

# NATIVE NEW YORKERS

From Daryl K and Eileen Shields, who have both found international fashion success in the Big Apple, to Jane Wogan, Terry's niece, who married the restaurateur famous for popping out of Bianca Jagger's birthday cake at Studio 54 in a loincloth, the Irish take well to bohemian New York.

**Britt Collins** meets some of our more colourful exports. Photography by **Tiziano Niero**

**T**here's more to New York than Manolos and cosmopolitans. Seduced by the creative vitality, urban edginess and mystique, seekers, strivers and dreamers from around the globe have flocked here for decades where so many movies have been made, so many lives transformed. This all-night, rock 'n' roll city that has inspired generations of artists also offers the vicarious thrill of living in close proximity to David Bowie, Lou Reed and its other grand achievers and exquisite ghosts, however humble a Manhattan dweller's existence. Crossing the ocean in search of this picture-perfect slice of Manhattan life is a well-trodden journey for young Dubliners.

## JANE WOGAN

Jane Wogan's life resembles the glimmering, rarefied world of a bi-coastal Hollywood starlet. The Dublin native-turned-New Yorker lives like any well-heeled young urbanite who summers in the Hamptons, wears designer threads and whizzes off on exotic travels. Fresh off the plane from St Tropez, where she went to celebrate her wedding anniversary, she is breathless and chatty.

"I came here for love," says the 30-year-old journalist over dinner and espresso martinis at Nobu, her husband's ultra-fashionable downtown restaurant. But, she says, she had been infatuated with the romance of New York since she was a child.

"Before I met Richie, I'd planned to move here. I'm not a homebird by any means," she says.

'Richie' is Richie Notar, the slick, perma-

tanned, 49-year-old legendary restaurateur and former player on the Studio 54 scene.

An entertainment reporter for CNN and *TV Guide*, Jane works the red carpet between New York and LA, with invitations to the hippest parties in town. Equally at home at the glitziest Hollywood dos and on the most desolate Indian beaches, she looks like a flower child, whimsical and dreamy, with long hair, shimmery make-up and a sheer, clinging minidress that shows off the taut curves of her skinny body.

Coming from a showbiz dynasty — Terry Wogan is her uncle — she is used to leading a nomadic existence. She left Dublin at 17 to study at Bristol University, where she "had a blast for three years". Moving to London, she dabbled in modelling and worked as a television presenter. While her friends settled down, acquired houses, possessions and debts, she fled. "I've always had the wind beneath my feet."

Since arriving in Manhattan her career skyrocketed after a rough start. She was sent back to Ireland by Homeland Security and her husband enlisted his starry friend Hillary Clinton to sort out her visa.

"It was a nightmare," she says coyly, "I couldn't work for months, so Richie got me two puppies, Elo and Lily. Before long we had five dogs in a small apartment. I spent my days wandering the streets with them and everyone thought I was a dogwalker."

"New York humbles you because you're the tiniest tadpole in a big river. It's true, if you make it here, you can make it anywhere. I quickly realised that there's always someone prettier, funnier and smarter than me. I used to be incredibly insecure but since living here, I've become more accepting of myself and my flaws."



'I quickly realised that there's always someone prettier, funnier and smarter than me' Jane Wogan, Terry's niece, on the reality of living in New York

Wogan is happiest when telling stories about her husband, whom she met in LA while working as a presenter.

"He pursued me. He was brash and cocky, those bastard qualities that women love. Our life together is like the city itself, chaotic and crazy, and it's wonderful. Not a day goes by when I'm unhappy with him," she says of Richie Notar.

Richie is notorious for many things, not least because he once popped out of Bianca Jagger's birthday cake in a loincloth at Studio 54. He partied with regulars such as Debbie Harry and Andy Warhol, took fistfuls

**'He was brash, cocky, those bastard qualities woman love,' she says of her partner. De Niro and the Clintons are in their intimate circle**

of Quaaludes and slept with hundreds of rich, beautiful women.

"It was a time in America that will never happen again, because people were allowed to be free," she says of Notar's eventful past. "The decadence and stories of Warhol, Truman Capote and Halston are fabulous. Richie's like Jack Kerouac, he documents his life, his travels. Maybe one day he'll write a book for our daughter," she says.

Wogan says with her warm, wide smile that they are having a marvellous time. They were engaged in Venice, married on the Amalfi Coast and their two-year-old

daughter, Harlow, through family connections, was christened at the Vatican because they "wanted to give her a story". They count Robert De Niro, Harvey Keitel and the Clintons among their intimate circle.

Despite her glam existence in the city that never sleeps, she has often thought about moving to Rome.

"Having a toddler, I realised New York's not a city made for kids. But, at the same time, I think it's great that she gets to grow up surrounded by so much colour and culture. The Natural History Museum, MoMA and Central

Park are down the road from me," she says.

But this occasional party girl finds New York is not what it used to be. In the seven short years since she arrived, everything has become sanitised and samey. Not that she is bothered about going out as much as she used to, she laments, there's just no place to go. Now, she says, the clubs are tawdry and lonely, filled with posers and tourists. She would rather "stay in, with friends, chatting into the morning hours or being among interesting people who don't care whether you're a billionaire or a pauper".

**AMERICAN DREAM**



**'I'm one of those people who loved the grittiness of old New York. It's still so full of raw, real-life scenes that you never lose touch with reality'**  
Daryl Kerrigan on her new hometown

**DARYL K**

"I came to seek my fortune," says designer Daryl Kerrigan, professionally known as Daryl K and the reigning designer of downtown chic. "I love the romanticism of New York, and it's a music city, which inspires my clothes."

The street style and uncomplicated elegance of her tailored low-riders and sexy retro dresses and T-shirts quickly made Daryl K a paragon of hipness, an inspiration for legions of copycats seen on runways all over the world.

She came to New York for the summer in 1983 while studying at the National College of Art and Design and waitressed.

"Nowhere famous," she says in her soft Irish lilt. "There wasn't a lot of opportunity in Dublin then, especially for anyone who wanted to be creative."

Spurred on by the punk-filled glamour of Eighties Manhattan, she returned after college, imagining that she would hang out at CBGBs and hear the rock heirs to Blondie, the Ramones and the Velvet Underground. She settled in a sublet in Williamsburg, then a rundown blue-collar Brooklyn neighbourhood, and found work designing costumes for films such as *My Cousin Vinny* and *Mystery Train*.

She fell into the film industry through a boyfriend.

"My first movie was a film noir and I got paid \$100 a week. It was shot in February in the streets of Manhattan. It was freezing but I was happy," she recalls.

She travelled across the country and

worked on mostly indie films with great actors such as Harry Dean Stanton, Keanu Reeves, Crispin Glover, Tom Waits and Joe Strummer — with whom she became good friends. "He featured in our lives until he died," she says.

She soon realised her heart wasn't in it. "As exciting as it was making movies, it was too restrictive. Maybe if I stuck at it, I might've met a director who was right for me — Quentin Tarantino or someone. The last movie I worked on was *My Cousin Vinny*. At that point, I got bored and wanted to go off and do my own stuff."

Two decades ago, however, there was no place in New York's conservative climate for the flamboyance of mavericks such as Kerrigan.

"Fashion here at the time was pretty dismal," she recalls. "Those high-end designers like Calvin Klein and Ralph Lauren were all about career clothing."

So she made her own, or reworked vintage pieces. With \$40,000 in savings, she opened a little store in the East Village with Paul — she blushes and gestures towards her husband and business partner Paul Leonard, a handsome, sandy-haired man, sitting on the sofa opposite us in her breezy, white design studio. Although Leonard, who was once an assistant to art photographer William Wegman, is also from Dublin, the couple met here 22 years ago.

"I've always been thrifty. When one of my father's businesses failed, we had nothing left. We even lost our family home. It taught me a lesson. It's one of the

**'We went all the way up and smoked joints and drank champagne in the head of the Statue of Liberty, looking out at the Manhattan skyline'**

reasons my brothers and I emigrated."

But why not Paris or London? "Well, as that Clash song goes, 'London is so goddamn cold. New York has so much more soul.' There's a coldness to London and, back then if you were Irish, you really felt it. New York was warm and welcoming. People loved your Irishness and the accent."

She confesses that she failed fashion in Ireland: "It crushed me."

Yet, here she is sitting in her elegant shop on the Bowery, arriving out of underground obscurity into the mainstream.

"This environment made me thrive," she says, attributing her success to her adopted hometown. "Americans really want you to succeed. They have tremendous goodwill."

However, she still misses Ireland: "The Guinness, the gentleness of the people and

the softness of the little island where you don't have to explain yourself."

"I love the wild Irish countryside," she adds wistfully, a sadness passing her liquid-blue eyes. "It's not as big as America, but there's a sense of freedom. There are no rules, no guns, or trespassing signs. You can just open a gate and walk to the beach through a farmer's field."

But, of course, she does love the benefits of the 'big world' — "the amazing people and parties you can't experience under those small-island circumstances."

The couple are now living their version of the American dream between a brownstone in Brooklyn and a countryside retreat in Pennsylvania. Her life has been a whirl of international catwalk shows, dazzling people and places. She recalls Tina Brown's glamorous *Vanity Fair* party in Ellis Island in 2000 when the city was still wild.

She describes it like a scene from *The Great Gatsby*, "with Moroccan carpets and jewelled cushions on the lawns, the trees strung with candles and vintage champagne. Everyone was there from Charlize Theron to Liam Neeson. They didn't realise the Statue of Liberty was open. We went all the way up and smoked joints and drank champagne in the head of the statue, looking out at the Manhattan skyline. Shortly after that, 9/11 happened and the city became a different place. I'm one of those people who loved the grittiness of old New York. It's still so full of raw, real-life scenes that you never lose touch with reality," she says.

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## AMERICAN DREAM



**'My mother says that New York is making me impatient and angry. But I'd be stressed on top of a mountain as I thrive on chaos. She wants me to come home, but I constantly have to remind her I am home'**  
Eileen Shields has no plans to return to Ireland

### EILEEN SHIELDS

In fashionable circles, people talk about Eileen Shields as being incredibly cool. Her Fifties-style footwear has been seen on the sexiest women in showbiz, from Halle Berry to Natalie Portman. Eva Longoria appeared in *Desperate Housewives*, stripped down to her underwear, wearing Shields's racy-red, peep-toe stilettos. Yet she describes herself "as just a small Irish girl trying to make her way in the glamorous world of fashion".

Shields came to New York as a teenager "when the East Village was swarming with Irish people".

"I met about 10 people from my art college. People like Philip Treacy and others like Daryl K who were a few years ahead of us. So, we were all young and poor together. It was a turbulent time. The East Village riots happened that year and half of the NYPD resigned over corruption and violence."

But New York was never part of the grand plan. Paris and Italy were more obvious fashion destinations, but she didn't speak French or Italian. She intended to stay briefly and then move to London, where her brother Kevin, the frontman of the hugely influential Nineties band, My Bloody Valentine, already lived.

"They played five nights at the Roundhouse in London and the shows sold out in nine minutes," she tells me proudly. "They were offered a million quid to play the Hollywood Bowl."

Instead, she remained in the East Village, where she still lives with her artist husband Mark Orange and their two small boys. She spent a decade working for Donna Karan, launching the DKNY footwear line when it was exploding around the world.

"It was a high-powered job that absorbed my life. I was a slave to stability. In the end, no amount of money was worth it. But I think if I'd started my own collection then, when I was that young, wild Irish girl keeping all the bars open in New York, I couldn't have handled it."

The 9/11 terrorist attacks affected her deeply.

"Mark and I lived close to Ground Zero and knew many people who died. It was like Beirut — the army and the National Guard took over the streets. I didn't go to work for weeks. I had these firemen, who were digging out dead bodies every day, telling me, 'Go back to work and make beautiful shoes.' They felt all this frivolous stuff had some meaning. With terrorism, people learned quickly that they just have to live an ordinary life and the point of terrorism is to prevent that. It made us change everything. I quit my job, got married, got pregnant and started my own label, opened my store in Scarlett Row in Dublin, all in one year."

Seven years on, her quirky, vintage-chic shoes have been featured everywhere from *Vogue* to *The New York Times*.

"My footwear comes from a desire to dress people up," she says, leaning against a vividly coloured boutique window.

"The new collection is inspired by Twenties lingerie."

Shields is fixated on "beautiful old-

**9/11 made us change everything. I quit my job, got married, got pregnant and started my own label, opened my store in Dublin, all in one year. With terrorism, people learned they just had to live an ordinary life'**

fashioned things". She seems in many ways a figure from another time, with her bouffant hair, slippersy-red lips and spooky light-green eyes.

"I love the Fifties," she says. "That's what's great about this city, you see strains of that glossy Americana when everything was made to look perfect."

These are exciting times for Shields. Now on the cusp of major success with the *Sex and the City* exposure, which launched Manolo Blahniks and Jimmy Choo into the public consciousness, she hopes to open a New York shop.

Recently, she says, she went to the *Sex and the City* premiere.

"All these overdone women were dressed in trashy Patricia Fields-type outfits, colourful dresses and really high heels. It was awful. New Yorkers don't live like the characters of that show and they aren't fashion obsessed. Everyone is undressed-up, unkempt, undone. Even designers work too hard to make that effort."

Living in a melting-pot city has sharpened her sensibilities and made her much more worldly.

"I love that my kids are growing up in a multicultural environment," she enthuses. "Before I moved here, I wasn't exposed to much diversity."

Though she was born in Queens in 1970 and the youngest of five siblings, Shields's family traded "the sunshine and sophistication of New York", as she puts it, for "the wet greyness and simplicity of Ireland" when she was three.

"My parents emigrated because they wanted their kids to grow up Irish. I was this little American girl, so I quickly lost my accent because I got teased. I was always the outsider so I don't feel any strong roots to America or Ireland. But we do spend summers in Ireland. It gives me a chance to escape work and everyday life."

Does she plan to return?

"My mother says that New York is making me impatient and angry. But I'd be stressed on top of a mountain as I thrive on chaos. She wants me to come home, but I constantly have to remind her I am home."

