



Christy and Jay
Cashman, owners of
Kilkea Castle in County
Kildare, Ireland

A Love Story

KILKEA CASTLE
IS RESTORED

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"Who goes there?" came a muffled voice from behind the heavy castle door. A handsome gentleman with a salt-and-pepper mane opened the vault-like door. "Lisa and Gerald Burwell—editor-in-chief and publisher of *VIE*," I replied. "Oh, right. I'm Jay," he said casually, extending his hand in greeting. "We're just getting a fire started," Jay said, leading the way to the heart of the castle lobby. "That's Jim," he said unceremoniously, motioning toward a man contorting to get a better look up the fireplace flue. "It's open," said Jim McClellan, owner of the five-star Wequassett Resort in Chatham, Massachusetts. "It's just not drawing yet." Smoke was beginning to back up from the freshly lit fire. Thanks to quick thinking by Jay and Jim, doors and windows were promptly opened for ventilation. The flue eventually began to draw out the smoke but not before setting off the castle's brand-new fire alarm. Jay jested, "Well, at least we know it works."

It was late afternoon on Friday, October 27, 2017. My husband and I had just arrived to a remote Irish hamlet near Castledermot, County Kildare, about an hour southwest of Dublin. An invitation to the grand opening of Baronial Hall had brought us the three-thousand plus miles. Jay escorted us over to the golf pro shop to pick up our room key. Approaching the newly renovated clubhouse, we commented on the gorgeous course and its amenities. "I didn't know *anything* about golf courses before purchasing this course," Jay admitted. "I don't really even *play* golf. But after refurbishing this course, I now know *a lot* about golf courses."



Above: The beautiful rose garden and hedge maze at Kilkea Castle

Photo by Bruno Sternberger

Right: Kilkea offers memorable horseback riding experiences; Christy Scott Cashman, an avid equestrian, poses on-site with one of her favorite horses.

Opposite left: A full Irish breakfast is served in the Banquet Hall overlooking the rose garden.

Opposite right: Guests can enjoy a drink with medieval flair at the castle's pub.

It was nearly a quarter century ago that Jay Cashman, a Boston-based American business mogul of Irish heritage, was visiting Ireland with his then-girlfriend and avid equestrian, Christy Scott. (In the early nineties, before she and Jay even knew each other, Christy frequented Ireland for world-class hunt seat horseback riding—a very assertive and exhilarating cross-country riding style rooted in old-world foxhunting.) It was about one such trip in 1996 on which Jay accompanied her that Christy reminisced. “While I’d be out riding, Jay would be scouring the countryside looking for real estate, but more specifically, he was in search of a *castle*. He was determined to one day own one, and at the time, I thought he was joking.”

Jay’s determination would be prophetic. In early 1999, the couple were wed in the ruins of the Franciscan Abbey on the grounds of Adare Manor in County Limerick. According to the *Irish Examiner*, the lavish wedding was one “befitting a king or queen.” In 2012, Jay finally achieved his objective



when he purchased the breathtaking Kilkea Castle along with the adjacent golf course near Castledermot, County Kildare. Ironically enough, when Jay tracked his family lineage, he discovered that his ancestors were once peasants that had worked the land owned by wealthy Irish lords. Whether it is intended or not, it has seemingly become Jay’s destiny to raise the bar for the family legacy. “I don’t know why he thought I needed a castle, as I didn’t. Or, maybe I actually did!” quipped Christy.

The allure of owning a twelfth-century medieval castle in Ireland is what dreams are made of. The experience of walking into a castle will bring a smile to even the staunchest of adults. But few have the means or the will to pour copious amounts of TLC and large sums of money into a dilapidated landmark. As founder and CEO of Jay Cashman Inc., Jay definitely had the proficiency and resources for such an undertaking: he employs more than a thousand people in marine construction, dredging, vessel leasing, renewable and wind-powered energy, real estate development, environmental remediation, heavy civil construction, water storage, and power plant maintenance. Christy is an actress, writer, producer, and philanthropist who has appeared in over twenty films, including *American Hustle*, *The Forger*, *Joy*, *Ted 2*, and *The Kids Are All Right*. In 2014, she founded Saint Aire Productions and cofounded Charity Warriors Challenge, an annual competition that provides a platform for women and their charities. With Christy’s entrepreneurial

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thrill-seeking spirit and her genuine love of Ireland, it seems that she and Jay could not be better suited for the ambitious venture of restoring Kilkea Castle and the golf course back to their former glory.

Baronial Hall was the crowning touch of the five-year castle renovation. The \$50 million transformation brought welcome jobs and a restored sense of pride to the local community. “I think the biggest challenge about the restoration was the fact that it wasn’t just a patch-up kind of job,” Jay recounted. “We had to gut most of the buildings and start fresh. But, it was definitely the right thing to do for the property.” He added that the most important transformation to Baronial Hall was to bring light into the space and to feature the original rock wall that is actually the back side of the carriage house. “It was important to make it romantic for brides,” Jay continued. “We are very proud of the way it turned out, and it looks better than we imagined.”

The late October air was cooling rapidly, which was drawing a dense fog. (How appropriate for a party at a nine-hundred-year-old castle!) Entering Baronial Hall, we were politely late, so the cocktail reception was well under way with a crowd of over three hundred guests that included friends, family, dignitaries, surrounding neighbors, business colleagues, and the press. The contemporary event hall was stylishly appointed and beautifully decorated. The staff was genuinely attentive, the atmosphere unpretentious, and the food amazing.





Irish tenor Ronan Tynan and his band perform at the ceremony.



Christy and Jay Cashman dance the night away, celebrating their castle and a love story worthy of a fairy tale.



Before the night's entertainment began, Jay and Christy took the stage. The gracious and reserved man and his equally poised model-turned-actress bride both welcomed and thanked their guests for celebrating yet another milestone in their lives. After giving a warm thanks to their staff for a job well done, property general manager Adrian O'Sullivan gave a glowing thank-you to Jay and Christy for their incredible vision and generosity. "I am looking forward to Kilkea Castle becoming one of Ireland's most famous castle resorts," boasted Adrian.

BETWEEN JAY'S EXPERTISE AND CHRISTY'S LOVE OF IRELAND, KILKEA CASTLE COULDN'T HAVE FOUND MORE APPROPRIATE BENEFACTORS.

The acclaimed and energetic Irish tenor Ronan Tynan and his band brought the guests to their feet. "I performed at the opening of Kilkea Castle, and I was thrilled to be asked by Jay to perform again tonight," said Ronan. "Jay has restored this magnificent castle to the highest standard. It will be one of the hottest tourist attractions in all of Ireland," added Ronan. The evening's extravaganza was capped off with a first-class fireworks display over the perfectly manicured French garden. The Cashmans know that a good party is always followed by a great after-party, so close friends and family were invited back to the castle for an intimate get-together that went into the early morning hours. It was the celebration of celebrations.

What really struck me about the entire experience was that it felt more like a family reunion than a formal gala. And that is just one of the amazing facets to Jay and Christy—they are an extremely gracious, down-to-earth couple who have the uncanny ability to make anyone feel welcome. Their love for life and for

Ireland is contagious to anyone within sight. I'm so impressed with the Cashmans, not because of their great success or wealth, or even their bringing Kilkea Castle back to life, but because you can see kindness, decency, and class in all that they do.

Between Jay's expertise and Christy's love of Ireland, Kilkea Castle couldn't have found more appropriate benefactors. Despite the geographical location, this is an inspirational, all-American dream of moving mountains—through hard work, drive, and determination. The revival of this magnificent landmark castle is a true testament to the Cashman's dedication, generosity, kindness, and passion.

For most, the fantasy of fairy tales is relegated to the pages of childhood storybooks, such as the Brothers Grimm's *Snow White* or Charles Perrault's *Sleeping Beauty*. But in this real-life story, the dashing Prince Charming does meet the fairest in the land, and they are living happily ever after! ▣

For more information about the amazing amenities and services of the five-star Kilkea Castle & Golf Resort, please go to www.kilkeacastle.ie

Above left: Fireworks display to celebrate the grand opening of Baronial Hall

Above right: Beautiful Kilkea Castle on a sunny day

Photo by Bruno Sternberger



Guests enjoy the festivities at the grand opening of Baronial Hall at Kilkea Castle on October 27, 2017