



A BEAUTIFUL DAY

Family, friends, a superb location, endless sunshine and some enthusiastic gourmets. What more could one wish for over a lazy summer weekend?

MELANIE MORRIS attends an al fresco get-together in Co Offaly.

Photographs by MARK MOLLOY.



OPPOSITE: The stunning gardens at Busherstown provide the perfect setting. **ABOVE:** After helping set up a gazebo for shade, friends Jessica Whelehan, Rachel Whelehan, William Hamilton, Harry Whelehan jr and Richie Stokes start tucking in to the buffet. **BELOW:** Host Andrew Rudd devotes his time between Dublin and his family home in Co Offaly

When it comes to the work/life balance, sociable Andrew Rudd certainly seems to have it all. Born into a family famous for its gourmet artisan produce and brought up in a beautiful 18th-century house outside Roscrea, Andrew divides his time between managing his own Food Group in Dublin and relaxing with family and friends “back home” in Busherstown.

One of nine children, with countless cousins and in-laws, Andrew has a diverse and extensive group of friends, all of whom share his love for life, a passion for cooking and entertaining. And so, the gravel along Busherstown’s drive is always crunching with cars coming and going for yet another convivial gathering.

Over a weekend, with the sun streaming down, the Rudds welcomed over 20 adults, trailing countless toddlers and children, to an informal outdoor lunch. Many arrived the night before, staying in The Belfry, a converted outhouse on the estate that Andrew lets on a commercial basis. Sleeping twelve, it was the ideal meeting point, and perfectly appointed for the host and his close friend and business colleague, Naoise Nunn, to begin food preparations.

As overnight guests awoke to the aroma of freshly baked brown bread – instantly consumed before they jumped under power showers and into casual summery clothes – numbers swelled as more friends arrived. Andrew’s housemates from Dublin, Ross Robertson and Lizzy Aders, part of the welcoming party, quickly got to grips with setting up the outdoor gazebo and buffet table. Taking charge of the various meat dishes, Naoise warned that his terrine was “not for the faint-hearted” because of the generous quantities of country butter demanded by the recipe.

Andrew and Naoise often cook together, both on social occasions and when sampling new products for the Andrew Rudd Food Group. A new





MENU

SALADS, DIPS AND EXTRAS Greek salad; green salad; tomato salad; fennel and butter bean salad; guacamole; gazpacho; tzatziki; home-made hummus; pasta salad; smoked haddock mousse; pâté de campagne

MAIN COURSES Rib roast marinated in olive oil with spices; cold pressed ox tongue; gravadlax; cold salmon with dill sauce; salamis and prosciutto platter; boiled new potatoes

AFTERS Irish farmhouse cheeses from Matthew's Cheese Cellar, served with grapes, oatcakes and rye bread. Fresh summer berries; selection of home-made ice creams; strawberries with clotted cream; Prue's crushed pavlova with cream, chocolate and grapes

CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE: An impromptu game of croquet is the ideal way to work up an appetite; home-cured gravadlax makes a delicious starter; Dave Drumm, Dylan Moran Nunn, Jeremy Davies-Betancourt and Andrew get first crack at Prue Rudd's delicious crushed meringue pudding





ABOVE: Andrew Rudd and Naoise Nunn are familiar cooking partners, for both business and social purposes **BELOW:** Sampling Naoise's pâté de campagne



raspberry balsamic vinegar causes great interest as the two boys debate what might go well with it – and decide to drizzle it over fresh figs. Delicious dishes multiply, as do the numbers milling around, watching, helping and chatting. It's a real team effort and everyone enjoys the process.

By midday, most have decamped outside and an impromptu game of croquet has begun. Jugs of Pimm's appear on a white-cloth table, positioned under a shady cherry blossom for easy access.

Dave Drumm and William Hamilton arrive in a vintage Mercedes roadster, garnering all the right sort of attention while Harry Whelehan Jr, wife Rachel and two children appear from nearby Shinrone, along with Harry's sister Jessica. The numbers continue to swell as Andrew's mother, Prue, sets up an alternative picnic, a teddy bear's tea party for grandchildren, Amy and Suzzie Lawlor. Not to be outdone by the girls, Naoise's boys, Jude and Dylan Moran Nunn tackle more physical pursuits, climbing trees and gates and swinging out of ropes around the garden. It's paradise for adults and children alike.

Lunch starts to take shape as friends help carry out china, cutlery, glasses and bowls of delicious home-made treats. In addition to the endless stream of starters, salads, hot and cold meat, cured fish and various breads, there's also plenty of Andrew's favourite extra virgin olive oil and flavoured vinegars for all to try – "my guinea pigs", he laughs.

Leaving teddies and toddlers aside, Prue pops indoors and emerges with a smoked haddock mousse that instantly disappears, such is the demand. Thankfully, like all good mothers, she's well prepared and a replacement is swiftly added to the buffet.



Wine

APERITIF: Pimm's No 1, Champagne Beaumont des Crayères Vintage 1998
WITH LUNCH: Monte Real Rioja Reserva 2000, Château Pey de la Tour Réserve 2003, Delheim Rosé 2005
All at O'Briens Wines, www.obrienswines.ie



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: Children, adults and animals have plenty of space to unwind, as brothers Jude and Dylan Moran Nunn discover; Tanya Myles, Niamh Wylie and Lizzy Aders chat in the shade of a cherry blossom





CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE: Co-host Naoise Nunn was barman for the day; Amy and Suzzie Lawlor hosted a party of their own with some of their favourite teddies; Dave Drumm, Harry Whelehan III, Harry Whelehan Jr and Lilly Whelehan take a breather from the afternoon's activities; the cheeseboard featured Irish farmhouse favourites



Lunch continues, with course after course – platters of salamis and cured ham and some delicious home-cured gravadlax are complemented by bright red gazpacho and Naoise's delicious, refreshing tzatziki. These are followed by tasty meat dishes and more colourful salads before cheese, fruit and, finally, a selection of stunning, summery puddings.

As the sun continues to blaze, Dubliners and the Rudds' friends closer to home mix easily. There's talk of a second overnight stay for many and, ever the host, Andrew welcomes the idea with more wine. Later on, scones and clotted cream are served with preserves courtesy of Prue, her own line from a new food business with Andrew's brother Simon, the jewel in their culinary crown being a re-launch of the Rudds' original-recipe sausages. Thankfully, because everyone is now too full to ask for samples, the industrious and always hospitable Rudds now have a chance to finally sit down and unwind. ■

For recipes and further details;
www.image.ie

