

## A focus on the beauty of the West

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Walter Pfeiffer's fascination with Connemara has left a legacy of two stunning collections of photography, writes **Marjorie Brennan**



John and Richard Lee footing the turf at Slievenarusheeny. Pictures: Walter Pfeiffer

Walter Pfeiffer's long-standing love affair with Ireland began in 1964, when on a holiday to Ireland from his native Germany, he laid eyes on the Aran Islands for the first time. The photographer was bewitched by the stunning landscape and the following year, he returned to Ireland, where he would make his home for the rest of his life. The results of Pfeiffer's fascination with the West of Ireland can be seen in the photographic collection *Connemara & Aran*, a follow-up to the very successful *Connemara & Beyond*.

The recent publication of the book is especially poignant given the photographer's unexpected passing earlier this year, aged 73. Pfeiffer was renowned for his work as a fashion and food photographer, working for publications including *Vogue* and designing and shooting commercial campaigns for the likes of Bord Bia and Dunnes. Vincent Murphy, creative director of Artisan House Editions, the Connemara-based publishers of *Connemara & Aran*, had a long and fruitful working relationship with Pfeiffer and it is clear that his loss is still hugely felt.

"It was a total shock. I had known Walter for 25 years; I encountered him when I worked as an art director and designer in Dublin and we became good friends," says Murphy. "The first book I worked with him on was about 15 years ago, *Wicklow: A Personal View*, which was a fabulous book and which sold out rapidly. Then we moved on to *Connemara & Beyond*. We were working together professionally in between all these things."



John Jack Joyce in the Maumturks

Murphy, who is originally from Bishopstown in Cork, says he and Pfeiffer had also planned to do a book on West Cork.

"He spent a lot of time down around Dunmanus Bay and Sheep's Head at Christmas-time. I used to visit him because I was visiting my family in Bishopstown. He would take me on shoots on the Sheep's Head peninsula. He had a fabulous collection of photography on West Cork."

Pfeiffer lived with his Irish wife Valerie and their five children in Delgany, Co Wicklow, and was also inspired by that county's lush countryside.

"For the last five years or so, he had been shooting Luggala and the estate there; he has photographed every inch of that. It was planned to release a set of prints and we were just about to embark on that; there was some beautiful imagery there."

Perfectly complementing the photography in *Connemara & Aran* are poems by established and emerging writers who have a strong association with the area.

"We are getting a fantastic reaction to it. There is also a special edition hardback which includes a CD of all the poets reading their work and harp music from Kathleen Loughnane, whose music Walter loved. Not only that, the CD has a recording of Walter introducing the work. He was a private man, he didn't do interviews so it is great to have that, even though it is very difficult to listen to."



Seaweed bubbles near the Rotten Stick on Innishmore

Like Pfeiffer, Murphy has also been captivated by Connemara, basing his publishing business, which he runs with his wife Mary, a native of the area, in old worker's cottages in Letterfrack. Murphy studied in Cork and Limerick, and worked in London and Dublin, but he says he is now staying put in Connemara. "I love Cork, as any Corkman would, and I love Kerry, where my father is from, but I'll never go back anywhere else, this is a gorgeous part of the world. I've found my space here. It's not only the beautiful scenery but the people as well. As Walter wrote: 'Connemara can be many things to people; it is not only a place of silent valleys, shrouded, rugged mountains, dark and broody lakes and at times a fearsome coastline; to me, it is a state of mind, a refuge to escape to from the stresses of everyday life.'"

*Connemara & Aran* is out now via Artisan House Editions, [artisanhouse.ie](http://artisanhouse.ie)