

McDonagh's

With its roots in Galway, McDonagh's is a seafood bar and restaurant that has grown since 1902 to become one of the best loved seafood restaurants in the West of Ireland. McDonagh's has been frequently reviewed as 'the best chips in Galway' by tourists and locals on travel apps, and has made it onto the 'top ten best fish and chip shops in Ireland' list in various articles and reviews over the years. Located on Quay Street, close to the river Corrib at the Spanish Arch and its history of fish trading, McDonagh's is a family restaurant that has grown and evolved with the city of Galway over the past century.



McDonagh's is currently in its fourth generation. It began with Colman (Cogar) McDonagh in 1902. Colman's son, Coley, was the second generation of McDonagh's to run the business with his wife Margaret. The third generation to take the reins was PJ McDonagh, and his wife Mary, who are still involved in the business today. Colm, Liam, Pádraig and Tomás are the fourth generation of the family business. We spoke to Tomás McDonagh about the importance of family, and how the business has changed over the years.

Q. Who is involved in the day-to-day running of McDonagh's?

My father and mother retired, PJ and Mary. Also Colm, Liam, Pádraig and Tomás McDonagh (myself). PJ and Mary are not involved as much as they used to be, but still play an important role in the decisions made by the company on a daily basis.

Q. Is the family aspect of the business important? Why?

Absolutely. The fact that it has always been a family business means that a lot of the day-to-day running of it revolves around the family aspect. For instance, trust in each other's strengths and abilities, reliability, and to a certain extent, a level of co-dependency on each other, which probably makes it different from the traditional single owner type business.

Q. As a fourth generation business, why do you think McDonagh's has been successful in remaining a family business for so long? Do you see the business continuing this way in the future?

We have always been a close family. Even our extended family would be considered close by most measures. In previous generations, that closeness meant there was a network of people around the business that could be relied on when things were difficult. Even today,

we have cousins that have worked with us ever since they were kids. I have no reason to see a change in that. They are important members of our team, and we feel very lucky to have them with us.



The shop front on Quay Street.

Q. Are the next generation in the family encouraged to take part in the business, or is that interest allowed to unfold naturally?

The next generation are still at school, so it's not known yet if they will be interested or not in joining the family business. I'm sure when they are old enough they'll get roped in somehow. My guess is it would be allowed to unfold naturally. The difference between now and previous generations, would be the fact that they have a choice in deciding that for themselves.

Q. Has the development of Galway over the last 100 or so years had any impact on the business?

I would say it most definitely has. It started off as a fish shop that sold turf and coal, then it became more of a fish shop that sold fruit and vegetables. Until eventually, with the increase in tourism in the 80s, we began to serve cooked seafood in the tourist season. Then by the early 90s we started doing fish and chips, which kept us busy with students most year round, and with the increasing tourist numbers in the summer months. When Galway city centre pedestrianized the main street, that stopped any cars picking up fresh fish from the shop. So that was the end of the fresh fish counter.



McDonagh's Seafood Restaurant, which is a separate area to the seafood bar.

Q. Since the very beginning, are there any values or traditions in the business that have been brought forward to today?

It sounds clichéd, but the number one value that I know we try and abide by, is to treat people as you would like to be treated yourself. It's a simple value, but if you stick by it as best you can, you shouldn't go too far wrong.