

# CATHERINE FITZGERALD AND DOMINIC WEST

## – landscape designer, actor

**Catherine:** My favourite is the oak, in particular the sessile oak. At Glin there are several ancient ones, remnants of the primeval forest, which once stretched all the way from Killarney down to the mouth of the Shannon. I love them because they are so hoary and ancient — their bark is rugged and deeply fissured with age. Their long arms ripple like tentacles and run with green rivers of polypody ferns, mosses and lichens. These ancient creatures support the habitats of more than 280 species — more wildlife than any other native tree.

**Dominic:** My favourite is the Cedar of Lebanon. I first saw them in the grounds of my sister's convent in Hertfordshire as a child and fell in love with their majesty and distinctive horizontal branches, which seem to invite children to climb them. I love the smell of their resinous wood, particularly in old cupboards, where the natural oils keep the moths away.

**Catherine:** My favourite thing in the garden at Glin is the Persian ironwood, a drought-tolerant tree endemic to the Alborz mountains in northern Iran. Luckily it also thrives in west Limerick where we can get up to nearly two metres of rain a year. My grandmother Veronica, who updated the garden at Glin in the 1930s, planted one and it has obligingly grown into the most perfect symmetrical vase shape for us to enjoy today. I love the dark red witch hazel-like flowers on bare stems in winter, its early mantle of delicate emerald green leaves and cloak of autumn russet. It is one of the earliest trees to start to colour, in late August the leaves start to turn a subtle

pink, an early sign that autumn is on its way.

**Dominic:** I remember when I first walked down the avenue at Glin, being astonished by the gunnera that rear up on spikey trunks like pre-historic carnivores. Their huge rhino-hide canopies funnel gallons of rainwater down their bristling throats. I placed my infant son on one of them and quickly took a picture before it swallowed him up.

**Catherine:** I have many wonderful memories of playing in the garden at Glin as a child: my sisters and I made elaborate dens in the rhododendron bushes and epic journeys wading up the stony stream which borders the gardens' eastern side. The twisting roots of the ancient Killarney oaks were exposed where the stream had gouged out a mini gorge in the soft clay layers of soil and shale.

**Dominic:** I grew up on the edge of Whitecliff moor outside Sheffield and spent my childhood tramping over its peat and heather and dry stone walls. It is situated on the dark side of the Peak District and is reminiscent of the Brontës' *Wuthering Heights* further north. The grey limestone of the White Peak lies just to the south. There is nowhere more beautiful; its sheer gritstone cliffs at Froggatt and Stanage are world famous amongst rock climbers.

**Catherine:** This winter we have been planting lots of bulbs. We are trying out new species we don't have already, such as star of Bethlehem amongst the dog's tooth violets, snakeshead fritillaries and



primroses. I am also trying out some patches of perennial wild flower mix in an attempt to introduce more native species. We hope the camassia will be in flower in May for the Rare and Special Plant Fair at Glin.

This garden is very special with layers added by each generation. My father was interested in the architecture of garden. He cut a vista through the wood and he and my mother restored the walled garden. With my love of planting effects, I am working up the contrasts in the garden. I see it as a theatre with changing scenes. It's rough round the edges as there is too much to be done, but it's got great soul."

• in conversation with Yvonne Gordon

*Brought up at Glin Castle, Catherine trained as a horticulturist at the Royal Horticultural Society and then did a post-graduate diploma in Landscape History and Conservation at the Architectural Association London. She worked as planting designer for landscape designer Arabella Lennox-Boyd and now works as an independent designer and consultant, often in collaboration with landscape architect Mark Lutyens.*

*Dominic West is an actor, producer and director. He recently starred in the BBC One adaptation of *Les Misérables* and he played Noah in five seasons of acclaimed TV series *The Affair*. He recently starred opposite Keira Knightley in the film *Colette* and played James McNulty in HBO show *The Wire*. Awards include a BAFTA and SAG and he has been nominated for a Golden Globe*

*Catherine and Dominic live at Glin Castle, Limerick, with their four children. The Rare and Special Plant Fair takes place there on 12 May, with accommodation available, see [www.glin-castle.com](http://www.glin-castle.com).*