

On my way to meet with James Brown, celebrity hairdresser and best friend of Kate Moss, I brace myself for lots of air kissing and dahlings. Instead, I am met with a genuine guy, who you quickly realise has zilt time for any of the typical pretentiousness that you associate with celebrities.

**W**e meet in the Unicorn Restaurant in Dublin where James and his PR girl, Jennie are sitting patiently amidst the sea of suits. What was to be an interview over lunch quickly turns into what seems like lunch with mates over a really nice couple of glasses of Châteauneuf du Pape and great food. Chatting about Galway, which he now calls home, his horses, Supermacs and getting a bit worse for wear at the races while trying to keep up with his beer drinking Irish friends, you get the impression that this Croydon-born chap is now ready to take a step back from the glitz and glamour for something a bit more real. The reason we're meeting up is that James has just launched his new range of hair products, but he seems reluctant to discuss

kindly puts in my mouth when I ask him how he deals with the whole 'celebrity' hairdresser label. "I don't entertain it at all. At the end of the day, I blow dry hair – I'm a hairdresser, that's all I do. I'm not saving the world; I'm not saving lives. Obviously, I'm good at it but it's not brain surgery and I hate being called celebrity hairdresser." Maybe so, but working with A-listers like Gwyneth Paltrow, Kirsten Dunst, The Beckhams and Johnny Depp is obviously a tad more exciting than chopping hair in a salon down the high street. "I am lucky, when I find myself moaning, I think, I'm in paradise here."

Some of his favourite celebs to work with include Sarah Jessica Parker and Demi Moore, "an amazing woman" who is he says super professional and really nice. Julianne Moore is another of his favourites. "You just feel like you've known her forever. Most of them are my clients regularly, so it's easy. You see them at their most vulnerable because you're at their house and they've just got out of bed and you're in their life completely which no one else would ever see in a million years. You're there in their bedroom or even in the bathroom helping them wash their hair. So they're in a very vulnerable state but obviously they can trust me."

When in need of a bit of escapism from the whole scene, James hops on a plane and heads for Killimor, where he's been coming since a little boy. "Every time I come here I feel super, super at home like nowhere else I've ever been before. When I'd go to the airport sometimes, I'd cry when I'd have to leave. A lot of people don't understand it at all. During the summer, everyone's going off to Cannes or sailing around St Tropez and I come to Ballinasloe – they can't understand it. This Christmas and New Year, everyone went to Thailand, I'm came here. I did that for years but now I'd choose this a hundred million per cent any day." He says he'd love to have his best friend Kate Moss over to stay in Galway, but admits the last thing he'd want to do is bring the wrath of the paparazzi on the sleepy village of Tynagh. "I am still in that scene and I speak or see Kate every day but I love having that balance and if I can't manage to get here for

that side of things, preferring to chat about the possibility of him holding the stations at his house in Ballinasloe and his life as stylist to the stars. He's really excited about his new home in Killimor, and invites me and our photographer around for a more intimate chat the following week. But James' real friends are those he's had for years and admits that he meets lots of 'wankers', words he



feature



# Styling the stars

BY JO LAVELLE





some reason then I'll be in the countryside at Kate's but I'll be up and out and still riding there as well – I just love the balance of that.”

Mentions of Kate are dotted throughout our conversation. He laughs as he tells me of how he was dying to get on the phone to Kate to tell her that the guy's name who was renovating his outhouse in Killimor was called Mossy, his nickname for Kate. I ask him what it is about Kate that has the public in a constant state of fascination. “I think it's because she has a way of disarming people. She doesn't get out of a limo with 20 bodyguards and dark glasses on, making an entrance. She'll get out, put her head down and get in. And the fact that you do see her without her hair and make-up done, you do see her in the country with her wellies on. She's not air-brushed all the time so I think she's the most relatable out of everyone. You go to work with Kate, everyone will tense and then she'll come onto set and everyone is disarmed immediately – she'll know every single assistant's name by the end of the day. She'll be in the corner chatting away to the caterers and other celebrities don't do that. I know not a lot of people get to see that but she is super down to earth and normal. She drives her own car, she'll walk to the pub – she's normal, as much as she can be for being Kate Moss.”

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It was a collaboration with Kate, who he befriended in his late teens, which catapulted James into the world of celebrity and fashion. He dubs as “life changing” the first cover of

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Vogue he ever did with Kate at the age of 22. “It was so easy because it was a natural process, because I was doing Kate’s hair which I did anyway all the time, my friend Corrine Day was taking the pictures, who was my flat-mate, it was just so mellow and easy and great and it ended up changing the whole industry really.”

Following over two decades in the industry, James decided to launch his own product range. “I was always mixing and matching products and it was never quite what I wanted. I just thought, wouldn’t it be great if I did my own products and then I just did it. I think the time was just right basically to do it.” So what in James’ opinion makes a great hairstyle? “Simplicity. For me, it’s when someone looks like they haven’t tried, that they haven’t spent hours on their hair is the best for me really. You want the hair to be simple if you’ve got a ball gown on. And that keeps you modern and fresh. You never see Kate with huge hair and a huge dress and full make-up. The hair is always super simple but the outfit can be over the top. That’s why she always looks so good.”

So how does he rate us Galway women on the fashion front? “I love the city; I think people look amazing in Galway City. You see really well dressed women, kids that have the best style; a lot of the students don’t have any money but the way they’re put together is amazing. It’s so weird now that I see people in Galway and I think ‘God, that’s amazing’ and a season later, on the catwalk in New York, I’ll see the same stuff. Because the designers are out there on the streets copying what they see. I’m on the firing line of fashion – I’m at a show in New York, on the first week of fashion season and I see where the stuff is coming from and it’s coming off the streets. Women are really well put together in Galway.” I tell him the ladies will love him after that comment.

We head off through Stephen’s Green, and he’s asking me where he might find a pair of white fingerless gloves when we bump into Victoria Mary Clarke, girlfriend of Shane McGowan. She tells him it’s Shane’s 50th, there’s a party for him in London. Will he be there? Absolutely he will. Wonder if he’ll need a break in Killimor after that session? **e**