



A simple monochrome scheme combined with crisp detailing characterises this stylish extension to a Victorian mid-terrace house in Dublin's Portobello.



What could be a potentially dark space is illuminated by a large roof light, bouncing light onto the exquisite terrazzo floor which extends out to the terrace.

BLACK IS THE COLOUR

A DARINGLY DIFFERENT HOUSE EXTENSION COMBINES A PASSION FOR DETAIL WITH A STRONG COLOUR SCHEME

PHOTOGRAPHS BY MARIE-LOUISE HALPENNY
TEXT BY SANDRA O'CONNELL

Extending a period house can mean limited choices for the owners and their architect, particularly in the case of a protected structure. Often the end result is a 'box' at the back, containing a new kitchen/family space that opens up to the garden and mirrors its neighbours in layout and shape. Yet with meticulous detailing, a minimalist palette of colour and materials, and clever use of light - this rear extension to a mid-terraced Victorian villa in Dublin's Portobello is daringly different.

When architects Sterrin O'Shea and Diarmaid Brophy were asked by their clients - both of whom work in advertising - to remodel their 180-year-old terraced home, they were given free reign except for one very clear direction:

EXTENSION



Black open shelving – housing the owners' art and design book collection – are juxtaposed with sleek white kitchen units, concealing the cooking area.



Mirrored glass envelops the bathroom pod and turns it into an exquisite object – and optical illusion.

EVEN THE BOILER HOUSE HAS BEEN METICULOUSLY DETAILED TO BE CONCEALED BEHIND A MIRRORED DOOR THAT REFLECTS THE GREENERY OF THE GARDEN.



The large bookcase in the study acts as a space divider and conceals the wet room pod with mirrored storage beyond.

“Anything but a white floor!” “While light-coloured floors can be a great device to reflect light in dark spaces, we took our clients’ wish to heart and proposed instead the idea of black floor,” explains architect Sterrin O’Shea. This courageous choice has resulted in an exquisite black terrazzo floor with delicate speckles of white and yellow. Poured and polished on site, the stunning terrazzo floor has become the inspiration for the strikingly minimalist colour scheme that characterises this open plan space, where old and new flow seamlessly together. A long “wall” of black open shelves, containing the owner’s colourful collection of art and design books, lines one side of the space and is juxtaposed with superbly detailed white kitchen units, concealing the cooking area.

In this “upside down” house the bedrooms are located on the first floor or entrance level and accessed from a beautiful Victorian hall with lofty, ornate ceilings. By contrast, the ground floor living spaces had been dark and poky with a poor layout and minimal connection to the west-facing garden. “The kitchen was so small that the clients had no space for a dining table,” O’Shea recalls. Although the actual extension is small – only twelve square metres of space was added to the side courtyard – the real skill in this quirky renovation project lies in how the architects have reorganised the layout and dramatically improved the flow. Although essentially open plan, the new ground floor comprises three distinct zones: the study located at the front of the house; the bright and spacious kitchen and dining space in the rear extension; and the living room, placed between both spaces, at the threshold of old and new.

Located at the centre of the plan, the living room can be closed off when necessary by full-height sliding panels, concealed within the fitted furniture. “This could have been a potentially dark space, but we flooded it with natural light via a large bespoke rooflight,” says O’Shea. Also adding to the sense of space and loftiness of this remodelled ground floor are the cleverly concealed storage units and the beautiful detailing of the built-in furniture. Describing herself as “storage-tastic”, O’Shea believes good architecture must extend into all aspects of the interior down to the last kitchen drawer. “Working with good craftsmen is key to the success of



The kitchen units show off the architects’ deft hand at detailing. The island is clad in Blanco Zeus Silestone.



Inside and outside flow seamlessly into each other in this project.

a residential project,” says O’Shea who collaborated on this house with Irish company Oikos who made all the built-in furniture and with Colum Ryan on the terrazzo floors. Just as important is, however, her practice’s complete passion for detail. For each project, O’Shea and Brophy produce a “book” of A3 drawings and building details, thereby ensuring that builders and craftsmen know exactly how to make an elegant anthracite zinc roof or how to neatly fit a floor mat into the external terrace. Even the boiler house has been meticulously detailed to be concealed behind a mirrored door that reflects the greenery of the garden.

This passion for detail is nowhere more evident than in the piece de résistance of this remodelled house: a bathroom pod, clad in mirrored glass and superbly detailed like a precious object. It occupies a formerly under-utilised space beside the ground floor entrance and doubles up as a much-needed second family bathroom. Every joint in this glass bathroom has been carefully detailed by Sterrin O’Shea: “Instead of having to get out your toothbrush to get between tiles, these glass sheets can be simply cleaned down,” explains O’Shea. She follows the motto of Mies van der Rohe, that “God is in the detail”. “When something looks very simple, in most cases a lot of detailing has gone into it,” says O’Shea. It is this careful attention to the smallest detail and her intuition for colour and materials that elevates this extension above the ordinary. ■ Sterrin O’Shea Architects, 01 405 2315; sterrinoshea@sosa.ie