

Charlotte and Ben Colchester with a young Kitty.



## SECOND NATURE

**B**en Colchester was a pioneer of the Irish organic movement and his only daughter, Kitty, has followed in his footsteps with Second Nature rapeseed oil, which won best organic product in 2011 and was served at the banquet for Queen Elizabeth II at Dublin Castle. They live on Drumeen Farm in Co Kilkenny.

**BEN:** "My wife Charlotte and I moved to Ireland in 1976. All we had was £24,000. You couldn't even buy a cottage where I lived in England, yet for that money we managed to buy this farm. Organic farming wasn't known then and, at the start, it was a disaster. The grass wouldn't grow without the fertilizer and we had trouble getting our Jersey cows in-calf, so we took up contract fencing and ended up employing 10 people.

"Kitty is the eldest and there are three boys after that. When she was younger she had no real interest in the farm; she was a bit of a wild one really. She left home at about 16, but came back, which did take us

by surprise. She wouldn't really be a farmer but she's interested in selling and promoting the oil and she's very good at it. She was always wanting to push ahead; if we had 70 acres of rape, she'd want 140 acres. But we set it up in a way that she would have free rein.

"I grow the rapeseed, dry, clean and process it, and then she comes along, bottles, labels, promotes and sells it. We even have two different names. We're Drumeen Farm, she's Second Nature – and that gives her complete freedom. Even if she so chooses to sell her business, she's in the position to do so. She has complete independence; she can make her own mistakes and do it her own way. When you're young, you have to have complete freedom."

**KITTY:** "I have always called my father 'Ben', though when I was a child, I think it was unusual in Ireland to call your father by his first name. Both my parents have very strong value systems. They don't believe in lending or borrowing money and they were very frugal.

"Growing up, we worked on the farm to earn money and that was their way of teaching us a good work ethic. I remember saving £200 for a pony – a white Shetland called Baby – but at the time the importance of these lessons did elude me.

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wanted to be anywhere but here. I lived around Europe and North Africa, but it seemed I needed to explore the world before I realised what was under my nose.

"The lessons I learnt as a child have stood to me enormously during the start-up of Second Nature. I don't borrow money, I don't take on credit, I forward-plan, I keep costs very low, I work hard and I believe in what I do.

"One of the main things I learnt from my father was the ethos behind producing something you really believe in.

"My father is a real pioneer and I can't pretend that I am. Growing rapeseed for culinary oil purposes is just another one of his good ideas. But while he's not strong in sales and marketing, he has great faith in my abilities to grow a brand, so we're very lucky that we trust each other."

"He is also a very technical person, which is essential for someone like me who loses the will to live when the bottling machine breaks down. It's been a learning curve watching the methodical, patient way he approaches these problems. I tend to think big, whereas he's steady and keeps me very grounded. We're both a bit hopeless at reaching a decision. Luckily my mother is decisive!"

• [www.secondnatureoils.com](http://www.secondnatureoils.com)  
[www.drumeenfarm.com](http://www.drumeenfarm.com)

Ben and Kitty Colchester on the home farm in Kilkenny.

