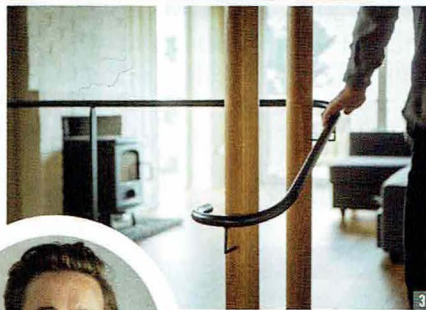
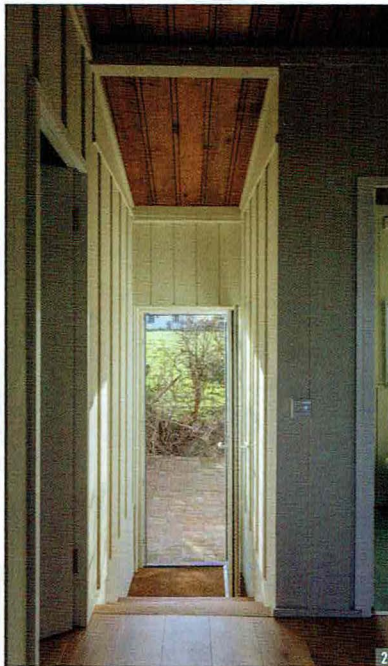


Architecture

Emmett Scanlon looks at the award-winning work of architect and teacher **Robert Bourke**



The notion of who or what is emerging in architecture can often be fluid and vague. In 2012, when Yvonne Farrell and Shelley McNamara of Grafton Architects won the Silver Lion award for emerging architects at the Venice Architecture Biennale, 33 years into their career, it was a reminder that, while new voices can emerge suddenly, most architects arrive when they are ready. Established in Dublin in 2008 and

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awarded the RIAI Emerging Architect Award in 2014, Robert Bourke's 2019 award-winning extension to a holiday home in Riverchapel, Co Wexford, leaves no doubt that, as an architect, Bourke has arrived.

Bourke first trained as a civil, structural and environmental engineer in Trinity College Dublin before going on to study his Part 1 architecture at the Dublin Institute of

Technology (now Technical University Dublin) and his Part 2 at the University of East London.

With an office in Dublin's north city centre, Bourke, like many of his contemporaries, is also involved in training and educating young architects. Practitioners who teach form the backbone of the education of Irish architects and Bourke has been a Design Fellow at University College Dublin since 2015.

Bourke's interest in the social life of his projects has extended to other forms of spatial practice and he has worked with transition year students in Luttrellstown Community College in Blanchardstown. Students were supported to learn, translate and

present their ideas and experiences of their local environment into tangible propositions. Feeling dislocated and isolated, they built a slide and stairs to highlight and overcome the real, physical barriers they encounter each day in their neighbourhood.

To date, much of the work of Burke's practice has addressed the domestic, making new rooms and homes for families. The Riverchapel holiday home addresses everyday activities, using real architectural tools – material, texture, light, stepping levels and dimension – to calibrate a subtle and exuberant choreography to ease its residents' comfort. For example, in Burke's addition to the 1970s seaside cottage, he built brick steps and a platform that make a clear transition from the sandy landscape to the kitchen and then to the living room. Brick changes to oiled oak as the landscape and outdoor activities are left behind, fires lit and evenings draw in.

The addition demonstrates restraint and precision, adding just what is needed to root the house more fully in its seaside place.

Bourke says there are real challenges facing him and his contemporaries in Ireland today, with access to public work significantly limited. Very large offices are thriving in the new boom, but medium-sized practices are being thwarted by unnecessarily complex awarding and tendering processes. ■

Emmett Scanlon is an architect.



1-3 Interior shots of Riverchapel extension

4 Robert Bourke

5 Cottage in Riverchapel, Co Wexford