

MOVE

An awkwardly shaped corner plot posed a challenge to architects when it came to extending a house in Dublin's southside, writes *Cara O'Doherty*

Home extensions on corner sites can be tricky. How much of the garden do you eat into? How do you create rooms that are of workable shape? Should you emulate what the neighbours have or ask an architect to design something extraordinary?

Robert Bourke, of Robert Bourke Architects, kept these questions in mind when designing an extension for a 68 sq m, three-bedroom, former corporation house in the Tenters area of Dublin's southside last year.

The property, built in 1922, had been bought by the clients in 2014. They were keen that the 37 sq m extension reflect the style of the house. "These are solidly built houses, with high ceilings, well-made joinery and beautifully tiled fireplaces," says Bourke.

The brief was to create more space and an open-plan home. The owners were happy to defer to Bourke. "They didn't have an exact brief, so we helped them to define it," he says. "This often happens after the first design meeting: you put an initial design on the table and suddenly there is something tangible to discuss. Then the conversation starts and it slowly develops into a design that meets all of the client's requirements."

When it came to extending the house, Bourke faced a challenge: the corner site was almost triangular, so he designed the bulk of the extension to the side with just a small addition to the rear.

"The private back receives morning sun, but lies at the thin end of the wedge, whereas the much wider, street-facing front gets evening sun, but had potential privacy issues," he says. "Our task was to enlarge the ground floor, while adding some new functions to meet modern needs. We kept the layout of the original house, designating the original living room as the TV room and keeping the kitchen in its original position at the back of the house."

Bourke says corner sites often present difficulties, but the challenge is finding workarounds. The key is working with what exists and ensuring that all changes are sympathetic to the original building. An extension can reduce access points for light and it is important to compensate for that.

"The choice of whether, or how, to extend will depend on many factors. We always try to make the existing house work as well as possible before advising on extending. If an extension is required, as it was in this small house, you need to work with the shape of the site."

"In this case, it made sense to extend slightly to the rear to accommodate the utility room. We installed a roof light in between to minimise the loss of light to the kitchen. The dining/living space was placed to the side, where there was originally a garage. This allowed the space to run the full length of the extension, with glazing to connect it to the front and back gardens."

The garage and small rear extension were demolished before work began. To combat the corner issue, Bourke and his team tested several layouts. The answer was found in the simplest version. "To the front, we added a new wall, perpendicular to the neighbour's boundary and, to the rear, we added a new wall parallel with the back of the house," says Bourke. They placed a bike store in one of the triangle's corners and a utility room and guest lavatory in the other.

This layout allowed them to integrate a living/dining space, running front to back. Despite the tapering of the site, the new principal rooms are almost

STE MURRAY



Riddle of the Tenters triangle

rectangular and the ancillary spaces absorb any awkward angles.

Bourke departed from the norm by using exposed beams on the ceiling and inserting a curved wall, clad in tongue-and-groove timber painted green, to separate the kitchen and living area from the utility room.

"It provides separation between the kitchen and dining spaces," says Bourke. "It also conceals the view of the back garden as you enter the kitchen from the hall, diverting you around its curved edge into the larger, more flowing dining-living space. This larger space provides relief

from the more boxy rooms in the rest of the house, and its glazed ends allow lots of sunlight to enter on clear mornings and evenings."

The ceiling is made of Irish spruce joists within and around a square steel frame, which would support a guest bedroom on the first floor, should the clients decide to extend further.

"We were keen to express the interesting pattern of joists and beams, and the clients' clever suggestion to apply a translucent whitewash softens this surface to create a more subtle texture," he says.

The effect is striking and unusual, but



The extension, with its beamed ceiling, was created by leaving the joists exposed and covering them with a light wash; above right, the brickwork emulates that of surrounding properties



THE LOWDOWN

What it is: A 1920s ex-corporation corner house

Where it is: The Tenters, Dublin 8, a historic old area of Dublin that borders the Liberties

Who designed it: Robert Bourke Architects

The firm's work: Its award-winning portfolio includes homes, community buildings and places for education and employment. "We seek to create an architecture that is socially conscious, environmentally responsible and timeless in its aesthetic," it says.

Other projects: Pavilion House, which was shortlisted for the Royal Institute of the Architects of Ireland Public Choice Award and Best House Award 2020, a basement gymnasium and arts building in St Marylebone School, in London; the Place Shapers Project, an urban design project in Blanchardstown, Dublin; as well as numerous extensions and renovations to houses including a 1930s bungalow in Honey Park, Sallynoggin; a Victorian home on Anglesea Road, Ballsbridge; and a pre-war apartment in Prague, in the Czech Republic

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The dining/living space was put to the side, so it could run the length of the extension

did not involve extra cost. "This form of construction is used for all flat roofs, but it is usually covered with plasterboard," says Bourke. "However, we did have to be more careful about how the joists were laid, as they would be in full view."

When it came to the external walls, he was careful to respect the house's origins. The Tenters is one of Dublin's oldest industrial areas and derives its name from the fabric industry that sprung up in the 1600s, when French Huguenots settled in the area.

Linens and fabrics were hung from tenterhooks in the extensive drying

fields. Locals came to refer to the area as "the Tenters".

"The external walls of the extension are made of a black engineered brick, referring to the distinctive brick quoins on the corners of the original houses."

Landscape designer Mark Grehan selected feature and screening plants to bring life to the outside, which is zoned with areas of standard paving slabs and gravel. "Quality planting is often not considered or is the first thing to be axed from the budget, but we consider it to be at least as important as the interior," says Bourke.