

# TRIUMPH OF FORM AND FUNCTION

A house in Glasnevin that waited two generations for a renovation is now a bright, cleverly designed space that works as a blank canvas to display the owner's art collection, as well as being a great party pad, writes **Emma Cullinan**



**T**HE NIGGLING FEELING that your home could do with an overhaul can last for years, decades even. Inevitably we learn to live with what we have, sprucing up now and again, and thinking how great things could be.

That was the case with this 1930s house in Glasnevin, Dublin. There were plans for it for two whole generations. It was bought by the parents of the current owner, Hugh Maguire, in 1971 with the intention that they would retire to Dublin, from Cavan, but health issues eventually got in the way of that. In the meantime, they had short breaks in the city, using this as their base – the opposite of a weekend place in the country.

“My parents would come here and go into town,” says Maguire, who is director of the Hunt Museum in Limerick. “In those days there was the free bus for pensioners but you had to pay between 4pm-6pm, so at the end of a day they would go and have a hot whiskey to wait until the bus was free again – even though that cost more!”

The house has served Maguire well over the years. He began living here while he was at university, and even when he moved to New Zealand in the 1990s the building, which was then divided into two flats and rented out, stayed with him. “From a distance, I said, ‘we’ve never done anything with the house’ but life intervenes and time goes by so quickly.”

He eventually got some workers in to strip it back slightly and put in shelves but, without being able to keep a close eye on the work, “It was chaos and every time I came in they wanted cash.”

When he finally consulted architect Sterrin O’Shea a few years ago, he recalls the house as being “shabby but cosy”.

O’Shea says it had a good vibe. “When I first met Hugh, he said the house hadn’t been looked after, but I did not get that sense. I was fascinated by its retro feel. There were really nice things here – including a cool 1960s chair – and lovely paintings.”

Architect and client worked well together, with O’Shea providing a clear vision as to what could be done and Maguire describing what he liked and didn’t like about the house. “Sterrin



Hugh Maguire in the light-filled kitchen of his Glasnevin house extension, designed by architect Sterrin O’Shea.

PHOTOGRAPHS: DAVID SLEATOR

was wonderful to work with,” Maguire says. “Some architects are non-communicative. There is absolute authority on their part with no questions allowed. Sterrin had a combination of strong ideas but didn’t reject mine.”

On the plus side, the house’s front bay window scooped in plenty of southern light, but the 1960s extension, at the back, with its study, kitchen and bathroom – in that order – faced northern gloom.

The new extension is mainly on the same footprint as the old but is cleverly configured to grab natural light from wherever possible – including from the front of the house.

The layout of rooms is in response to Maguire’s wishes. He liked the fact that he didn’t walk straight into the kitchen from the hall, when he arrived home, but went through the study first.

“I used the house as a progression,” he says, dropping his things off as he walked through it. “It’s the same now, I can come in and leave stuff. It’s a different shape but the physical response is the same so it feels comfortable.”

The old extension was a rectangle that extended out from one side of the house. The new one takes up the same space – Maguire didn’t want it to take up any more of the small garden – but it now has a dining area off to one side that is exceptionally light, with its iroko





frame and glass walls that are fully glazed at the corners. The glass disappears up past the floating ceiling internally, adding to the feeling of lightness, while outside this allows the zinc roof to be thin.

The glazing means that light coming into the front of the house can hit this spot and pass through it. It travels through double doors between the front and back room in the existing house, which was revamped as part of the project.

The back room is now a library. Maguire didn't want a formal dining room that wouldn't be used and, along with its literary contributions to life, it has proven a good gathering place for drinks before dinner parties.

Another party-plus in the design is the pond that sits beside the dining room and completes the square beside that room and the kitchen. "At one party on a frosty December evening the pool was wonderful, like an ice bucket, we had loads of bottles of beer in it. You just opened the small door beside it to grab them.

"The house works very well socially," he says, which has to have something to do with its occupant as well as his design decisions. "I was adamant about having a breakfast bar and it does work. If you're delayed, your friends can sit at the dining table while you cook and talk."

The kitchen is small, a client requirement that O'Shea worked with by taking the storage cupboards out beyond it, high up on the living space walls. They have lighting snuck in beneath them to provide atmosphere. She praises the kitchen company Langrell, who also made the storage cupboards throughout the house, enjoying their attention to detail.

Her own attention to detail is evident throughout this build: walls and structures line up; existing areas match new ones in the subtle use of colour and material (she chose iroko to "pick up on the language of the garden"); and the study floor has been kept level with the hall floor to maintain a feeling of cosiness, before descending into the high-ceilinged kitchen and dining area.

She admits to being wary of some requests, such as the addition of a small window to the back of the kitchen, but now says: "It was the right thing to do." That was Maguire's artistic side coming into the equation – the window works like a small artwork. "It is like a picture that changes with the seasons," he says.

Maguire is enjoying the extra (white) wall space that allows him to put up pictures that had been seeking a home. And there is a new one too: "Instead of buying tables or chairs I bought a print to celebrate the finish of the house – any excuse."