

REAL LIFE WEDDING

Claire Fogarty & Ryan McAfee



Photographs: Jakub Walutek.

Young people go to Australia for all kinds of reasons – for adventure, to find work, to explore a new world. Claire Fogarty certainly didn't expect to find the life partner of her dreams, but that's exactly what happened. "We actually met on a dating site -Tinder in Sydney. Ryan was absolutely my first and only Tinder date!"

That was in Jan 2015. They had brunch together, and Ryan McAfee asked Claire out for dinner the following Sat night. "From there, we really haven't looked back! Something just clicked and we can't believe our luck to be from two different countries (Ireland and Scotland) and find each other in Australia." Perhaps the fact that they are both Celts had something to do with it.

Ryan proposed on top of the Marina Bay Sands Hotel in Singapore in July 2017. "It was a once in a lifetime experience staying there, and the proposal made it even more special. We were on our way to visit family in Cork and Scotland, so he planned it very well!"

Claire and Ryan wanted to do most of the planning of their big day themselves, but they found Alison, the wedding coordinator at the Kinsale Hotel and Spa very useful when they needed to check something or arrange special details.

"Ryan has loved Kinsale ever since his first visit to Cork. Even though I'm Cork city born and bred, my family on

both sides are from the town and it's a special place for both of us. We were really spoilt with the Kinsale Hotel and Spa; it has amazing views and is just the perfect place for the outdoor wedding we wanted."

Claire says she was very lucky in that she found her perfect dress in only the second shop she went to in Australia. "I absolutely adored it. It's from the St. Patrick Pronovias Collection and I got it at LUV Bridal in Sydney. The St. Patrick aspect was a nice coincidence!" When it came to bridesmaids, as three of the four were living in Cork, and one in New York, some organisation was needed. "I was very lucky to come across the Dessy Dress Service at Diamond Bridal in Cork. You pick the colour and style, they measure your bridesmaids, and the dresses are created. It's a fantastic service for someone planning a wedding from abroad. Then I got a fabric sample, sent it to my sister in New York, and she got her outfit made there. So it worked out perfectly."

Claire pays heartfelt tribute to her mother, Mandy, and aunt, Sally O'Neill. "They were angels. Nothing was too big an ask. My bridesmaids, (sister – Catherine, cousin – Emma, besties – Rosie and Mairead) went above and beyond too. When the people around you have your back, there is no better feeling. Planning a wedding is stressful, particularly when you're living abroad. It all worked out on the

day though, and was worth all the planning and occasional panic in the lead up! Our suppliers did not let us down and I was very lucky to have my bridal car provided by my godfather."

Bride and bridesmaids stayed in the Clayton Hotel in Cork City the night before, and the hotel, says Claire, was exceptionally accommodating, "with plenty of space for us and my mum to get our hair and makeup done." And even the weather cooperated. "Cork city felt like the south of France that morning! It was super relaxed and we were up near the penthouse, so the views of the city were immense." The morning preparations started at 8am and they were out the door for a stopover at Claire's homeplace on Victoria Road by noon. Then, after some photos and good wishes from the neighbours, they were off to Kinsale.

Was Ryan nervous? "He wasn't too bad the night before. However we were both full of nerves when the one black cloud in the sky decided to pass over the ceremony location bang on 2pm when we were due to start! Everyone ran in and waited whilst I was escorted into the nearest hotel room to avoid being seen. Thankfully, within 10 minutes the ceremony could get up and running again, and I was ready to walk down that aisle. We all had a big laugh about it after."

She likes to think it was a metaphor for married life. "There will be dark

clouds but we will get through them and come out the other side smiling." The event was set up in the round, between the hotel and the views of the hills and river, with the ceremony table and flower arch in the centre. "Our Humanist celebrant, Norma McElligott, ensured it was intimate and personal to us without being intimidating. We both truly felt surrounded by all the people we wanted to be there."

The hotel, Claire and Ryan agree, couldn't have been better. "We had guests from Australia, Scotland and various parts of Ireland who couldn't fault it. Manager, Ronan Fahy was in control and delivered all weekend. Everyone had a great time at the outdoor drinks reception with plenty of space indoors for people who wanted the option. The function room was stunning and the food went down a treat. The chiavari chairs look so wonderful, and really make the room. And the location was perfect for watching the fireworks in the night sky over Oysterhaven Bay when the band took a break. That was truly unforgettable and a lovely surprise for all our guests."

Although both Claire and Ryan had used up most of their holiday leave in planning the wedding, they had kept enough to allow for a few nights in Paris and Bangkok to alleviate the jetlag returning to Australia. "It was a really lovely time for us as a couple after all the madness."