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## CARL O’CONNELL

### Driftwood Surf Café



It is said that location is everything when it comes to property. But the same is true for hospitality and Driftwood Surf Café has arguably one of the best locations in the world.

Located on the Wild Atlantic Way, Driftwood offers breath-taking views of one of the most unique sites on the globe - the UNESCO World Heritage Site, Skellig Michael.

But for co-owner Carl O’Connell, the view is something he is accustomed to. He grew up in this Gaeltacht area and Driftwood is located in a green field that sat beside the family home, on the O’Connell’s farmland.

Carl and his wife Jenny spent years planning and building Driftwood and they finally returned from Edinburgh in February 2020 to open it.

“My father was a farmer but was ill for a long time and we had been planned to come home from Edinburgh since 2014/15 to be closer to him and the family but it took much longer than hoped to secure funding and gain planning that sadly he passed away in 2018 before Driftwood was complete,” says Carl.

Carl had moved to Edinburgh in 2006 to complete his final year of the Civil/Structural Engineering course which he was studying at CIT. He then got employment as a Structural Engineer and it was in Edinburgh that he met Scottish schoolteacher Jenny and they married in 2017.

“We had always wanted to set up our own business and when my father got sick we decided to do it sooner rather than later. We were always going to start a business on the family farm and decided that a restaurant and café would give something back to a very rural community.”

The couple managed the project themselves from Scotland while continuing to work to fund the project, which was delayed by a number of planning issues. Jenny left her job as a teacher and went into the hospitality business to gain valuable experience.

In February 2020, they moved to Kerry and into Carl’s grandmother’s cottage a stone’s throw from the café. Then Covid-19 hit, delaying the opening further.

During this time, Carl participated on Back for Business with Thomas Ennis as his Lead

Entrepreneur. “The programme was so helpful as, even though we could not open, we gained so much from my Lead and the other entrepreneurs in my group. Whether it was motivation, general business ideas or more tangible marketing and accounting advice, there always a nugget of gold to be found.”

With the help of family, the couple finally opened in September 2020, offering fresh, local and seasonal food inspired by the neighbouring ocean and farmlands.

“It couldn’t have gone better. The support was massive from the local community and the large following we had gained on Instagram and other social media platforms. We were super busy right up to Christmas Eve.” Various lockdowns and restrictions meant the café had to adapt from being a traditional restaurant to a take-away as well as enduring enforced closures.

The couple will re-open their doors as soon as restrictions allow and have many plans to host small festivals and events that encourage the Irish language to help sustain the local community and attract even more tourists to this little slice of heaven.



#### POSITION

Co-founder

#### WHAT WE DO

We are a restaurant, café and farm shop located on the western tip of Europe.

#### CONTACT US

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