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Glass ceiling

Dublin extension's glazing is up the walls, and across the roof

Picture: Denis Scannell

STYLISH HOMES ● INTERIOR IDEAS ● ART & ANTIQUES

COVER STORY

An oasis of calm right on track in leafy Ranelagh

Tommy Barker says the compromises dictated by this site on the LUAS line resulted in engaging design quirks

Pictures: **Denis Scannell**

It's a bit of a cliché when architects say a house's design features came about as a result of the site — if it's not a truism, it's a way of explaining why some awkward, glaring feature is evident from the get-go.

But, in this just-extended Dublin suburban home right by a LUAS line, the compromises dictated by the site resulted in design quirks that are engaging and worth emulating in their own right.

Parents of two young daughters, Judy and Eddie Doyle cast their eye on this 1920/30's Ranelagh home when it came up for sale around 2011, in a tired state, but on a great street, with decent back-sized garden — a bonus for these parts. Not only did the couple fancy it, but it even was Judy's parents' own neighbourhood and stomping ground, who describe it as “an oasis of calm” — so it's got a multi-generational thumbs-up already.

To make the semi-detached home fit for a growing family, they knew it would have to be enlarged. And with an eye both to budget, and the implications of having to go for planning and all the delays and extra cost that could entail if there were alterations and hitches, they opted to go for a single story extension, under 40 sq metres in extra space, and thus exempt, once building regulations were adhered to.

But, they didn't go the standard, block box or box glass extension. Instead — with the help of a team of young architects in a local Ranelagh main street practice — they got a rhythmic, visually arresting extension, one which opens up glimpses of the stars, in a mix of building media or materials.

Most pressing issue was the relative narrowness of the site on leafy Tudor Road, and not being able to build right across it, for fear of compromising

light for the neighbouring house next door to the north. It meant stepping back about a metre from that dividing wall — but what to do with this long, narrow corridor of left over outdoor space?

The response was to set up a series of framed views out to that lengthy strip outside, and to plant it for interest (evergreen bamboos are on trial) in this mini ‘long acre’.

It was done in a way that holds back from the shallow

views, as well as creating them. So, the side wall's now a mix of five solid and five glazed sections, with those glazed vertical panels continuing into and horizontally across the roof/ceiling; then, there are yet more glazed roof interventions as a sort of coda, running width-ways across the 30' deep and 14' wide extension to the solid wall sections; the result's a bit like black and white keys on a piano or keyboard, setting out their own contemporary

counterpoint.

Result? A room with a unique, and ever-changing view, depending on weather; the wind, scudding cloud, sun and moonshine and the seasons. It means a room flooded with light but warm and weather-tight, with sections apparently open to the skies but protected from the elements by seamless triple glazing.

And, it means a space where family life can go on full tilt, with domestic duties made less of a chore in such an airy space, while lively daughters cruise by on bikes, skates or scooters over the polished concrete floor.

However, a danger in adding such a long extension to the back of the house was the impact it would have on the existing back room, point out note architects Alan O'Connor and David Sheridan of OCA Architects Ranelagh.

“Without a considered approach, the extension's layout could have had a negative impact, with the side narrow passage left outside, and the danger that this back room would be starved of light, given that it would now be at the centre of the house; functionally it could have been lost in the new layout, says Alan, who also has a Co Kerry ‘wing’ to his design business.

“We used these concerns to our advantage — and they became the driving factors in informing the design,” say the architects.

Running out about 30' from the back wall (there was already a kitchen/overhead bathroom section), the extension is done in situ cast concrete beams, faced inside in a mix of white render and rich-hued timber panels.

Outside, the rough board-casting marks are left visible in the concrete beams, as a visual foil to sections of horizontally-hung cedar. In between, there's



glass, lots of glass.

Pointing to the rhythm set up by the glazing, architect Alan reckons “it pulls the inside and outside spaces together, drawing light down into the space throughout the day. The narrow passageway now becomes part of the internal space with the planting along here helping to animate the interior spaces. And, the glazing allows a visual release when inside, allowing the inside space to stretch on to infinity.”

The rear reception room (pic left), now a study/library space, has a door-sized tall



window looking to the extension, one pane of glass, allowing supervision (without distraction) for both adults and children.

The eye is drawn out past this reflective space, through the extension and on to the exterior so the room hasn't lost contact with the outside spaces.

Owner Judy says "I love it every time of day! When it's showery I like the way raindrops are reflected on the walls and wood. It's a very bright space, so whatever bit of sun we get comes streaming in. Then, at night, I like the view from the end of the garden to

the lit space inside the big glass doors."

Initially, Judy (nee Kelly) and Eddie Doyle had thoughts of having a garden/play room at the back boundary, linked by a glass corridor: "I still think it would have been lovely, but perhaps it was a bit ambitious for us.

"We were renting when we bought, so didn't want to risk costs spiralling if we had gone for planning permission. So what we have ended up with is probably just right," she adds.

Now, quite architecturally-mannered spaces are softened midships and given a living,

playful human element thanks to the family's choice of furnishing (it needs a corner armchair yet, Judy reckons) art and yep, toys, all off-set by the muscularity of the quite monolithic end beam in raw, rough-textured concrete. (PS for building nerds, the poured concrete was quite quick-setting, and so caused some measure of panic for the builders working with their board shutters.)

And, showing just how adaptable a material concrete is, there's a marked contrast between the external treatment, and the smooth,

highly polished concrete used inside on the floor, warmed by underfloor heating.

Once Eddie and Judy gave up on the linked/distant garden room, the concept here "came about very quickly... I suppose about three sets of drawings?" Judy recalls, saying that Alan was a gentleman to deal with.

"The thing that took a while, and became an obsession for me, was getting the wood panels right. I saw it in pictures of the loft apartment in New York of an Irish designer called Emma O'Neill (daughter of Cathal O'Neill, an architecture >>>

The new owners got a rhythmic, visually arresting extension, one which opens up glimpses of the stars, in a mix of building media or materials

COVER STORY





GET THE LOOK

Some great ideas for you to use in your home and where to get them

1 Pretty pins: Chairs and table with chunky laminate top have matching steel legs. Similar tables (ex Habitat) from www.jamesburleigh.co.uk



2 Skylight delight: windows in the roof open up eyes to the skies.

3 Out-side: a step-back side passage had to be kept for the neighbour's sake, and planting with bamboo will create a green wall in time — if it doesn't turn into an impassable jungle



4 If you've a long, internal view, break it up, compartmentalise and add colour

5 Play away: what could have been a cul de sac by the house's back wall has become a safe, overseeing play area next to the kitchen units. The glass screen to the house's back study can be removed at a future date if needs be



6 Tip-top: cupboard/shelving units can be run at eye level without a supporting back wall with a bit of ingenuity, and it means keeping faith with the open-plan airiness

SOURCEBOOK

Architect Alan O'Connell BArch MRIBA, OC Architects & Design No 67A Ranelagh Village, Dublin 6. 01-4913919 www.ocarchitects.ie

www.foldingslidingdoors.ie

Builder: Michael McMahon Construction, 01-8686600, e-mail: mc.mahon.const@gmail.com

Timber frame windows & timber interior panelling: Callaghan Joinery, 046-9023098

Glazier: The Folding Door Company: 01-4018282, e-mail: info@foldingslidingdoors.ie.

Kitchen: Arena Kitchens, 01-6715365, e-mail: info@arenakitchens.com, www.arenakitchens.com

>>> professor I believe) and her husband Ben Cherner. They are walnut veneered panels. I wanted the walls to bring warmth to the room, to take away the coldness of concrete and white walls. I love them now.”

Architects OCA employed a quantity surveyor to work out the budget, and “it crept up a little, but that was to be expected. We discovered when the build had already started that it was preferable to re-roof the house (it hadn't been felted) so that brought the budget up,” says Judy, and the couple also tweaked the first floor and converted the attic as a guest room “which was really worth doing.”

A sole regret is the fact they couldn't find space for a ground floor utility room, but a guest WC has been provided for.

Settling in since the summer, and with a first Christmas enjoyed, the couple note “the space is amazing in the kitchen

extension and is a nice place to relax in, and in the evening we tend to be in the old front part of the house.

This re-fashioned family home has its back boundary along the LUAS line and “one of our favourite things about that is seeing it pass by, getting the glow from the floodlights across our garden. We both lived in London for many years — so there's something appealingly urban about being right by the tracks.

“I saw a London house on *Grand Designs* which created a strip of window in the wall, so the full effect of a train passing by is experienced. We'd love to do that one day!” Judy says hopefully.

Meanwhile, there's been a very positive reaction to this home creation from visitors ... “although we weren't too pleased when we heard somebody had called it ‘Terminal 2’, but I think that was in jest!” ■■

