

MY FAVOURITE ROOM



CRYSTAL CLEAR

Roisin Fitzpatrick wanted to spread a very special message, and while decorating her beautiful seaside period home, she came up with the ideal way to do so. Edited by **Mary O'Sullivan**. Photography by **Tony Gavin**

Victorian terraced houses tend to be dark. Yes, the rooms are grander than those in modern houses and the ceilings are higher, but the windows are traditionally narrow, and so the light is limited.

Of course, there are ways of creating an illusion of more light, and artist Roisin Fitzpatrick is a past master at it. Mirrors, crystals, and iridescent silks are just some of the ploys she uses, and her lovely home sparkles and shines.

However, it becomes apparent that light means more to this vivacious brunette than to most of us, and it's not purely the light which can make a home more welcoming that concerns her. To Roisin, it's also about eternal light, something she says she has experienced, and which informs her work as an artist. "The day after my 35th birthday, I had a brain haemorrhage, and that night, I had a near-death experience," Roisin says.

She remembers exactly how it felt. "It was a beautiful, radiant light; a profound sense of peace and pure, unconditional love. It was a blissful experience," says the charismatic 40-something who, because of this event, went on to change her life dramatically. She decided to make it her mission to spread the word about death and the eternal light, and

her medium is her artwork. Her works — created from silk and crystals, and often based on pre-Celtic emblems such as those found at Newgrange, Dowth and Knowth — hang in many important institutions as well as private homes, and Roisin has exhibited extensively, particularly in the US, where she has had considerable success.

She has also written a fascinating book, *Taking Heaven Lightly*, which is currently in its third reprint.

Yet, prior to this extraordinary happening, Roisin had been a typical Dublin woman on a clear career path. A member of the Fitzpatricks shoe dynasty, started by her grandfather and continued by her father and uncles, Roisin, the youngest of four girls, grew up in Howth, and went to Trinity to study business. This was followed by a year in Brussels at the European Commission, and then a master's in international relations at Geneva University. These qualifications led her to a career in international affairs at both the UN and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD), which worked with Eastern European countries after the fall of communism.

"I loved working abroad, using different languages, and meeting people

'The near-death experience was a huge awakening. I realised there is no such thing as death as we know it'

of different cultures," she enthuses. She clearly enjoyed her work, and was heading places, when she began to suffer from chronic fatigue syndrome and decided to come back to Dublin. She had completely recovered from that debilitating illness when she was suddenly struck down with the brain haemorrhage. "It sounds crazy could so much happen to one person? — but it did," Roisin says with a laugh.

The brain haemorrhage started one day when she was alone, upstairs in her own home. "Suddenly, I had a blinding, excruciating headache. At the same time I had hot and cold sweats, and started to feel very nauseous," Roisin recalls, adding, "I managed to call the ambulance, because I realised something serious was happening. I began vomiting; I knew I had to maintain consciousness, and I made my way downstairs and opened the front door.

I was on my knees when the paramedics arrived."

Roisin was brought to Beaumont hospital, and while she was being monitored there, she had the near-death experience. "It went on throughout the night; it was a huge awakening, because I realised there is no such thing as death as we know it," she says.

Happily, Roisin recovered completely, and it was while convalescing that she realised that not only did she want to keep this radiant light alive in her own life, but she wanted to help other people to experience it too. And that's when she started to create her artwork.

"I'm an active person, but I had to take it easy, so I started working around the house. I made the curtains and the cushion covers; all the soft furnishings. Then I polished the crystals off the old chandeliers I had bought. I had extra crystals and remnants of silk left over, and, by combining the two, I was able to create an artwork which, for me, expressed light," she recalls.

Initially, she was making the artworks for herself, then a friend saw them and said, "That's it, Roisin. That's how you're going to share your experience."

That was seven years ago; in that time she has become known as Roisin Fitzpatrick, Artist of the Light, with a

Left Roisin had the words 'beannacht chroí' etched in the glass above the door of her period home. It means 'blessings of the heart'

Above Artist Roisin Fitzpatrick in her living room, which features soft furnishings of aquamarine and bowls of sea shells. 'I wanted to bring the sea into the house without getting the toes wet,' she notes with a laugh

Top right The large artwork over the mantelpiece in the dining room is one of Roisin's own creations of

silk and crystals. 'I want people to be able to stand in front of the pieces and connect with the light within,' Roisin says

Middle right The hall is hung with photographs of Bray's seafront in Victorian times. It's also lined with some of Roisin's extensive shoe collection. As a member of the Fitzpatricks shoe dynasty, shoes mean a lot to her

Bottom right Roisin found the view of the sea from her bedroom inspirational, and she wrote her book while sitting on the window seat

large following, both at home and in America. "The Consul General at the time, Niall Burgess, was very kind, and he opened many doors for me in America," Roisin says, adding that the current Consul General has invited her to take part in an exhibition later this year to commemorate 1916. Inspirational speaker Deepak Chopra and actress Roma Downey are big fans.

Concert-goers will be familiar with the artwork by Roisin on permanent display in the National Concert Hall. "The whole intention behind the art is for people to be able to stand in front of the pieces and connect with the light within," Roisin explains. Ever since her experience, Roisin devotes her energy to getting the best out of life, and one of those ways is by surrounding herself with the sayings of those who inspire her. The staircase of her lovely period home is lined with sketches she drew of her many heroes — the Dalai Lama, Aung San Suu Kyi, Archbishop Tutu, Mahatma Gandhi, Maya Angelou — and each sketch is accompanied by an inspirational quote.

However, she has her feet firmly on the ground too, and not just for her other passion, dancing. The hallway of her Bray, Co Wicklow home is lined with interesting pairs of shoes, some for salsa, and many, of course, from Fitzpatricks.



Roisin bought her home in 2003, and everything about the purchase was serendipitous. One night, she wrote a description of the kind of house she'd like — period house, by the sea, original features, price limit — and, the next day, while on a walk in Bray with a friend, she spotted the house. The asking price was the exact amount she had to play with. "As it happened, there was a silent auction and I was putting a certain figure in. It was my birthday, and my father gave me a bit more and said, 'Add that to the price,' and that figure got it for me," she marvels, adding that her parents, whom she clearly adored, died within 10 weeks of each other in 2010.

The house — which has four bedrooms — was in good condition, and the only major job Roisin had to do was replace the PVC windows, but she has worked hard at maximising the light. Her other aim is to enhance the effect of the sea. "I want to bring in as much of the sea as possible, without getting the toes wet," she says with a laugh. "That wouldn't be a good look on the dance floor. ☑"

See roisinfitzpatrick.com. *Taking Heaven Lightly* is published by Hachette Ireland. Signed books are available from Eason, O'Connell St and Dundrum, and Dubray Books, Grafton St and Blackrock