouse cheeses and steamed lemon meringue make for an apt final act.

Or, bask in the gilded glory of the Gold room with silk and damask-lined walls. Tea, scones and cream are served under the original painted ceiling graced by motifs taken from those used by the early 19th-century French architects in Spain's Aranjuez Palace and the crystal chandelier that once hung in the Paris *hôtel particulier* of Queen Caroline of Naples, Napoleon's sister.



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### DOWNTON ABBEY STYLE

No two guest rooms are alike, the epitome of obsessive attention to detail. From the little library suite to the Sir Charles Coote stateroom, the elegance of old-world finery is at its most magical. It's a feast for the eyes with four-poster beds, suits of armour, a marble sarcophagus bath, 17th-century Flemish tapestries and 500-year-old Chinese wall panels.

A luxurious ambiance gives way to whatever your whim du jour. At the ready is an English saddle jaunt through the estate's charming woods or the Slieve Bloom mountains on a Connemara or an Irish Sport Horse. Or, when you find yourself in a horse-drawn carriage galloping towards a medieval stone tower, you'll know you've slipped back to a different era. Billie the Irish Cob, mane blowing in the wind, will make his way around the bend, passing ancient grottos and gardens, to deliver you to the footman at the front of the house. It's Downton Abbey, only better, because you're in it.



Target and clay pigeon shooting, archery, pike and roach fishing and even the ancient art of falconry are signature activities here. Guests can also laze about on the lake via row-boat with a picnic destination, linger in the spa and receive a signature Ballyfin treatment, or retreat to the serene indoor pool. Historical tours that tell the tale of the Coote family legacy and the decade-long restoration of the demesne are engaging. Should guests be caught up in the spirit of the 1820s, they're welcome to choose from closets of period costumes and play a little dress-up, which makes for lasting photo memories. By the time the staff has lined up to bid you adieu, you'll be convinced that fairy tales are alive and well, courtesy of two couples who single-handedly orchestrated a dream come true.

[www.ballyfin.com](http://www.ballyfin.com)