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BOOKS OF THE YEAR

The best books to buy for Christmas gifts

From homegrown fiction to cookbooks you can't do without, Aoife Barry picks the Christmas presents bookworms really want



ILLUSTRATION BY CLARE COLLINS

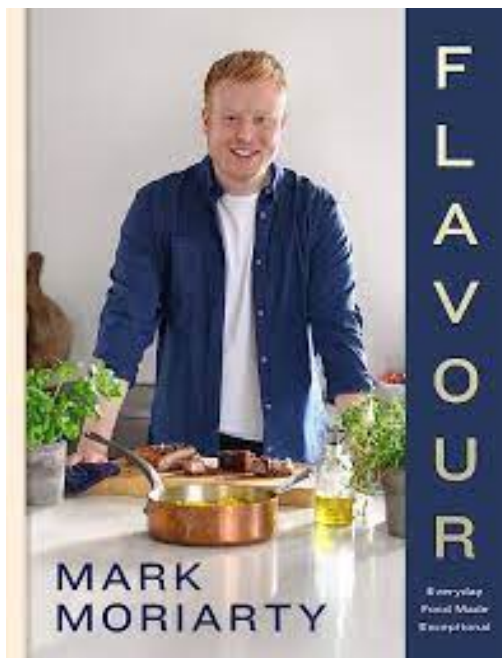
Aoife Barry

Sunday December 10 2023, 12.10am GMT, The Sunday Times

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At the top of the pile of meaningful Christmas gifts are books. Wrapping a perfectly tailored novel or cookbook gives an unrivalled sense of satisfaction, and you can borrow the book in the future if you're so inclined. A win-win.

If you'd like to shop Irish this year, be assured that it has been a stellar one for Irish publishing, so there are plenty of options to choose from. Here are 15 of the top Irish books from 2023 that would work as gifts — from cookery and history books to fiction.

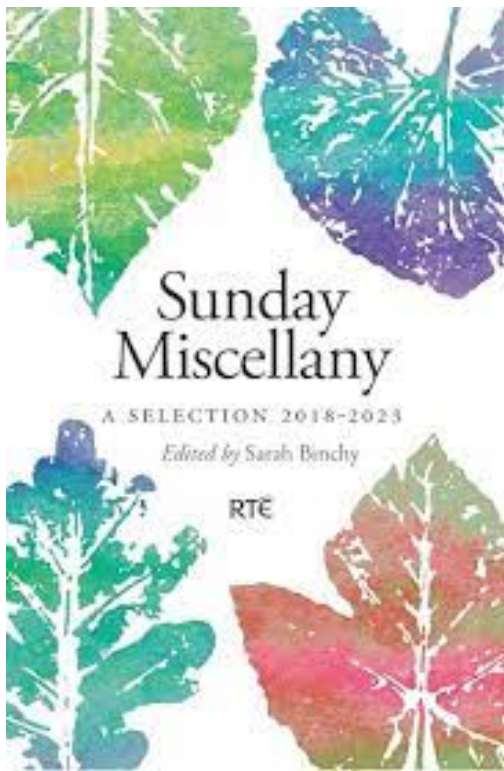


***Flavour: Everyday Food Made Exceptional* by Mark Moriarty**

The chef, TV host and columnist Mark Moriarty recently won an Irish Book award for this handsome cookbook. Inside you'll find 100 recipes, including chicken and mushroom lasagne and lamb curry, and Moriarty passes along his restaurant kitchen tips to help you to wow your family and friends with your next meal. Definitely one for the budding chef in your family, especially since you may get to reap the tasty rewards.

Gill Books, €24.99

[Buy a copy of Flavour here](#)

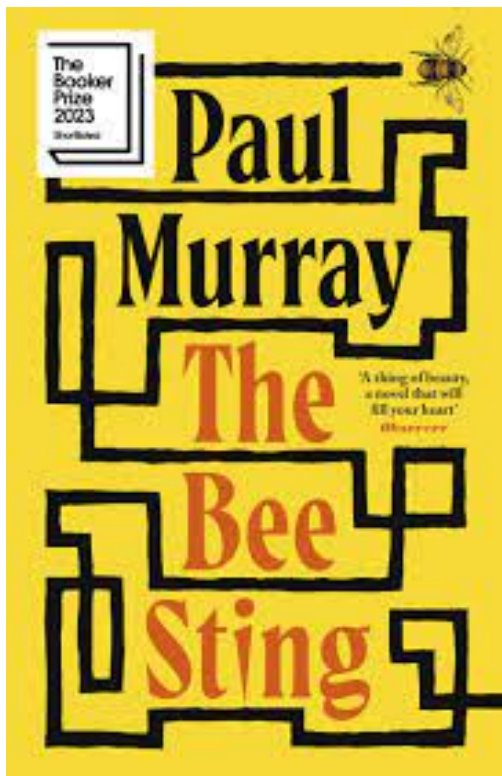


***Sunday Miscellany: A Selection, 2018-2023*, edited by Sarah Binchy**

Every week, *Sunday Miscellany* on RTE Radio 1 broadcasts a selection of essays that range from the deeply moving to the humorous. For many listeners tuning in is a weekend ritual as they cosy under the covers to hear personal stories by writers of all vintages. This latest collection gathers a selection of radio essays from authors including Colm Tóibín, Niamh Campbell, Joseph O'Connor and Louise Kennedy, and promises to offer comfort and entertainment in equal measures. (And, full disclosure, it features an essay by yours truly.)

New Island, €19.95

[Buy a copy of Sunday Miscellany here](#)

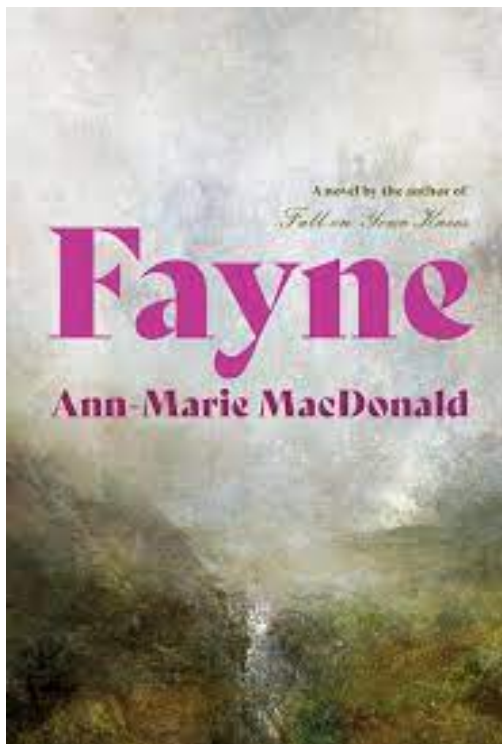


***The Bee Sting* by Paul Murray**

Ireland's Booker prize-longlisted and shortlisted books by Elaine Feeney ([How to Build a Boat](#)), Sebastian Barry ([Old God's Time](#)), and the winner, [Prophet Song by Paul Lynch](#), are terrific novels worth reading and giving, but there's something particularly gift-worthy about *The Bee Sting* given its hefty size. Christmas is when fiction lovers in particular relish getting stuck into a huge book, so give your favourite bookworm a copy of this and bask in their delight. Just don't expect to see them offering to help with the washing up as they traverse the 600-odd pages and the twisty family story within.

Hamish Hamilton, €21

[Buy a copy of The Bee Sting here](#)

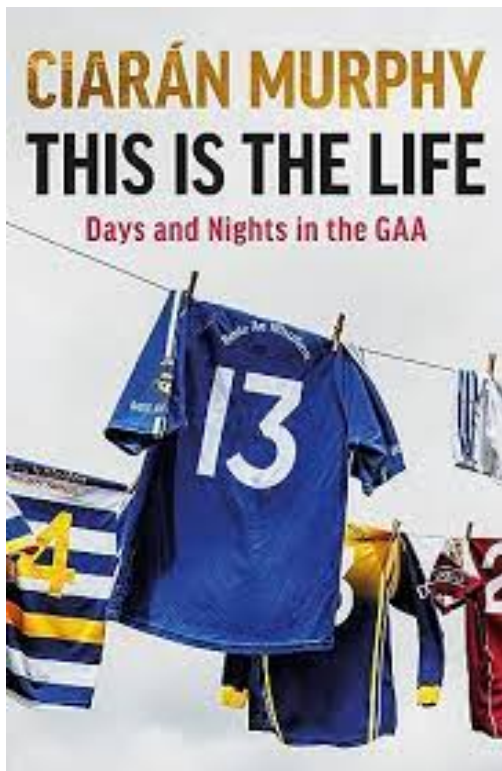


***Fayne* by Ann-Marie MacDonald**

Another hefty tome that got less attention than the Bookers this year but deserves a spotlight is *Fayne*, from the Irish publisher Tramp Press. It's by the Canadian author Ann-Marie MacDonald, and will be loved by fans of atmospheric novels set in big houses that have intrigue at their core. In this we meet Charlotte Bell, who is growing up on the vast estate Fayne, where she has been kept from the world by her father, Lord Henry Bell, because of her mysterious condition.

Tramp Press, €17.88

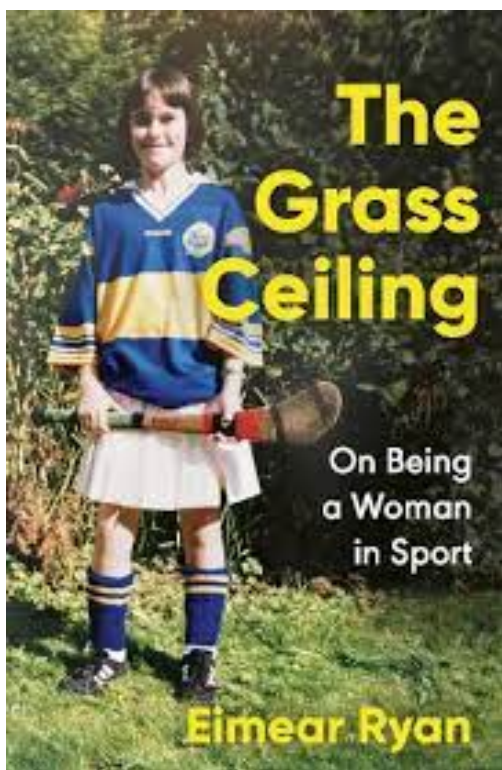
[Buy a copy of *Fayne* here](#)



This is the Life: Days and Nights in the GAA by Ciarán Murphy
Have a dedicated GAA player in your life, especially one who isn't in it for glory but for the love of the game? They'll adore the Second Captains presenter and lifelong GAA diehard Ciarán Murphy's first book, a memoir about being part of the great grassroots GAA community. He examines the role of rural clubs, the lengths players such as him go to for their team, and social class in the organisation, with wit and empathy.

Sandycove, €21

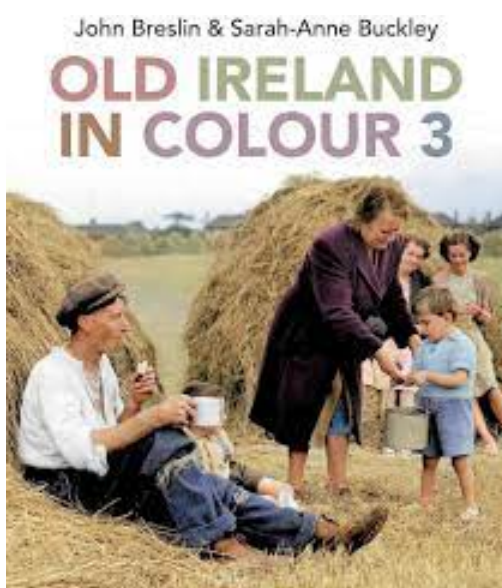
[Buy a copy of *This is the Life* here](#)



The Grass Ceiling: On Being a Woman in Sport by Eimear Ryan
Another sports book that would make a fantastic gift for a sportsperson of any age, but particularly for a young woman, is this Irish Book awards-winning memoir by Eimear Ryan. It explores her relationship with the GAA as a camogie player, and looks at what it means to be a woman who loves sport yet faces invisible — and visible — barriers in a male-dominated sector. Even those who've never lifted a hurl will find much to mull over here.

Sandycove, €21

[Buy a copy of *The Grass Ceiling* here](#)



***Old Ireland in Colour 3* by John Breslin and Sarah-Anne Buckley**

This massively successful series is a must-have for anyone interested in Irish history. John Breslin and Sarah-Anne Buckley present us with more colourised photographs from Ireland's past, and give us their background stories and historical context. You could lose hours examining the details in these photos and what secrets they might hold. The images include famous faces as well as everyday people from across the country.

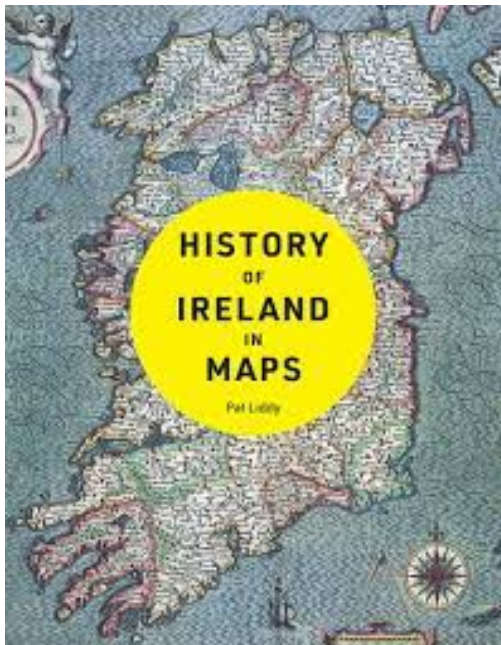
Merrion Press, €24.99

[Buy a copy of *Old Ireland in Colour 3* here](#)

***More than Concrete Blocks: Dublin City's Twentieth-Century Buildings and Their Stories, Volume 3 — 1973-99*, edited by Ellen Rowley**

When you walk down any street in Dublin the buildings you pass hold secrets and stories that you might not know about. The fantastic series *More than Concrete Blocks* is an ideal gift for anyone who wonders about the capital and its development, and this latest instalment takes us from the 1970s to the 1990s, covering iconic parts of the city such as the Poolbeg Chimneys, the Papal Cross in the Phoenix Park and the Central Bank. Walking around Dublin won't be the same after reading this.

UCD Press, €30

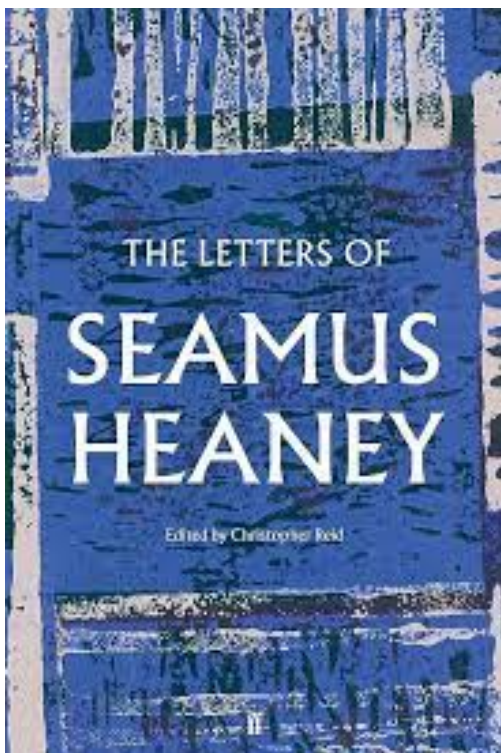


***History of Ireland in Maps* by Pat Liddy**

Be prepared to watch whomever receives this book spend hours examining these detailed maps, which tell the story of Ireland's development over the decades. It gathers 100 maps, from early cartography to modern surveys, and Pat Liddy is a tour guide and historian, so the perfect person to guide the reader through Ireland's past and present in this collection.

Collins, €35

[Buy a copy of *History of Ireland in Maps* here](#)



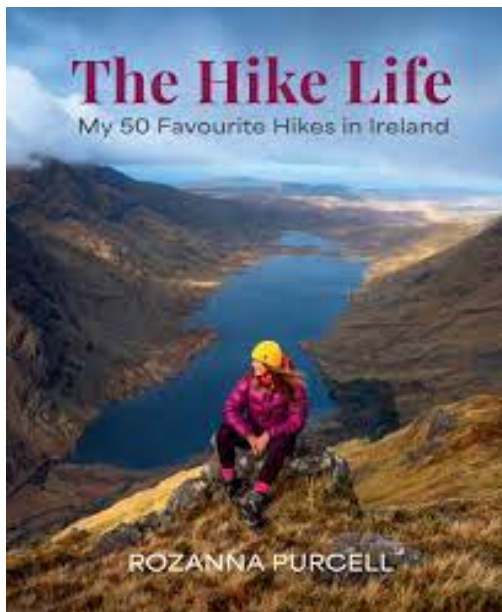
***The Letters of Seamus Heaney*, edited by Christopher Reid**

There's something hugely comforting about reading Seamus

Heaney's poetry, and this collection of his work from his publisher Faber gives a great insight into the topics and thoughts that occupied the poet. Christopher Reid has gathered highlights from 50 years of correspondence in a hardback that would make a beautiful gift for a reader of any age. It draws on letters from private and public archives, and takes in Heaney's youth in Belfast, his burgeoning career and his Nobel prize win.

Faber & Faber, €56

[Buy a copy of *The Letters of Seamus Heaney* here](#)

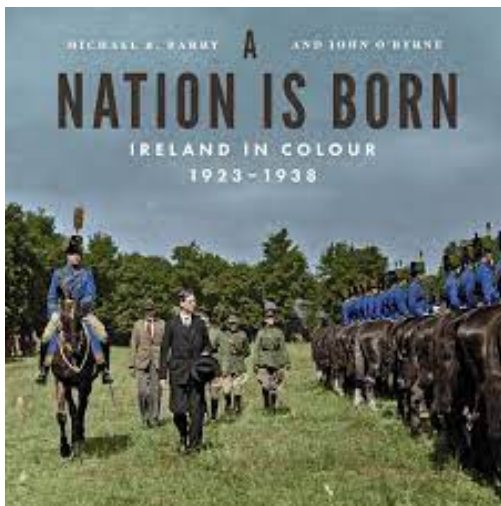


***The Hike Life: My 50 Favourite Hikes in Ireland* by Rozanna Purcell**

If you have a loved one who wants to spend more time outdoors in the new year, this is the ideal gift for them. The Irish Book awards-winning compact hardback is from the hike fanatic and influencer Roz Purcell, and looks at her favourite hikes across the island. She includes tips for hiking novices about how to make hikes safe and enjoyable, and pointers on where to stop for the best photographs and picnics.

Black & White Publishing, €28

[Buy a copy of *The Hike Life* here](#)

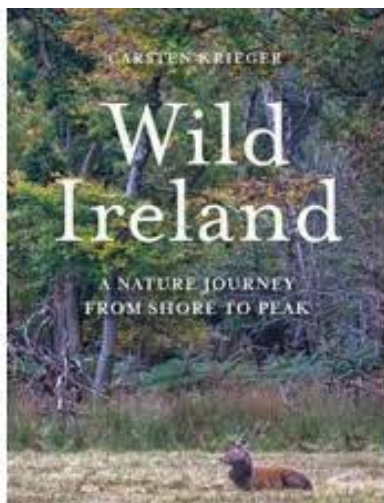


***A Nation Is Born: Ireland in Colour 1923-1938* by John O'Byrne and Michael B Barry**

Another must-have for Irish history lovers, this combines images colourised by John O'Byrne with historical commentary from Michael B Barry. The images are taken from the 15 years after the formation of the state, and show the journey of a country trying to establish itself on the world stage. It takes in rural life, the Eucharistic Congress and the Shannon hydroelectric scheme, for starters.

Gill Books, €26.99

[Buy a copy of A Nation Is Born here](#)



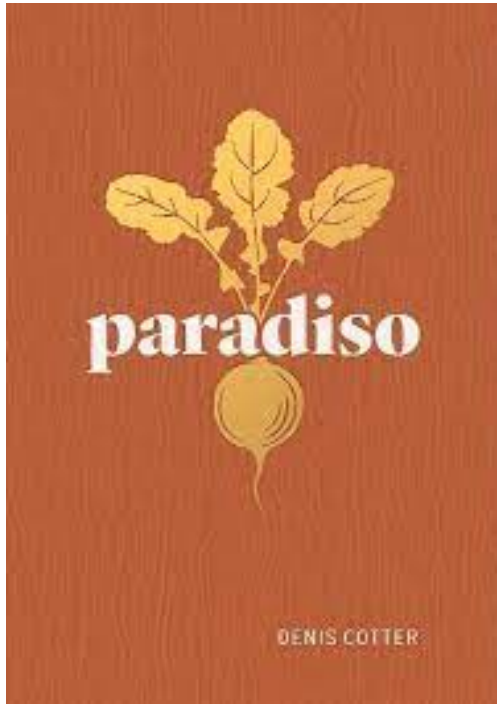
***Wild Ireland: A Nature Journey from Shore to Peak* by Carsten Krieger**

Take a trip around the beauty of Ireland through the lens and words of Carsten Krieger, who is adept at capturing the stunning landscape of the country. In this latest book he brings us mountains, bogs, dolphins and creatures on the Irish shoreline. One for those who want to journey around the

country without leaving home.

O'Brien Press, €24.99

[Buy a copy of Wild Ireland here](#)

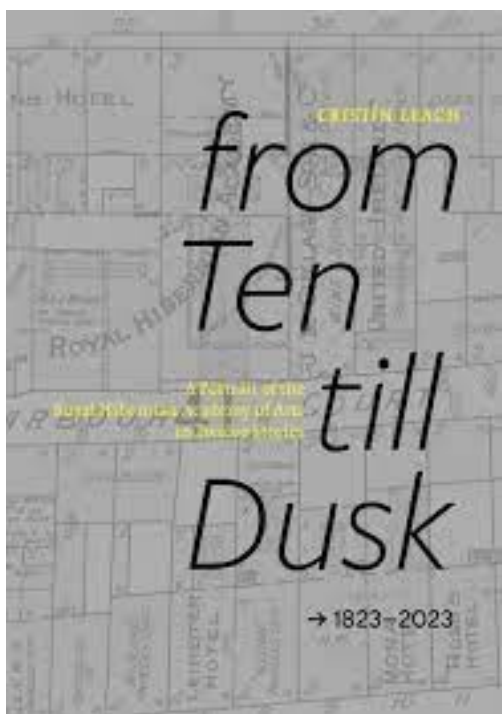


***Paradiso: Recipes and Reflections* by Denis Cotter**

There isn't a food lover in Ireland who hasn't salivated at the prospect of eating at [Paradiso in Cork](#), the chef Denis Cotter's stunning vegetarian restaurant. His cookbooks are always a joy, and in this latest stunning hardback he gives us a glimpse of how he and his staff create their delicious vegetarian and vegan dishes. It has a foreword by the longtime Paradiso fan Cillian Murphy. Buy this for the cook in your house and enjoy the results.

Nine Bean Rows Books, €39

[Buy a copy of Paradiso here](#)



***From Ten till Dusk: A Portrait of the Royal Hibernian Academy of Arts in Twelve Stories* by Cristín Leach**

The art critic and [Sunday Times contributor Cristín Leach](#)'s latest book will go down a treat with the discerning culture or art fan among your family or friends. This is the story of the history of the Royal Hibernian Academy, but rather than go the typical route Leach has chosen to tell it through the tales of 12 people integral to its journey — through historical fiction, diary entries, letters and poetry. The book is beautifully designed and packaged, making it a delight to gaze upon.

Merrion Press, €19.99

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