

my place

NAME: METTE ROCHE
ADDRESS: CO MEATH
DWELLING: CONVERTED BARN
HERE SINCE: EARLY 1980S



PHOTOGRAPH: ALAN BETSON

'It's still farmland, but we're worried because the land around the house has been sold for a high price'

I'm Norwegian. I came to Ireland in 1975, so I'm here 30-plus years now. We lived in Monkstown originally, then Ashbourne, but we were looking for a rural home, and we found this place more than 25 years ago.

It's quite rural. It's still farmland surrounding us here. But we're getting worried. Ratoath and north Co Dublin are expanding very rapidly, and the land around the house here has been sold. It's still zoned agricultural, and it's still used as such, but we're worried because it went for a very high price. We've gathered signatures to try and keep it a green belt. It's a lovely community, with a lot of people born and reared here and families who have lived here for generations. A lot of the land is still being farmed by those people, and they take pride in the community. They're really lovely people to live among.

I'm in a converted barn now. We originally lived in the adjacent farmhouse – a thatched cottage – and then converted the barn. People say it is very Scandinavian, an extension of my past, with a lot of wood inside. It's stone on the outside, which I love. It's not a standard two-up-two-down, that's for sure. There's a lot of space, and open rooms with a lot of wood. I have a large open-plan kitchen/dining room/sitting room on the ground floor, with a mezzanine above it, and a sun room. We have two big wood-burning stoves to keep the place warm. I have a little studio in the mezzanine above the kitchen for my artwork. I'm a social worker, which can be quite challenging, and I use painting as therapy and for relaxation. I'm in an art group called The Old Schoolhouse, and we exhibit twice a year, very successfully.

The space lends itself to lots of ideas. The area inspires me, because it's rural and quiet. The fact that you can walk out your door and go for a long walk on country lanes is nice. I love gardening, and have a quarter or a third of an acre, which is plenty. I used to grow vegetables, but not any more. Now I have berry trees and shrubs and plants – there's a lot of work with vegetables.

I've been living here for so long, that it's now hard for me to compare Irish communities with Norwegian ones. I prefer to live in Ireland. I think people are friendlier, and they're much more accommodating, especially here in this rural community. I find in Norway things have become very materialistic; they're very much looking out for themselves. People might say that about Ireland now, but maybe that's why I love living here in this area. You don't get that feeling. People are still very down-to-earth.

◆ In conversation with Davin O'Dwyer