

# THE ONLY WAY IS OUT

Feeling the squeeze in your living space but reconfiguring hasn't worked and moving isn't on the cards? A well-thought-out extension can be the solution. WORDS **ORLA NELIGAN**



PHOTOGRAPHY STE MURRAY

**ARCHITECT** ROBERT BOURKE  
ARCHITECTS

**PROJECT** RIVERCHAPEL

**MATERIALS** A split-level, timber-framed extension with tile and timber floor

**SIZE** 17 square metres



**A carefully considered floor layout can often make the most of an existing space so that the extension accommodates only what the house cannot.** In the case of this 1970s Swedish-style, timber-framed holiday home by the sea in Wexford, the existing house had all the potential of a great holiday retreat, but lacked those generous spaces required by a family, plus a lack of insulation meant it wasn't the warm and cosy home they'd hoped for. "There was a tiny kitchen and dining area that could only be reached by crossing the living room and since this

was going to be their holiday home, the family wanted an entrance area where boots and coats could be removed and stored immediately upon arrival," notes architect Robert Bourke. The house being 1.5 metres above ground level meant some design challenges, which they overcame by making the extension three steps lower, reducing the number of steps to the front door and creating an interesting split level with several twists between the extension and original living space. The result is a rich spatial experience from the front door to the boot

area and up the oak steps into the living spaces – a series of "surprises" that takes you on an upward journey. The sloped roof encloses the kitchen-dining area, creating an L-shaped plan, which connects a new, sheltered, south-facing patio. Oiled oak benches and steps – a nod to that original Scandi interior – give a simple, fluid and understated air to the interior. "We didn't want it to jar with its environment. It's a modest building and we wanted it to sit comfortably and honour its original character." rba.ie



**ARCHITECT** RYAN W KENNIHAN

**PROJECT** CATHERINE'S HOUSE

**MATERIALS** Brick extension with concrete supports

**SIZE** 28 square metres

**One of the biggest pitfalls made when designing an extension is too much open-plan space, according to architect Ryan Kennihan.** The pre-requisite for most clients approaching an extension with an existing house that has a lot of closed-off rooms is to open them up but, unfortunately, it's easy to go too far. "You can often end up with a single big public space lacking in character and with nowhere to escape to," says Ryan.

This was a key consideration when planning the extension for Catherine's House, which required opening up the spaces with views from street to garden, but maintaining the individual character of the distinct rooms, thereby avoiding one big open-plan area. The clients wanted a beautiful, functional home on a budget but, being both design savvy and open-minded, were happy to take some risks. "I approached it surgically," notes Ryan. "Through a series of cuts and openings in the existing walls, we were able to create a variety of visual and physical connections."

They didn't mind either, when Ryan suggested stripping the original plaster off the rear room of the house and leaving it exposed, a risk that really paid off.

Blending the extension with the existing house was another fundamental in the



PHOTOGRAPHY AISLING MCCOY

design. While many architects prefer to enhance the division between old and new structures, allowing them to sit unapologetically side-by-side, Ryan, however, was intent on blurring the lines between the new contemporary structure and the more traditional house. The use of brick was key to achieving this, both in the external and internal structure of the extension, but also in the rear room where the exposed brick gives the space its unique character and allows the house to blend materially from the painted front room to the rear room to the extension.

Having a clear idea of what exactly the character of a room should be is a good starting point when it comes to designing,

says Ryan. "It can never be achieved with just furniture or structure alone, but through a merging of these elements with the natural environment." It is one of the reasons the old pieces of timber and nails behind the plaster in the middle room were left in place; they feed into the narrative of the building, the story of the house and its creation.

And if he had the freedom to design an extension with no restrictions? "I would build a very hand-crafted structure both in its material and contents. Our homes are the last bulwark against the technical and media-saturated world. We can only feel at home in a well-crafted and careful space and, I'm happy to say, this project comes close to that ideal." [rwka.com](http://rwka.com)



**OPPOSITE** The plaster was stripped from the original rear room and then linked with the new extension through the white brick walls. **THIS PAGE** Concrete was also used as a linking material, as a support structure both in the new space and in the old brick walls of the original house.





**When you're planning an extension 20 metres from the sea on the coast of Connemara**, there are two major factors to consider: that West coast "rock" for one, and the exposure to that cool Atlantic air. Thankfully, for architect Stephen Tierney and his clients, neither proved a problem. The biggest challenge, however, was creating a simple exterior in keeping with the surrounding landscape. Builder and furniture designer Colin Snow was integral to the process. "Behind a simple exterior is often quite complicated details," notes Stephen. "Having a furniture designer as a builder is a major bonus. Details such as battening, water proofing and guttering has to be done in a discreet and quiet manner to make for a simple exterior and Colin understood that." According to Stephen, one of the most

**ARCHITECT** TIERNEY HAINES  
**PROJECT** LIBRARY LOOKOUT  
**MATERIALS** Cedar-clad extension with roof terrace and oak interior panelling  
**SIZE** 19 square metres



PHOTOGRAPHY STEPHEN TIERNEY

common mistakes when designing an extension is not re-designing the garden at the same time. "There needs to be a balance between the two," notes Stephen who, together with his client Paula Vine, a keen gardener, re-imagined the garden space around the new building.

Given the exposed nature of the site, major consideration was also given to the materials used. "When it blows down there, it really blows, bringing salt water with it," he laughs. The overall effect is hardy yet aesthetically simple. Simplicity and functionality were key considerations in the interior too. The library lookout is designed as a quiet retreat and dedicated workspace with its own atmosphere and external space, away from the active social areas of the house such as the kitchen. It is well

insulated, snug but airy, and nestled into the side of a hill within a corner of the garden, with a roof terrace for when you need a blast of that cool sea air. Stephen's decision to use oak for the panelling, desks, shelving and storage in the room makes for a seamless space with a "cabinet" look that reads as one piece of furniture. But it is the roof terrace, just above the surrounding landscape, that appeals most to Stephen.

The existing building is sheltered in its little hollow, but the design of the extension with its slightly elevated roof terrace, allows you to pop your head just high enough over the surroundings to get that beautiful expansive view. "I love that it's tucked away behind planting but just high enough not to be too conspicuous in a landscape as sensitive as it is." [tierneyhaines.com](http://tierneyhaines.com)