



# The Merrion

by Lauren Byrne



# historic hotels



The Merrion hotel is excellently positioned for those who wish to sample the best of Dublin.

From royalty to the Rolling Stones, everyone wants to make The Merrion their home when in Dublin nowadays. Its charms are obvious. Although situated in the heart of Dublin, the hotel exudes the quiet ease of a fine old Irish country house; its nineteenth-century furniture, antique gilded mirrors, and stunning collection of paintings look as if they've been acquired over generations by a family with an eye for beauty as well as comfort.

In fact the hotel dates only to 1997, but its

and nobility. Lord Monck lived at No. 22, which became known as Monck House. No. 24 was leased in 1769 to Garrett Wellesley, Earl of Mornington, and is known today as the birthplace of Arthur Wellesley, first Duke of Wellington, who defeated Napoleon at the Battle of Waterloo in 1815.

For most of the twentieth century the four houses were used as state offices. In the late 1990s, Lachlann Quinn and Martin Naughton, in response to Ireland's booming Euroeconomy, decided the time was right for a hotel that showed off the best of Irish art



Jack B. Yeats (1871–1957), *The Old Grass Road, Kinsale*, 1925.

roots are deep in eighteenth-century Georgian Ireland, an era of rare political and economic stability. It was also a period of unparalleled architectural activity, when James Gandon (1743–1823) built the city's Custom House and its Four Courts, and Leinster House, opposite The Merrion and now the seat of the Irish government, was built by Richard Cassels (1690–1751) as a townhouse for the Earl of Leinster. Four elegant townhouses built in the 1760s now make up The Merrion. Nos. 21, 22, 23, and 24 Upper Merrion Street were built by Lord Charles Stanley Monck for wealthy Irish merchants

and architecture. The four houses were meticulously restored and a contemporary garden wing commissioned to complete the hotel. The restoration of ornate plasterwork was undertaken by Seamus O'hEocha, a master stuccadore skilled in the art of hand modeling lime-based plaster. Damaged details were remodeled by hand using the same techniques used 200 years ago. "Create a space with sensitivity to the eighteenth-century heritage of the building," was the brief given to designer Alice Roden, who successfully achieved this, down to the hand-woven carpets she designed for the main reception areas.



The attractions of the hotels' Michelin-starred Restaurant Patrick Guilbaud and its state-of-the-art Tethra Spa have strong competition from the hotel's stunning collection of Irish art dating from the eighteenth century to the present day. Sitting in front of the blazing turf fire in the hotel's main drawing room one recent spring morning, General Manager Peter MacCann sounded justifiably proud of this feature of the hotel. "People refer to The Merrion as the *other* National Gallery of Ireland," he says. And it's a fact that at The Merrion you'll see works by the same distinguished Irish artists represented at the National Gallery, a short walk from the hotel. The collection belongs to co-owner Lachlann Quinn, who, according to Mr. MacCann, enjoys the idea that work of this calibre can be viewed in such relaxed surroundings and not only in the hallowed halls of a museum. Since individual works are often on loan, the same paintings are not always on show, but on a recent visit the hunter green walls of the hotel's wine bar were the perfect setting for Thomas Frye's (1710–1762) *Boy in Classical Landscape*. The classical restraint of the hotel's front hall was enlivened by the brilliant blues of works by expressionist Jack B. Yeats (1871–1957), brother of poet William Butler Yeats, and today regarded as Ireland's greatest painter. One of Ireland's finest young painters, Martin Mooney, was commissioned to paint a series of works for the neoclassical stairwell. Along with a changing rota of twentieth-century art, Restaurant Patrick Guilbaud provides views of the eighteenth-century styled garden at the center of the hotel that a cheerful family of ducks have made their home.

There's more than just the menu to consider in the Cellar bar and restaurant. Originally wine vaults, the bricked walls, stone floors, and vaulted ceilings of the hotel's cellars bring the past potently to life, making it the perfect setting for some hearty Irish food. Traditionally, the visitor to Ireland has been well advised to forgive the country its food and concentrate on its other strengths. But as *Saveur* magazine, which recently devoted an issue to new Irish cuisine, points out, things are changing. The Merrion's Executive Chef Ed Cooney concurs. "Modern Irish cuisine now has an identity and appeal all its own."—Yet another reason to seek out The Merrion when next in Dublin. @

The Merrion is located at Upper Merrion Street, Dublin 2, Ireland. For information and reservations visit [www.merrionhotel.com](http://www.merrionhotel.com) or call (011) 353.1.603.0600



Walter Osborne (1859–1903), *The Ferry*, circa 1889.