

INTERIORS



Joined-up thinking at work in the home

Once a warren of offices and flats, this Dublin 6 house has been transformed into a smart family home.

THE relationship between the owners of this Dublin 6 house and their architects began long before they bought their delapidated Victorian villa. By chance, they had rented one of architect Paul Keogh's holiday homes in Westport and loved the design. When it came to buying a house for themselves, they invited Paul and his partner Rachael Chidlow to view the property with them.

The house had been divided in two, with upstairs set out as offices and downstairs "a warren" of flats and another office.

"I found it really hard to visualise its possibilities," recalls the owner, "but Paul said we could really do something special with the house. He said, 'You have to completely reimagine down here.'"

"Looking back, the brief was probably a bit more psychological than anything else — we're a family, so, like every family, there are times when we want to all be together, there are times when we want to spread out, so we needed space for us to be together and to be separate."

The family likes to watch movies and to cook and eat together, so a well-thought-out space to prep food together, chat, do homework and entertain was crucial.

"We weren't so fussed about an ornate garden. We just wanted a garden that was well-connected to the house and Paul was really good at stressing the connection with the inside/outside."

Alongside the brief, Paul and Rachael had to take into account that the house is a protected structure and so there were architectural features that needed to be conserved and enhanced to protect its character.

That might daunt some owners, but as Paul says: "Because a house is listed doesn't mean it can't be altered; the challenge is to respect the original, while meeting the needs of contemporary life."

The gloomy basement was transformed into a sun-drenched kitchen, dining and living space, extending into the garden using the same Brazilian floor tiles both inside and outside. The extension has a slate roof interspersed with roof lights and sliding glass doors that frame the view of the garden.

"The back of the house is southwest-facing," says the owner, "so it is bright all day, it has great light coming through. This is the hub of the house and there are areas to sit in all day."

There are smart architectural details — a recess in the wall is perfect for displaying the children's art, the Corian island countertop is 3.6m long and wide enough to allow deep drawers for storage, another priority, while the Iroko wood units can be wiped down easily and are made from renewable sources.

"There is lots of room to spread, often we'll be three people prepping and I'll get the kids to make a mess over this side," says the owner.

The space isn't completely open plan. One of the original walls divides it almost in two and provides a living area with revealed timber ceiling beams and squishy sofas that is perfect for family movie nights or entertaining. A full length curtain allows the space to be cordoned off and makes it very cosy.

The retaining wall contains the original fireplace, a granite arch that now houses a wood-burning stove. Paul and Rachael added a clever opening that connects through to the kitchen and lets light pour through.

"Features that contribute to the house's special interest should be retained wherever possible," says Paul.

'Like every family, we needed space for us to be together and to be separate'

The architects reconnected the garden level with the first floor by designing a very contemporary stairs. A double height window floods the return and stairs with light. There is no attempt at pastiche — "New work should be distinguishable from the old," says Paul. "Well done, high-quality contemporary design will complement the character of the original."

The owners are delighted with their new living spaces, saying: "The space itself is everything we hoped it would be. It's a great combination of respecting the house's character and history, with a modern, flexible family living space."

Words by Fran Power and Sandra O'Connell; photographs by Peter Cook

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Clockwise from far right, architect Paul Keogh, who reimagined the space with partner Rachael Chidlow; the kitchen with 3.6m long island; where old meets new, the stairs; dining area and, to the right, the living area can be curtained off and is ideal for watching movies



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