

Changing Times

Declan and Emily embarked on their pursuit for a new home. Coming from a contemporary property, they were now looking to step back in time and source a period property that they could add their own character to. What they found in Dublin was something rather special.

PHOTOGRAPHY BY DEREK ROBINSON.





‘It was advertised in the paper,’ says Declan, ‘and when we came to see it, it became clear very quickly that it hadn’t been touched since it was built, it was a wreck with no central heating or anything so really nothing had been done for around 100 years. At the time we weren’t particularly looking for such a major project, but we really liked the area and saw the potential immediately.’ Coming from a new build terraced four bedroom home, they had been used to sleek, modern construction but it had become their desire to completely change to a red brick period home for a number of years. Finding this gem enabled them to not only do that, but due to the condition of the property, it opened the door to create something completely bespoke to them.

‘First thing we did was to get an architect on board. The decision

we made was to do everything at once and get the plans drawn up so in conjunction with the renovation we did up plans for the extension too. The architect was Eddie McGlynn who was recommended to us by a friend. He then put the job out to tender for the builder. We had a reasonable idea of what we wanted to achieve, but mainly we wanted it to become more open-plan at the back. It was standard construction of its time back then and where the kitchen is now the footprint of the old return. We just wanted to open it all up for a kitchen, dining, living area.’

One of the concerns for the couple was to try and strike a fine balance on firstly harnessing the natural light, hence the extensive use of glazing, but at the same time ensuring privacy and creating a space that maintained a comfortable temperature all year round.

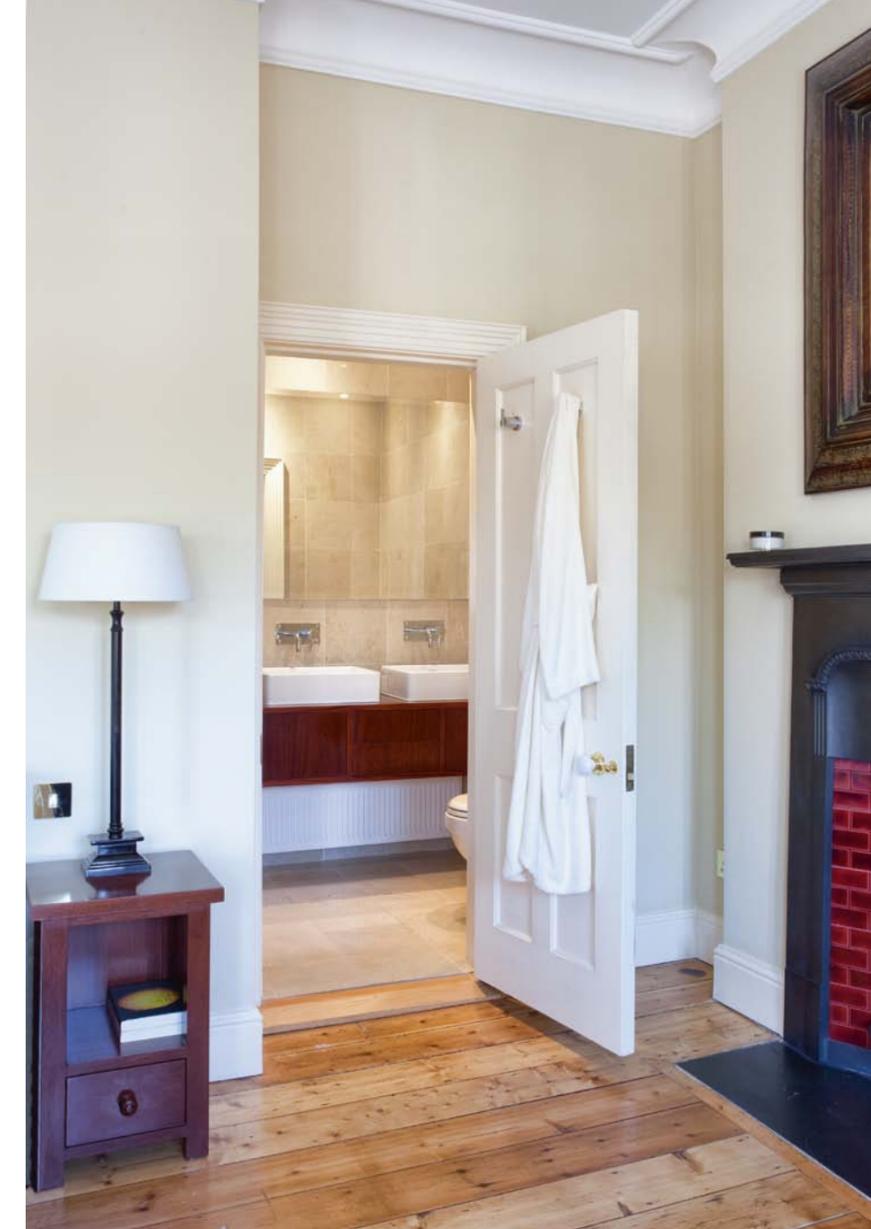
'Emily set out the wishlist for the kitchen, she wanted something that was good quality, very well made with excellent craftsmanship, not overly fussy but was practical and understated.'





‘We didn’t want to add on something that was essentially akin to an oversized conservatory that would be too hot in summer and too cold in winter, so we balanced solid walls with the glass to make it bright yet cosy.’ One of the things that concerned Declan and Emily to get to the build stage was taking out the walls of the return for the extension without causing structural damage to the neighbouring property. Once they started doing the demolition work, they discovered the foundations weren’t great, so had to do some work to underpin. With that obstacle overcome and the new extension in place, the results more than met the couples brief that was set out at the beginning. The new space adds a new dimension to the entire ground floor space and the light that floods through each new specific zone is remarkable. Plus of course the distinction between

old and new is clearly defined. But with the old and new there are lines that are blurred between the two by clever use of surfaces and textures throughout. For example, some bare brick remains on the internal walls and the use of wood creates such a warmth and glow to the place. ‘The bare brick was our idea to incorporate. We just really liked the idea. Initially some of the ideas were super modern, but we wanted something more sympathetic and less jarring to go from the old part into the new space. We also wanted to use natural materials to make it warmer so instead of ceramic tiles we preferred wooden floors and we thought the brick would enhance that warmth and also be a lovely feature. We looked at many houses at the time and many of them are done almost as a show house in style but felt cold rather than somewhere to live.’



In terms of original features, the couple ended up having to remove some that were too far gone and copy for replacements. For example due to damp and damage they had to replace things like windows and floors but always tried to mirror the originals to maintain a sense of history. 'When we took the floors up downstairs we used the good, remaining timber board to repair damage upstairs and to floor the attic conversion to create continuity. We then got timber from Wilsons Conservation Building Products for the living space which was originally a railway carriage board.'

This relationship with Wilsons began with the floor, but once the couple had visited the premises, it began to progress when they realised just what Nigel there could do for them and the kind of renovation they were involved with. 'I initially found out about them on the internet. We had started to look for floor boards and wanted to get reclaimed flooring, came across Wilsons and then we found more and more in what really is a treasure trove up there. Eventually we ended up sourcing bricks, cast iron radiators, chandeliers, the leather trunk, chests of drawers and our armchairs too.'



They ended up going back several times and before long were on first name terms with Nigel! 'He was fantastic and he handled the kitchen for us too. Emily set out the wishlist for that, she wanted something that was good quality, very well made with excellent craftsmanship, not overly fussy but was practical and understated. We explained that to Nigel and he took our thoughts on board and understood where we were coming from and we are delighted with it.' In the living room, the fireplaces were in a terrible condition so one is an original and was restored by antique fire restoration expert, David O'Reilly and the couple then found a match. The sofa came from Seagreen in Monkstown along with the chair and all the blinds throughout with the side tables from Coote & Co. In the library the shelving was done by Eamonn O'Byrne and also all the radiator cabinets.

Upstairs and the master bedroom is a great mix. Again magnificent light floods into the room and the height of the ceilings and well grounded Farrow & Ball tones only add to the drama. The chairs are an old English design from an antiques shop in Galway with the bed and lockers made bespoke by Seabourne Chic in Wicklow from iron wood.



The bathrooms stick to the period look with roll top baths, classic sinks and the mere modern touches here and there.

The garden is yet another triumph in this home, as Declan explains. 'The garden is by David Shorthall from Landscape Discovery. Again we found him by researching on the net and found various companies but we just loved his stuff. He did all the hard and soft landscaping so it's his job from start to finish. It was a complete blank canvas for him as there had been an old tree out there which we had to remove so it was a flat plot and he came up with what was a fantastic design.'

Plugging a contemporary space in line with how we live today into a 1910 period home is always a challenge, but one that throws up so many opportunities in the process. Declan and Emily overcame the initial hurdle of just how run down a property can become when neglected for the best part of a century and how to bring it back from the brink. And as Declan concurs, it has evidently been worth the endeavor for the end result. 'We love the area, are close to the park and town which is great. Living in the house is fantastic. We absolutely love it here.' 🏡