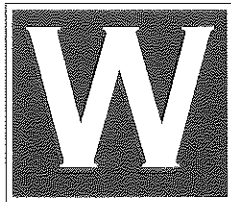


# PARK HOTEL KENMARE

BY NICHOLAS FOX WEBER

*The person whose name is synonymous with the Park Hotel, Kenmare is Francis Brennan. If the austere and imposing gray stone and stucco facade at the Park may make you feel as if you are about to enter a regimented Victorian public school and ought to give your parents and nanny a teary farewell at the door, the cheery and efficient Mr. Brennan will quickly assuage your fears. In any event, once inside you are in the throes of luxury.*



When we arrived in Kenmare, we had just come from touring Bantry House, the palatial 18th century Italian-style residence and formal gardens, now a museum, that overlooks vast Bantry Bay. Entering the Park, we quickly felt as if we had just stopped to visit poor relatives on the way home.

Our suite was a marvelous honeycomb of entranceway and nooks for writing and breakfasting, vast wardrobes and a good modern bathroom, and a bed-sitting room. The great canopied bed was covered with a quilted version of the fanciful material of peacocks and flowers that adorned the wall, while the area with the highly polished breakfast table and desk was a more austere blend of pale green velvet and ivory walls. When the bellman knocked at the door to deliver our suitcases, I instinctively started to call out "je vient," since only in France had I encountered luxury and taste of this level. But our chambers overlooked a view of the Kenmare estuary and Caha mountains that could have been nowhere but Ireland. To look at this unblemished romantic landscape from surroundings of such ultimate luxury was an

extraordinary experience.

The Park was built in 1897 as a railway hotel for the gentry who, having taken the train to Kenmare, stopped there en route to and

from the Grand Hotel in Parknasilla, to which they could journey only by carriage. They liked it so much that they began to use it as more than a transient stop. But in the late 1970s it fell on hard times, and it is only recently that Francis Brennan has refurbished it and made it what it is. The Park has fifty rooms, "but we run it as if it had twelve," very much in the great country house tradition, with service that is "formal but very easy. Nobody whispers at the Park." What Mr. Brennan means by this is that, spiffy as the place is, he doesn't like the hush of secrets, and greetings are sure to be heard in his bold and jaunty Kerry voice. And although elegant dress seems very much in order in the dining room, if you happen to be in a jumper (sweater to us), Mr. Brennan would above all want you to be comfortable. If other guests complain because you're allowed to dine that way, he'll

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BANTRY HOUSE.

simply explain that your bags were lost at the airport and he'd do the same for you. This is luxury without stiffness; when an important foreign dignitary is dining at the next table—

as apparently happened when we were there—nothing changes an iota.

Relaxed as all this may be, there are, however, services practically without equal. A typical one is summed up in the printed notice that appears under your windshield wiper blade in the morning. What looks at a distance like a parking ticket is in fact a card stating, under the sprawling script saying Park Hotel Kenmare. "Our porter has cleaned your windscreen to allow you to get a clear picture of our emerald isle."

It's no surprise that the Park won the 1988 Egon Ronay award as the best hotel in Ireland and Britain. The place settings of Rosenthal Classic Rose on top of rose-patterned

damask are as fine a white as Victorian style can offer. You dine in the grand manner as you bask in the soft evening breezes of the Kenmare estuary. You can look through the large windows at the light of candles and chandeliers, reflected off mirrors behind you, appearing to recede into the distant land-

CONTINUED ON PAGE 16

# HAPPY ST. PATRICK'S DAY TO ALL THOSE OF IRISH DESCENT.

(and those who wish they were.)

*Joe Malone*



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## PARK HOTEL

*Continued From Page 8*

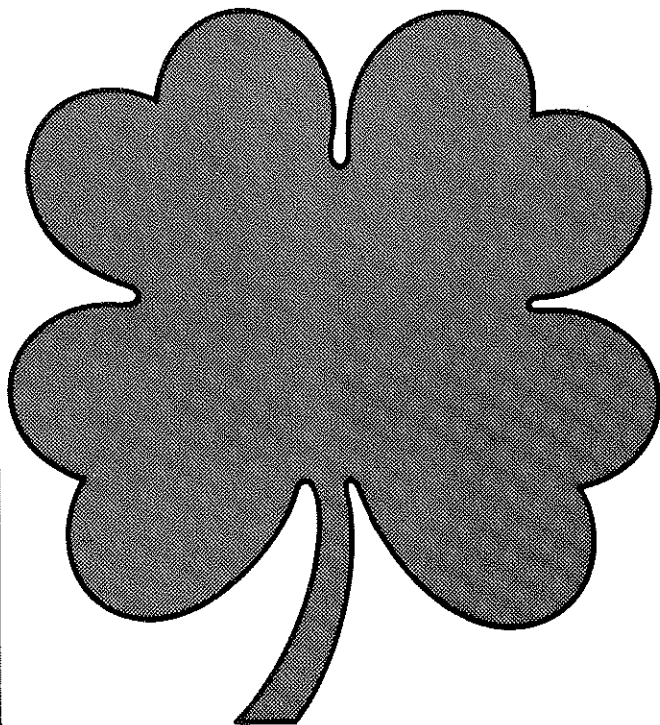
like fairy lights.

The menu includes an earthy duck leg with red cabbage and a deeper red currant sauce; herby chicken liver mousse served with a fascinating trio of sauces (one raspberry, one dill-flavored, one an orange lemon mustard); local Kenmare Bay fish in sea urchin sauce; rare veal with mustard sauce; and Kerry lamb with sweet lavender, honey and thyme. The wine list is excellent. And the pastry chef is capable of some minor miracles, including tiny sandwiches of airy shortbread pastry filled with bittersweet dark chocolate mousse, a confection of which dreams are made. At breakfast the fresh pink sea trout is impeccable.

Lying on the canopied bed at the Park toward the end of the afternoon when we arrived there, I looked out the window over the large sweep of very manicured lawn to the distant wildness. Studying the shadows of clouds on the rocks and meadows of those mountains across the estuary, thinking about the surfeit of worldly amenities within the great structure that was housing us, I felt, yet again, that for pleasures urbane or natural, Ireland held no equal.

Park Hotel, Kenmare, Co. Kerry, (064) 41200.

*Nicholas Fox Weber is a freelance writer who contributes regularly to the New York Times travel section and whose articles have appeared in European Travel & Life magazine. His next book will be "Eminent Moderns" to be published by Alfred Knopf in early 1992.*



May all of life's  
blessings  
be showered on you  
and your family.  
Happy St. Patrick's Day  
from the  
**King Kullen**  
family.

*America's First Supermarket*