



## full potential

Accommodating contemporary open-plan living was the key objective in the architectural brief for a post-war house in Stillorgan, Co Dublin.

One of Irish artist Deborah Donnelly's beloved cows looks out benignly over the drawing room in Dunsland, the house belonging to Dublin sisters, Tina Featherston and Michelle Farrell. "The Flying Cow", painted in Donnelly's distinctive style, inspired by the Fauvist painters of the early twentieth century, brings a burst of colour and a fun element to the room which is otherwise sophisticatedly attired in a classic contemporary palette of neutral shades and deep wenge browns.

It has taken Tina and Michele over two years to extend, renovate and decorate the property under the design guidance of Brazil Lohan Architects. The project came about as after completing the successful renovations of their own houses, the sisters felt they were ready to take on something else that would be more of a challenge to their interior design skills than the buy-to-let investment properties they had previously worked on.



In 2005 Tina and Michele found Dunsland, a late 1940s two storey detached house situated in a large garden on the main Stillorgan dual carriageway. With Dublin gardens becoming ever smaller as developers build on the generously sized plots of old, they felt the house had great potential that would set it apart as a family home close to town. However, they had to look beyond a conglomerate of small, dark and poorly linked rooms, to see what could be achieved with a little creative thought.

Bringing in Brazil-Lohan was their first step in tackling the project. Tina and Michelle explained to the architects that their vision for the house was to convert it into a family home with larger room sizes and more fluid, open spaces. In response Brazil-Lohan proposed the demolition of the flat roofed extensions to each side of the house and the opening up of the rear to allow for very generous one and two storey extensions which would almost double the size of the property.







With Brazil-Lohan's architectural and detailed interior fittings plan on the table another sister duo arrived to lend a hand in the form of Sinead and Fiona Considine of Upstage, interior designers and home staging specialists: "The scope of the project was so large that we felt it would be invaluable to have some help with co-ordinating the overall look of the house to achieve the blend of high quality fit-out with sophisticated furnishings designed to have broad appeal that we were seeking. Upstage's design approach suited our needs perfectly," explains Tina.





Sinead Considine's signature style is her own take on classic contemporary, utilising a neutral basic colour palette in soft furnishings, teaming this with dark outlines such as wenge stained wood for tables, chair legs and mirror frames, and then exercising a light touch with accessories such as glass-based lamps, chandelier candelabras and bowls of crackle-glazed ostrich eggs. She combines furniture from her own range which she designs and has made to order, with pieces from leading continental manufacturers. Most items are currently available for purchase by private clients only, but plans are in place to open a new store in the autumn. Sister Fiona produces original artwork which can often be found in 'Upstaged' properties and helps with sourcing accessories and dressing properties due to come to market.





Brazil Lohan's rear extension to the house at ground level comprises a large drawing room, sun-filled garden room and an open-plan kitchen/dining area. All these rooms enjoy garden views and are linked by double leaf oak doors allowing free flow throughout. Floors have been kept in neutral tones with Antica Italian stone flooring running through the hall and kitchen/garden room area and soft cream carpets in the drawing room and dining room; and walls have been painted accordingly in muted tones selected by the architects from the Colortrend palette such as "Desert Castle" for the kitchen and garden room and "Tavern Taupe" for the drawing room and dining room.



The kitchen has been fitted with sleek SieMatic units in a cream gloss finish with honed granite work surfaces and built-in Neff appliances. Frosted glass and stainless steel pendants selected by Brazil Lohan from National Lighting illuminate both the dining area with its armchair style brown leather chairs and the island sink unit which doubles as a breakfast bar with the addition of retro stools upholstered in cream leather. Off the kitchen, a single storey extension houses a large utility and storage area with painted custom-made tongue and groove cupboard units.

The house's five bedrooms are all located on the first floor and reached via a new staircase built in natural oak. Originally, the staircase went straight up from the hall but the architects advised its replacement with a curving, centrally located version leading to a galleried landing which would inject light into the centre of the house and allow better freedom of movement upstairs.

The master bedroom suite, part of the new two storey extension, overlooks the garden and contains a dressing room area with custom-built painted wardrobe and cupboard units, as well as en suite shower room. One wall has been picked out in an accent shade of soft mossy green and this colour is reflected in the choice of bed linen and scatter cushions resting on the bed and upholstered bench seat at its foot.





The two guest bedrooms are decorated using an aqua and grey palette to contrast with cream walls, cream painted built-in tongue and groove storage and pale mushroom carpet.

One room features a simplified four poster bed with wenge brown frame from Global Village which works well in a satisfying colour combination with aqua and grey scatter cushions covered with fabric from KA International and a similarly coloured striped cotton bedspread.

The other guest room also utilises an aqua based colour palette but this time the focus is a boldly patterned a grey and aqua floral bedspread which is part of a range Sinead brings over from France. Contemporary stainless steel lights with white shades from Hicken Lighting sit either side of the bed on wenge stained tables.

Tina and Michele bought and furnished the house very much with a growing family in mind and to this end the two bedrooms at the front of the house within the original structure have been decorated for younger children.

Twin beds in oak have been dressed with chocolate brown bedspreads (again brought over from France) and brown and pink striped cushions. Dainty pink shaded lamps sit bedside the beds on oak units and contemporary artwork by Deirdre Geraghty reflects the room's pink and brown colour scheme.

The baby's room is incredibly cute with white painted furniture by Spanish company Amelia Aran and candyfloss pink accessories. Everything is mini-sized even down to the tiny tangerine and pink throw, "These are my favourite rooms to dress," says Fiona, "it's easy to get carried away as everything is so adorable!"

There are a total of four bath/shower-rooms – a main bathroom and three en suites in the house and they each feature Villeroy & Boch fittings from Ideal Bathrooms and Antica stone vanity units over custom-built painted cabinets which co-ordinate with painted panelling on the walls. The Italian stone wall tiles and shower trays were also selected from Antica's ranges.



The garden is a key factor in the overall attractiveness of this property and was one of the first aspects of the house that Tina and Michele decided to tackle. "It was in such a mess when we first arrived," remembers Michele. "Totally overgrown, more of a meadow than a garden really."

Landscape designer Brian Considine, Sinead and Fiona's brother, had worked for the family at their other homes and he was called upon to transform the garden into a contemporary outdoor space to complement the house's new external appearance. Making it a safe and hospitable place for children was another priority.

"Apart from the tangled undergrowth, the site's biggest physical constraint was a surprisingly steep slope running from front to back", Brian explains. "We didn't want to use up the budget in large scale earth removal which would have been required to level the garden and so we decided to address the issue of the slope within the overall garden design."







To this end Brian proposed terracing the garden into four levels to obviate the need to remove tonnes of soil. The ground immediately outside the garden room has been paved with Indian sandstone to form a large terrace with raised beds either side of centrally placed sandstone steps and the end portion has been covered in bark to provide a play area for children.

The remainder of the garden is divided into three lawned terraces, each smaller than the one before to visually elongate the plot. The stepped levels have been faced with stainless steel and this is lit with small sunken LED lights, as is the terrace. Flower beds, simply planted with bulbs and shrubs for easy maintenance and year round colour have been positioned symmetrically at either side of each lawn area and a stone water feature with white pebble surround is positioned on the middle terrace.



It's been a long project with significant architectural design changes to the original property and a real top-to-bottom detailed makeover. Would they do it again? The response from Tina and Michele is an immediate and enthusiastic, "Yes", both saying how much they'd enjoyed the challenge of starting with a blank canvas and then learning to adapt their own tastes to create a living style that would appeal to another family. ■

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