

MEET THE CL

WE once enjoyed the accolade of the island of saints and scholars and though it's long since past, if cleanliness is next to Godliness, it may soon be thus again. This time, however, it is the ladies leading the charge since a Norwegian study has revealed that Mrs Éire undertakes no less than 32 hours of housework a week, outshining her European sisters by quite some distance. And while most of us, with our dust-carpeted apartments, regard such statistics with customary derision; there are those women who will smile discreetly, knowing it applies to them. Here, GEORGINA HEFFERNAN meets four such domestic goddesses.

SOPHIE FLYNN ROGERS, 33, is from Dublin. She runs her own PR company, SFR PR. She lives on her own. She says: 'My friends tell me I'm a freak but I really love cleaning. When I went to college, my dad used to try to bribe me with my train fare and an extra €20 to come home and "work my magic on the house".

I know it sounds strange but cleaning actually relaxes me. I have a two-bedroom house now and I find about 18 hours a week cleaning in it. People might think it's excessive but I find it therapeutic.

I've arranged my schedule into cleaning duties — every week I have my 'clean sheet night' when I wash and iron all my bed linen.

I used to send them out to be done professionally but they weren't doing it right and they'd come back creased. So now I do them myself because I know that it will be perfect.

I have a routine of how I like things done. The sofa covers get washed every two weeks and the bed linen is washed twice a week.

Sunday is for ironing and there's always a huge pile. I can't understand people who only iron the fronts of their shirts — they're not even comfortable to wear like that — in my book everything can be ironed. Except maybe knickers.

Friday evening is for the kitchen floor. It's always intense because of the white lino — a total hands and knees job. Cillit Bang is my current cleaner of choice. The best applicator, I think, is a nail brush and you get down and scrub until it gleams. I like to keep my wardrobe colour-coded too. And I starch my sheets the old-fashioned way.

I also have a cleaning uniform. I wear pink wellies and a funky pinny over my clothes and blue rubber gloves. I am very careful to mind my hands so I wear cotton gloves underneath and slather on the hand cream.

Because I work from home I could spend all day cleaning and not doing anything else, so I have a very solid schedule. I get up in the morning and go to the gym. At break time, around 11am, I'll have a little clean. I find "CIF-ing" the skirting boards great for kick starting the creative process.

Sometimes my working life can be unpredictable, so it's nice to keep everything I can in order. It sounds like I'm a control freak but it makes me happy when everything is in its place. I wouldn't do anyone else's cleaning. They can do that themselves. But sometimes you can't help but giving other people's houses a good going-over.

Once I was seeing this guy and we were in his house and I went up to use the bathroom. After about half an hour, he came up to see if I was okay and I was still in there. I came out and said: "Look, I cleaned up because the sink was filthy; there was dust all over the place and the shower tray was disgusting."

After that we didn't last long, but he did offer to pay me to come over and do his cleaning. I declined. When I'm upset about something, I



by Georgina Heffernan

always do my best cleaning. Having said that, I'd never judge people on their tidiness. I just have a special radar for dust and things other people wouldn't notice.

My house was always spotless when I was growing up so maybe that's where my fascination comes from. It's nothing to be embarrassed about. You should take pride in a clean home, whether you're a man or a woman.

And there's no point in randomly spraying bleach around the house. Removing lime scale takes elbow grease. When I was growing up I always had chores to do — whether it was polishing the door saddles or the cutlery. They were always checked and if they didn't shine, it would have to be done again.

I can rarely leave my cleaning at home. Even if I go to New York, I'll bring back fancy rubber gloves and a brilliant cleaning book and a terrific dish scrubber. I go to India every year to bring back washing powder and stain bars. They have really good cleaning products there — their whites are gleaming.'

PATRICIA MOLLOY, 48, is the medical director and founder of the Derma Laser Clinic in Blackrock, Co. Dublin. She is married with two children, Patrick, 20, and Irene, 17. She says:

'Because I trained as a nurse, I am obsessed by hygiene and fanatical about cross infection. I like to keep things spick and span — but I don't over-disinfect because I'm conscientious of getting drug-resistant bugs. I would be very wary of crumbs lying around after eating. I never let the kids eat in the bedrooms, or have friends over to eat pizza. That just drives me crazy.

EVEN though I have a cleaning lady that comes twice a week, I don't see that as enough. I work full-time so I need someone to keep up the standard of cleanliness. Every morning before I leave, I put a wash on, fill the dishwasher and clean up. I make sure the kitchen is spotless. I check all the beds. It takes an hour to complete. I don't see it as a chore. It's part of life.

I've always believed 'clean house-clean mind'. If the house is untidy then I don't believe you can think clearly. Besides if there's mess in a room, I can't relax. I'd have to tidy it first and relax later. I think it's because I'm a visual person and I love coordination. I like my cushions to be arranged just so. If I walk

Nail-brushing the lino on their knees, starching the sheets and polishing the skirting boards — the hardcore household regimes of the women who spring clean all year-round...

into the room and they're not in place, it wouldn't matter who was sitting there — I'd have to fix them.

Of course, family can't be fixed as well as the cushions. I have a very messy daughter.

Sometimes I try to close the door and pretend I don't see it but it really annoys me. Every so often she will do a big tidy to please me. I tell her it's for her own good because she studies in that room. I don't know how, but she does.

I know everyone isn't as conscientious as me. Before I got married, I lived with terribly untidy flat mates. They would leave the bathroom in a mess and wouldn't clean the bath. It drove me absolutely crazy. We used to have big arguments all the time and in the end I just ended cleaning up after them myself.

Of course, we always made up in the long run but I really don't like living in a messy environment.

My husband still thinks he can leave things lying around and it will still be there weeks later, but that's not what happens. I can't under-

stand why, if they are that important, he doesn't just put them somewhere safe.

The one thing I can't abide is ironing. It's SO boring. And it's not like cleaning where you can see your achievements in front of you. I would scrub the house from top to bottom before I'd iron.

Dirty floors are a challenge for me. We have a white marble floor and yes, it shows up the dirt but at least I can see it. With a dark floor, you wouldn't know where the dirt was lurking.'

CLARE MCKEON, mid-40s, lives in Glenageary, Co. Dublin. She is a well-known journalist and TV presenter. She is married and has a nine-year-old son, Neil. She says:

'I don't want to make myself out to be a freak, but I am very dirt-conscious. I get upset if I go to a place and notice dust. I can't switch it off either. Even if I'm in an important business meeting and I spot a dirty patch — I won't be able to concentrate. In my mind, I'd be

