

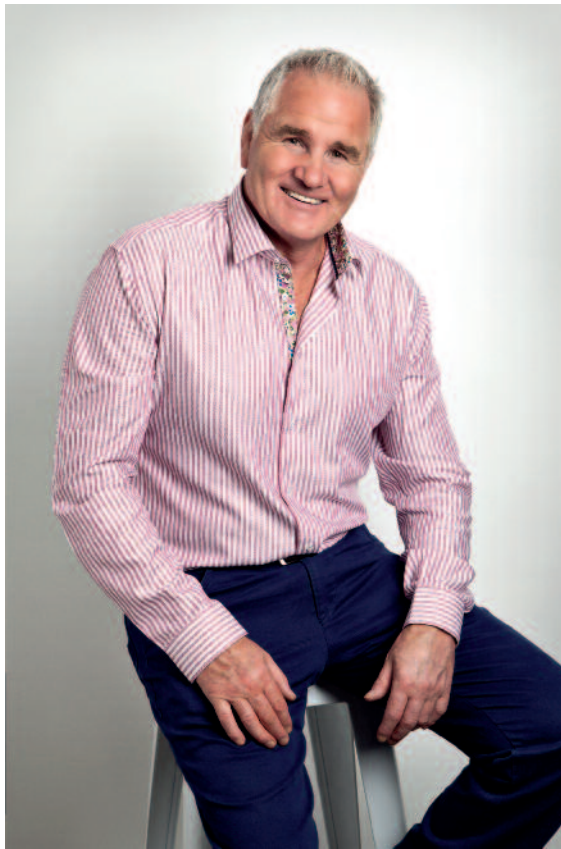
RUGBY PUNDIT BRENT POPE

“ One of the reasons I purchased my house was that even though the place was run-down, it was the garden that sold it to me. It was part of an old orchard in Stillorgan/Blackrock — there’s still the old granite wall. I have two lovely apple trees right in the middle, I have a pear tree and all the neighbours have plum trees. I just saw those two apple trees and I fell in love with them, more so than the house. It was the fact that you could have a piece of paradise in Dublin.

I love those apple trees. I keep googling to see how long an apple tree will last. The house was built in the 1950s so the orchard was there before that. Every year I prune them or I have them professionally pruned. They’re still bearing fruit. I make an apple crumble and I gather up the fruit and give them to the neighbours so they can make apple pies. It’s really a lovely feeling to take fruit from your own trees and make something of it.

They are cooking apples. I can eat the pears straight off the tree. The apples are a bit tart so you have to stew them down. I tried putting them in the blender but they were a bit sour. I get a lot of apples out of both trees but I also string a hammock between them in summer and I lie out there in the sunshine and read a book and it’s nice and peaceful.

I went to Bloom one year and there was a guy out there who had a kind of a riverbed scene with all the ferns and things like that, so I replicated that in my back yard. So, a little section of my garden is a bit of home for me because I have created a riverbed. My favourite is, in New Zealand they’re called pungas. I’m not sure what they’re called here. They’re ferns that are like an armadillo on the outside, they have very thin green shoots and can take a shallow rooting. I bought a little metal kiwi last year when I was home and he sort of pops his nose out of that area, which is lovely to look out on.



I find mowing the lawns very therapeutic, and I do the edges and everything. I love a garden, although I am not green-fingered I’d have to say. I match colours. I love art, so my way of looking at plants, when I go up to the garden centre, I just like colours and I try to match colours. I have had a lot of disasters because I am not great at the transplanting. I know in theory it should work. I should be able to take plants and transfer them to places. I go through all the rigmarole — I get the fertilizer and I dig the hole more than big enough and I water them. I don’t know, sometimes I

come back in a couple months and it’s wilted.

The lifestyle in New Zealand is all outdoors, growing up outside of the city as a country bumpkin, I was always up at cock-crow. You’re always outside and nature plays a huge part in your lifestyle, whether it was out with the horses, walking or trekking. Even in the rugby, I was always playing sports outside. I prefer an outdoor lifestyle, it’s just not possible in this country a lot of the time because of the rain or whatever. Going from a playing and coaching career to a career inside was quite a transition. Even when I was coaching, I was used to getting out. Sadly, I have got used to being inside now. I really need to spend more time outside. That’s my garden time, I like nothing better, especially in the summer, than coming home and getting everything done and I can stay out in the garden for hours. ”

• in conversation with Yvonne Gordon

Brent Pope is a former professional rugby player, coach and rugby pundit for RTÉ television. He has an award-winning autobiography, if You Really Knew Me and his eight children’s books have raised money for children’s charities. He has his own shirt brand, POPE, and is an outside art gallery curator. He is also an ambassador for many leading Irish charities, is proactive about mental health issues, and is an accomplished after-dinner speaker and motivator.