



The eye-catching Garden Pavilion makes a big impact, with clever use of decking saving a tree



Ranelagh Room provides an impressive link between a 19th-century house and its contemporary extension



A featureless rural house is transformed into a bold statement, leading judges to call St Jude's a 'prototype'

ADDITIONS NOW EQUAL SUCCESS

Two years ago, the cube was cool. In 2004, no glass, it didn't pass. But at this year's Bank of Ireland Opus Architecture & Construction Awards, if it was extended, it was commended.

At the Opus ceremony last week, where Ireland's snazziest new building designs took home the glory gongs, the judges decreed that the best Irish residential architecture right now is happening at the bottom of urban gardens, at the side of country cottages and beyond the hole in the house.

Just one of the winning entries in the under €1m category, where the bulk of the architectural eye-candy hangs out, is a true new-build. The rest are extensions or clever additions to the crumbling fabric of old houses — a trend that probably reflects the sparsity of land for new-builds in urban areas, where most cutting-edge architecture is practised.

A dearth of sites means homeowners who might otherwise have moved to a larger or more stylish property opt for tinkering with or extending their home.

This year, 127 projects were submitted, and 29 short-listed across four categories divided by budget.

The under €1m section is traditionally the umbrella category for snazzy domestic one-off projects for which the editors of coffee-table magazines live.

The best innovations in architecture are extensions, not new-builds, according to judges of this year's Opus awards. **Dara Flynn** reports

In previous years, themes and patterns have emerged. Box-like additions, exposed concrete, cedar cladding and heavy glazing are among the trend clusters to have had their Opus day out.

Yet the 2007 gongs recognised designs that proffer add-ons and updates as solutions to problems such as lack of space, onset of dereliction or an unattractive appearance.

A commendation went to Twist and Turn in Ranelagh, Dublin 6, a two-storey addition to a period house on Chelmsford Road, by GKMP Architects and Zoltan Bodnar construction.

It was picked not only for its crisp detailing and build quality, but also because it somehow managed to "reorganise the house and garden relationship".

One of the two top award-winners was Ranelagh Room, by Anello Architects. This, the adjudicators said, was an entry that had to be seen to be appreciated: a three-part project where a 19th-century house is tied to a contemporary extension by a modern linking addition. The panel declared that "the sum of the parts is greater than any one element".

Interestingly, in a critique of St Jude's in Connemara, Co Galway, the assessors criticised planning laws, saying: "The silly inflexibility of a development plan insisted a derelict 1940s house of no intrinsic value should be retained."

Boyer Kennihan Architects (working with Pascal Lyons Construction) were awarded one of the top prizes in the category for their ingenuity in overcoming this planning restriction. Two gable ends were removed and replaced by a modern extension, with detailing that linked the house to its landscape.

The panel declared this one a "prototype", and it's obvious why. A plain, featureless rural house has become one of the boldest statements on the short list, with a nearly black, wood-clad extension with giant windows that suck daylight in and ooze a warm glow at night.

Despite no immediately obvious relationship between the house and the extension, the project seems to work. It is as though the black box of a giant jumbo jet has landed in a Connemara field and made itself at home, having

smudged its pure white host with a layer of black cladding on the way down.

Fuse Graphics, a Dublin 8 in-fill by Box Architecture (with Irish Conservatories Ltd) took home something for the mantelpiece for the way in which they coped with the difficulty of the task. The budget was limited, the site narrow and existing buildings in poor condition.

Box Architecture's David Dwyer and Gary Mongey removed one building, replaced it with a brick facade and created a corner junction with a retained and upgraded building. "Clever use of site cross-section," adjudicators noted.

The judges were also impressed by Sterrin O'Shea Architects' Garden Pavilion, a garden room "for entertainment and reflection" in Churchtown, Dublin 14. The panel called it "a very modest addition" and liked the preciseness of its construction and its site placement.

It has the smallest footprint of any Opus winner, but plenty of impact in daylight and at night, as well as a playful element — its deck has been built to allow a tree in the garden to grow through it.

They also enjoyed Treehouse, in Dublin 6, an extension by GKMP spanning the length of the garden of a Victorian house and replacing the unsightliness of previous ad-hoc additions with an inviting glazed series of linear rooms.

The Bank of Ireland Opus Architecture & Construction Awards do something that sets them apart from other architectural accolades.

Since 2004, they've been two-fold in their merit system: the on-site workmanship of the builder is as important as the penmanship — and ego — of the architect.

A building's function from an aesthetic perspective, organisers believe, is irrelevant without an examination of its primordial function as a well-built means of human habitation.

Vanity projects, melodramatic architectural showcases and artistic follies do not get a look-in, unless they are also built to last, please the eye, make the most of their site or merit being dubbed an architectural "prototype".

To this end, the assessors looked at three factors during their visits to the competing structures: how challenging it was to meet the brief, how good the design proposal was and how well-built the finished product was.

The only full new-build to take home a prize in the under €1m category was the succinctly named House for Musicians, a modern design by Donaghy &

Dimond Architects, built by Peter Duffy, at Carrickfin, Co Donegal. The modern work is so called since it is home to Mairead Ni Mhaonaigh and Dermot Byrne of the band Altan.

The panel, headed by Ciaran O'Connor alongside Roger Dunwoody, Noel Dowlet, Barry Supple and Pearse Sutton, acknowledged that the star build

was far beyond the rural norm. Its creators got kudos for their skills in "place making and place respecting" with a strikingly modern house set amid the delicate scenery of the Donegal Rosses.

The house, with an angular, blond exterior, has a stark split-level interior that blends contrasting materials: a cold concrete base with a warm wood finish.

Its rooms are expansive, with large windows to frame the wild seascape.

The Opus awards also recognise housing schemes. This year, that category contained no highly commendeds.

Balgaddy E, yet another extension (to a previous Opus award winner) earned a commendation for Sean Harrington Architects and Gama Construction.

Both of the top accolades in housing went to O'Mahony Pike Architects — one for Hanover Quay, the urban mixed-use scheme in the docklands (built by Sisk), the other for Thornwood in Blackrock, Co Dublin, built by PJ Hegarty.

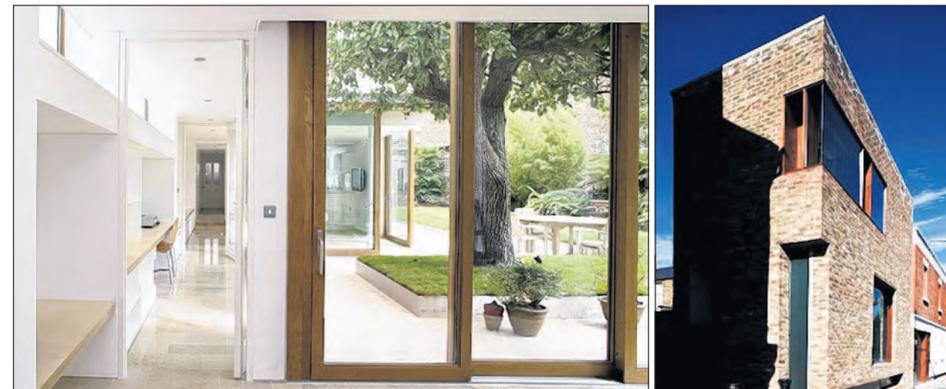
The panel noted that the quality of Hanover Quay was high, and that Thornwood evaded becoming a "bad neighbour and dreary place" with good apartment sizes, glazed balconies and well-managed landscapes and parking.

In the under €10m category, the Hugh Lane art gallery (Gilroy McMahon Architects with Collen Construction) was commended, and the award winner was Grafton Architects/Woodvale Construction's Loreto Community School in Milford, Donegal.

Murray O'Laioire's Cork School of Music was highly commended as an over €10m project, while the city's civic offices, by ABK, and the George's Court office building in Dublin 2, by KMD, were award-winners.

This year, the awards had a new category, Art in Architecture, for collaborations between artists and architects. The award went to Bon Secours Hospital, Galway, designed by Murray O'Laioire Architects and Brian O'Connell Associates, who worked with the artist Hughie O'Donoghue.

Magee Creedon Architects were commended for The Island Crematorium on Rocky Island, Cork Harbour, in a collaboration with the sculptor James O'Connor. The crematorium's builders, Cornerstone, got a look-in in the Heritage category for their sensitive transformation of an old gunpowder store into the building "where human and spiritual needs find resonance", the judges said.



Treehouse is a light-filled series of rooms in a garden; while Fuse Graphics, right, makes good use of a narrow street site

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