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HOME



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Rooms for manoeuvre

In a quiet north Co Dublin estate, one house stands out from its neighbours, a series of modest 1970s-built homes. What was once a run-of-the-mill bungalow now has a kerb appeal that catches the eye of passers-by, its white exterior dazzling in the sunshine.

Demands for light and space by its wheelchair-using owner mean this ordinary 1970s bungalow has been transformed into an eye-catching home, writes **Dara Flynn**

The original house has been substantially extended, reconfigured and given a finish that lends it the pleasing crispness associated with minimalist architecture. At a certain angle, it appears as though a two-dimensional, cut-out facade has been built to simply

hide the original building, but actually it has been given a full revamp. Aside from its striking good looks, this house has qualities that make it easily accessible because its owner, Helen Morrogh, is a wheelchair-user. Morrogh hired David Leyden, of

Kerb appeal: the remodelled exterior of Morrogh's home in Sutton, north Co Dublin

Leyden Hassett, an established multi-disciplinary architectural practice, to change the size, shape and look of her home on the Offington estate in Sutton. The project involved doubling its footprint, maximising daylight and fitting it with up-to-date heating, hot water, insulation and ventilation systems to create a smart, spacious and energy-efficient home. As the "before" and "after" pictures show, it amounted to a significant transformation, one that gave Morrogh a new quality of life.

Isabelle Doyle



Isabelle Doyle, Fergal Phillips, David Leyden



→“David was good at listening to what I needed, taking those needs and putting his own style to it, and making everything aesthetically pleasing, too,” she says. “He was aware of how practical it had to be. I wanted lots of light and space, and lots of floor area to be able to move around comfortably. It was important not to have anything too poky,” says Morrogh, who lives with her husband and their two children.

“I was presented with a 1970s bungalow on a classically poorly laid-out estate,” says Leyden. “It was the kind where house types ‘A, B and C’ were arbitrarily dropped on-site, with a

total disregard for orientation or other architectural triggers.

“Helen was keen to do something impressive and to get the light in. As a wheelchair-user, she had a detailed set of requirements for how the completed house should function. As a result, a lot of the stuff that’s second nature to an architect — space, light and function — had to be parked for a bit, and we had to get into detail with the client about her specific requirements.”

Leyden explains that most building regulations governing the adaptation of housing for wheelchair-users focus on making a house visitable, he says. His challenge was to make Morrogh’s home not only wheelchair accessible, but also fully functional and comfortable.

The 1,560 sq ft extension addressed Morrogh’s everyday needs. Minute details were adhered to such as providing adequate clearance space on both sides of beds, wheelchair turning circles, lower kitchen counters and properly equipped bathrooms.

“The corridors are one-and-a-half times the normal width, which would be considered extravagant in most houses, where people reserve that extra space for the main rooms.

“Architecturally speaking, this also gives a sense of grandeur and generosity of space. It allows for a spatial quality you wouldn’t normally find in a regular house,” says Leyden.

The ground from the car bay to the main door is entirely flat. The original house had a suspended timber floor, but this was dropped in height as part

The corridors are one-and-a-half times the normal width. Architecturally speaking, this gives a sense of grandeur. It allows for a spatial quality.

of the project, reducing all inclines and dispensing with the need for the three steps the original entrance had.

This wasn’t Leyden’s sole challenge. When it came to optimum orientation, the house was “back to front”: all the bedrooms were on the sunny side of the building, while the main living spaces were at the dark end.

“It became a question of flipping the house — grabbing it by the scruff of

the neck and reconfiguring the internal layout to reverse that,” he says.

With two young, active children aged four and six, Morrogh also wanted a large contained play area in the back garden. This affected the design, leading to the decision to extend forward.

“The houses in the estate all have long front gardens and low walls, with living spaces facing the front,” says Leyden.

“I drove around the neighbourhood and noticed a recurring pattern: in almost every house, the blinds were down at the front, so there was obviously a privacy issue.” This led to his idea for a “layering” of the spaces formed by the new front extension, creating what he terms a “hierarchy of space” from the public area, on the street outside, to the semi-public front garden, through to the semi-private front courtyard area and, finally, the interior of the extension.

A new “logical, rational” building line was established at the front, which happened to run parallel to the street. “Then we built up hard against that, presenting a united front, as we used to call it,” Leyden says. Initial plans showing a higher front wall were dropped during the planning permission stages.

“I lean towards minimalism and wanted to strip the detail out of it. I love that starkness of the architecture with the two flat-roof ‘objects’ to the front. It appears almost cliff-like,” he says.

Morrogh also loves her new home.

Turning circles: rooms were designed to allow Morrogh to travel around easily in her wheelchair

“For me it works so well: it’s incredibly bright, and the kitchen and bathrooms are easy to use. It makes my life so much easier. And nothing in the house has that ‘specially adapted’ look about it,” she says.

The access point was also moved to the opposite end of the front facade, pushing it closer to the car bay. Inside, the ceilings at the front of the original house were raised to double height,

It’s incredibly bright and the kitchen and bathrooms are easy to use. It makes my life easier and nothing has that specially adapted look

Clean lines: ‘I lean towards minimalism and wanted to strip the detail out of it,’ says architect David Leyden, far left, who designed the revamp, above, of the 1970s bungalow, above right

allowing the southern light to penetrate the space more effectively, even reaching the very middle — formerly the darkest, portion of the house. From an energy-efficiency point of view, the original bungalow was a dud: it had little in the way of wall insulation, save for some efforts made to insulate in the attic. The timber floors had no draught-proof measures and the house sported a mix of single- and double-glazed windows.

The firm took the decision to bring the house to a level of energy efficiency above and beyond what the current regulations call for, with the aim of achieving an A-rating. This meant super-insulating the entire fabric of the house and externally insulating both the exiting structure and the walls of the new extension. High-spec windows and doors were fitted.

“We then shored up the fabric of the house and went for an airtight construction. We introduced two wood-

burning stoves with external combustion air feeds, and a controlled heat-recovery ventilation system, which works by removing stale air from the interiors and piping in fresh air from outside, which is warmed as it enters,” Leyden says.

Solar panels were installed for hot-water heating, as was an efficient gas boiler with zoned controls. “We achieved a B1 rating, apparently because we used a gas boiler, whereas a geothermal heat pump, for instance, would have given us the A grade,” he says.

“You have to take a holistic approach to a deep-energy retrofit. You can’t just take some elements of it and you must see a house as a whole working machine. The eco-bling technologies are great, but worthless if the fabric of the building itself hasn’t been addressed.

“It’s like baking: if you get the basis of the cake right, you can put any icing you like on there.”

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