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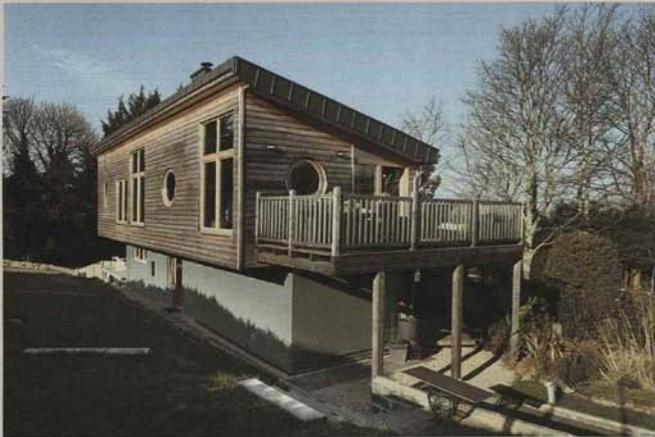
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MY FAVOURITE ROOM



FIT FOR PURPOSE

Pilates instructor **Eva Berg** had just moved in to her all-timber house when it caught fire, says **Mary O'Sullivan**. Now she's back in her home and studio, ready to impart the secret of her trim figure and tiny waist. Photography by **Tony Gavin**

**L**ike food and weight, exercise is a huge topic of conversation with women: how much or how little we do; which type; what works on which parts of the body. All the women comedians have something to say about it, too. "I don't think I need buns of steel, I'd be happy with buns of cinnamon," is Ellen DeGeneres's contribution, while Phyllis Diller has said her "idea of exercise is a good brisk sit". Of course, we like to laugh about it precisely because we don't do enough of it, and laughing masks our guilt and feelings of failure. Singer Cher was right when she said: "Fitness — if it came in a bottle, everyone would have a great body." And, whatever you think of Cher, she has an amazing body.

So, too, has **Eva Berg** and, yes, it's all thanks to exercise — in Eva's case, Pilates. She's a full-time Pilates instructor and practises what she preaches. As well as three hours of personal exercise daily, she runs classes five days a week in the custom-built studio at her lovely home in a leafy idyll in the exclusive south Co Dublin area of Rathmichael. Having trained in London, Scandinavia and California, she has spent several years refining her own techniques for defining and sculpting the body and it's obviously proving a hit with the clients — her regulars include

film stars, entertainers, sports people and socialites, as well as ordinary working men and women.

Yet Eva fell into the world of exercise only when she drew a blank when it came to her chosen career — that of fashion — though for a while things did go according to plan.

Born in Ireland, Eva lived in the Middle East as a child, then studied fashion in NCAD — she was a year below Philip Treacy. After college, she went back to Dubai. "I was back visiting my parents in my final year when I met my husband," she says. "When I left college we got engaged and I went to work in Dubai where I got a job in a French couture house.

"We used to do wedding dresses for the sheikhas, the daughters of the royal families. They were amazing dresses. The brides were all about 16, 17, and tiny. The dresses were heavily beaded with Swarovski crystals and weighed around 45kg. The poor girls hardly weighed that themselves and we used to have to put the trains on wheels because they were too heavy for the girls to drag themselves," Eva recalls.

After a year there, she moved to Norway with her husband, where she hoped to continue her career. However, she found it impossible to get work in the world of fashion and instead turned



**'The house came in a flat pack ... Myself and my girlfriends watched the house go up, or, rather, we watched the carpenters'**

to something she loved. "My hobby was the gym so I qualified as an aerobics instructor and, after two years, moved into Pilates."

Just outside her studio hang dozens of certificates of achievement in the world of Pilates. "The training is continuous. Every year I go off and do some more. I'm completely addicted to it," she says.

After 10 years in Norway, the family — she has two sons, Aaron, now 17, and Gabriel, now 13 — moved back to Ireland, but the marriage didn't survive. The couple split up four years ago, just after building their house, which is right next door to her parents' home. "When we moved back, my parents were still in the Middle East and we lived in their house. We tried to buy a few sites but we couldn't get planning permission. In the end, we bought the site from my parents and it took four years to get planning,"

she notes, adding that the all-timber house, though designed by an architect, was bought from an Austrian company who sent four carpenters over for three days to build it. "It came in a flat pack, like something you'd get in Ikea. Myself and my girlfriends watched the house go up or, rather, we watched the carpenters," she adds with a somewhat dirty laugh.

Hardly was the house up in November 2008, than tragedy struck — it caught fire due to an electrical fault. "We were in it four months. It happened during the day, I was at work when I got a phone call. By the time I got home, the fire brigade was here. Half the house was burned and there was so much smoke damage we had to move out," Eva recalls. "It was a weird time, losing my home, my income, my studio — it was a real test. I look back and realise it was a big clearing but unbelievably stressful. I went into numb mode."

She got her life back together, rented a house and continued her classes from the rental house until she finally got back into her home at Easter in 2010. That was stressful, too, but the one saving grace was her new partner, Alan, whom Eva describes as her knight in shining armour. "None of my friends realised how lost and overwhelmed I



**Above**  
**Eva Berg in the kitchen of her Californian-style home in south Co Dublin. The green kitchen, complete with Neff appliances, was designed by her friend, interior designer Cassandra Sheridan. The unusual feathery lamp polarises men and women. 'Women love it and men think it's silly,' Eva says with a laugh**

**Left**  
**The timber exterior of Eva's house. The living spaces are all on the top floor. Double glass doors open onto wooden decks, with delightful**

**views of the gardens and the mountains beyond**

**Top right**  
**The master bedroom is in olive grey and, when the curtains are drawn, it's like a nest, says Eva. The Ligne Roset chair is called a straddler**

**Middle right**  
**Aaron's room. The tripod lamp is from Soul Interiors in Sandycove, Co Dublin**

**Bottom right**  
**A detail of the shelving that covers the whole landing wall. All the artefacts were brought back by Eva from her travels**

was, because I did not tell them," she says. "I have never been so frightened in my life. But Alan arrived the first morning with plastic bags full of cleaning stuff, a toolbox and a lawnmower. And that man worked like a Trojan, hardly taking any breaks for nearly two weeks, cleaning, fixing, moving all the machines in. He painted and then set to work on the garden. It was unbelievable. And when I opened the door to my clients, some of whom I have had for nearly 10 years, instead of being worn out and exhausted from the move, I was so proud and happy."

Like Eva herself, some of the clients are addicted to Pilates. "I have some as young as teenagers, hockey players. The oldest client is in her 80s, she started once a week, now comes three times. She's able to do everything," Eva says.

The Pilates studio, along with the kitchen/dining room and the den, are on the upper floor of the house, to maximise enjoyment of the woodland views. The rooms all have double doors, which open on to balconies. Wooden floors predominate and there's lots of light. The overall effect is a touch Californian, a touch log cabin. Eva attributes the entire decor to her friend, the interior designer, Cassandra Sheridan. The colours used



throughout are moody — lots of olive, green and grey — lightened with quirky touches such as the feather-covered lamp in the kitchen, which, she says, women love and men hate. Alan, a businessman, doesn't seem to mind it.

Other features include Eva's well-chosen collection of colourful modern paintings. "Collecting art is the only creative thing I do now," she claims.

However, Eva sells herself short. She recently brought out her second DVD, entitled *The Wicked Little Workout for the Waist*, which, according to Eva, will help to create a sexy hourglass shape. Her American friend Marnie Inskip O'Neill executive produced it and together they ensured that it was no ordinary exercise DVD by incorporating a burlesque mood with Pilates techniques. Thirty per cent of the proceeds goes to the ISPCC and already she's raised over €6,000 for the charity. So, by buying the DVD, you're doing good for others as well as yourself. And you'll never be the target of anyone's sizeist jokes. **L**

*To order 'The Wicked Little Workout for the Waist' online, or to find out about classes and times, tel: (087) 791-7627, or see [www.thesecontpilates.com](http://www.thesecontpilates.com)*