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CITY LIVING

How a German architect transformed a small Dublin redbrick

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First page The original cast iron fireplace, now painted a contemporary off-white

Opposite page The ornate Bavarian table and chairs were a wedding present from Stefan's family

This page, right A carefully renovated plaster head

This page, middle The walls are painted two different shades, a blueberry hint below the dado rail and green granite above



Occasionally in Dublin you can feel like you have seen it all, know every street corner and are familiar with every spot. And then you can turn a corner, near the city centre and close to the Mater Hospital and go down a quiet little side street and have all your preconceptions blown out of the water. This is exactly what happened to German architect Stefan Hoeckenreiner and his banker wife Martina Walsh three years ago when they came across a Victorian redbrick house on Geraldine Street. Martina says "We were immediately taken with the house and the area is full of charm with a real community feel yet I can walk to work in fifteen minutes".

The street is lined with red brick villas which have dotey little front gardens full of carefully tended flowers and greenery. Similar to the other houses from the outside, once you are through the front door however, it is clear a radical transformation has taken place. When they bought the house in January 2005 they were looking for a renovation project, something which would utilise Stefan's skills as an architect and that he could put his own unique stamp on. They certainly found that here - the previous owner was an elderly lady and the house had not been touched in

decades. Happily, the house still possessed some beautiful original features such as the original Victorian plaster cornice and a number of cast iron fireplaces both in the living areas and an upstairs bedroom.

Work began immediately and they rented close by as the house was completely uninhabitable. Given Stefan's training and a dearth of good builders they decided to go down the direct labour route and Stefan supervised and co-ordinated all the work himself. Initial work centred around renovating the entire house, including removal of old plaster from walls, removal and lowering of the old floors to gain head-height in the kitchen, rewiring, re-plumbing and finally installing a gas fired underfloor heating system. As they worked, planning permission came through for an extension of the living space to 95 sq. m and the installation of a glass roof to allow light through the north facing and formerly dark kitchen area. The extension also allowed them to knock down the outside wall of the kitchen and build a second bathroom and bedroom out the back.

The success of the house however is in the wonderful contrast between old and new.

This page, below The cappuccino colour and glossy units provide a very modern feel to this part of the house.
Opposite right The glass roof bathes the kitchen in light even on the gloomiest of days.
Opposite left Contemporary bathroom fittings from Duravit.





With such a fundamental reconstruct of the house it could have been tempting to apply a modern style throughout, or even go retro and attempt a country cottage look. Instead what they have done is respected both sides of the houses character; without resorting to a mock look in either. The hall and front living room showcase the best of the original house with beautiful cornicing and a large sash window sympathetically restored. The rear of the house with a second reception room, kitchen and new bedroom/bath has a modern feel enhanced by the curved ceiling in the second reception room and the glass roof in the kitchen. The effect is spacious and airy, especially as there are no radiators clogging up the walls.

The front living area is comfortable and fits a custom made linen couch and two oversized leather chairs. Initially the room was dominated by the large black Victorian cast iron fireplace. It was Martina who took the bold step and one day, against all advice, painted it an off white. The effect was to immediately brighten the room. The second reception area, currently used as a study, has an unusual curved ceiling with a Velux window which allows the light to flow through.

Eager to retain as many original features as possible they decided against throwing out the granite sill from the old kitchen wall which had been knocked and instead used it as step joining the second reception area with the kitchen. The flooring throughout the downstairs is semi solid natural oak which provides a nice feeling of continuity.

The kitchen is now their favourite part of the house. Appalled by the price of Irish fitted kitchens Stefan investigated German options and eventually found a supplier of high end kitchens for a fraction of the price. He eventually decided to install high gloss cappuccino colour units from EBKE Kitchens. The layout works well, and with soft close doors and a sleek coloured glass splashback it adds a touch of luxe to the house. Since then Stefan has had so many requests for similar type kitchens he has expanded his business to import kitchens. In juxtaposition to the glossy kitchen is a set of antique Bavarian table and chairs, a family heirloom, carefully transported from Munich. These chairs are amazing - solid yet ornate, completely different and yet work incredibly well within this very modern space. Double doors lead to an outdoor patio area, home to a small herb garden



This page clockwise, from right The outside of the red brick villa; The painting of the cow above the fireplace is from Debbie Chapman. Her work can be found at Merrion Square art market; The old fireplace now houses the couple's wine collection; The original granite window sill has been given a new use as a step between the old part of the building and the new
Opposite page The installation of a Velux skylight lets the sun pour into the master bedroom

and potted plants.

Off the kitchen there is a short corridor which flows into the master bathroom and second bedroom. The master bathroom contains crisp white sanitary ware from Duravit. The ever canny Stefan sourced most of these in Germany and had them shipped over with no mishaps. The natural stone mosaic tiles behind the bath are particularly stunning. The second bedroom has a double bed and is perfect for guests staying over with a full length window looking out over the patio area.

Upstairs the low ceiling was removed in order to make way for a double pitched ceiling with roof light in the master bedroom and adjoining en suite.

The bedroom is simple with built in wardrobes and a pretty cast iron fireplace. The en suite is in stark contrast with the bedroom with blood red walls and modern white bathroom fittings from Keramag.

After all the work and hard decisions, this couple have really fallen in love with their beautiful home. According to Stefan what he is happiest with is the sense of achievement. "You really bond with a place after putting so much work and so much of your heart into it. It becomes much more than just a place to live." 📧

*Stefan can be contacted at
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