



KEEPING IT LIGHT

Alan Sheil and Fiona Begg have transformed a gloomy and dark three-bedroom suburban house into a roomy, light-filled family home.

Alan and Fiona were faced with a dilemma. They loved their area – there were great schools for their two young children to attend, and they were very happy with the local amenities of Ballybrack, Co Dublin. They had no desire to move. However, their detached, three-bedroom house, although only ten years old, was gloomy inside, had odd-sized rooms and virtually no storage space. “It was not very practical,” Alan admits. “The whole house suffered from a general gloominess – we always had the lights on.”

Their case proved a challenging brief for architect Robert Bourke and his team. “What struck me most was that the sunniest side of the house, facing south, was an almost completely blank wall,” he recalls.

The first decision they made was to open up this wall to allow sunlight deep into the heart of the house. This meant relocating the staircase and downstairs toilet and creating a glazed hallway, re-orientating the house towards the south.

Alan and Fiona were also eager to make their home more spacious. The usual solution is to build a large rear extension, but the garden

was already quite small and the couple didn’t want to lose any more precious outdoor space. So three small extensions were designed; one to the front, one to the side, facing south, and a small one at the rear, reshaping the existing rooms and flooding the house with light. “Robert’s plans took us completely by surprise,” Alan says. “They were visionary and imaginative.”

This creative response also allowed the architects to create three unique outdoor spaces in between the new brick volumes. Each one is tailored to respond to its location and take advantage of sunlight throughout the day. They can have morning coffee on the front patio or eat dinner on the west-facing rear patio in the evening. “The new spaces make the house a pleasure to live in,” Alan says.

“Sunlight is such a rare commodity in Ireland,” reflects Robert, “our approach was to harness as much of it as possible, while creating a range of spaces ranging from generous and expansive to more private and intimate.”

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HOW TO PLAN YOUR EXTENSION

The best way to extend your house will depend on a number of factors, but sunlight is one of the most important. Here are some things to consider when planning a light-filled extension.

- **THE PATH OF THE SUN** The sun rises in the east and sets in the west, so ideally rooms should be planned around this solar path. “This could mean, for example, that bedrooms face east to benefit from morning sunlight and the living areas and garden face south and south west to maximise afternoon and evening sun,” Robert says. Although the layout of your house may not conform to this optimum design, your architect will try to devise the best way to get as close as possible to this.
- **STUCK IN THE MIDDLE** If you’re extending to the rear of your house, a big concern is going to be how to avoid blocking off light to the room that gets extended. “One option is to simply use this space for something that doesn’t need much light, like a utility room,” Robert suggests. “Another approach is to create a small gap between the existing and the new with a glazed roof light allowing light into this space.” If space and budget allow, you can even create a small courtyard between the existing house and the new extension.
- **WORK AROUND IT** All is not lost if your house simply can’t adhere to the ideal south-east-facing bedroom and south-west-facing living area combination. Talk to your architect about smart design solutions that can increase the amount of light your space gets. Features such as light wells and roof lights can work very well. Even simple moves like increasing the height of an existing window can make a big impact.

OPPOSITE PAGE, LEFT Three separate extensions allowed architect Robert Bourke to reshape the existing rooms into larger, well-proportioned spaces. **ABOVE RIGHT** Although there are extensions to the front, side and rear of the house, the finished look is strong and singular. **BELOW RIGHT** The new extensions have created three new outdoor areas – this private courtyard is the ideal place to read a book on a sunny afternoon. **ABOVE LEFT** Rooms that once felt dark and pokey now seem airy and bright. **ABOVE RIGHT** The glass corridor connects the living spaces and brings the outdoors in.