



villa blanche

One of the oldest houses in Ranelagh has been restored once more to a single dwelling and given a new lease of life with a fresh, contemporary facelift.

When Richard Crosbie took off from the Ranelagh Gardens in 1785, on the first manned balloon flight in Ireland, he passed over a tranquil, rural landscape which would have included No 20 Annavilla, standing at the edge of a small footpath close to Sandford Road. Until the 1840s, No 20 was the last house on the street; in those days known as Anne Street.

There is quite a variety of architectural styles along this road in the bustling village of Ranelagh, just south of Dublin city centre, ranging from the eighteenth century through to the 1930s, but No. 20 stands out amongst them.

Apart from its white, render-covered exterior; whilst the majority of dwellings are red brick, No 20 is also noticeable for being a particularly tall house; its roof ridge runs at right angles to the street and the gable parallel with the road. More unusual still is that the property originally stood alone with a single storey cottage-style dwelling on either side; normally, houses of this style and date stood in continuous terraces, as seen in streets near the Liberties.

The house was once owned, it is thought, by the notorious Major Henry Charles Sirr; a man despised by the residents of late eighteenth century and early nineteenth century Dublin for his relentless and merciless pursuit of anyone whom he suspected of being involved in any remotely subversive activity. "He arrested rich and poor according to the strength of his information, no matter whether they were Catholics, Protestants, Dissenters, Freemasons or atheists. It used to be said in Dublin that a visitation from the Major was dreaded more than a visitation of Providence, for the one was a remote improbability but the other was an ever-present possibility", says Deirdre Kelly in her excellent local history book, 'The Four Roads to Dublin'.

However; it seems unlikely that the infamous captor of Lord Edward Fitzgerald and Robert Emmet ever lived in the house, for the Major owned a lot of property in the area and is documented as having lived at Elm Park House, a large house on extensive grounds, which stood between the old villages of Ranelagh and Cullenswood. He would certainly have been one of those landlords for whom you would make sure you were always on time with the rent.





A brief check of Thom's Directories reveals an ever-changing series of tenants living at No 20 Annavilla over the years, and it is not clear precisely when it was converted into bed-sits, but when Emmet Long and his family bought the house back in May 2006, they found it divided into half a dozen units and in a pretty dire condition. Emmet runs a building development company, Hillrock Developments, which purchases properties in desirable city locations to sell-on after renovating, and so he was able to tackle the project himself.

Some twelve months later, the house was ready to move into once again, having been completely re-worked to provide family accommodation on three floors, with a paved and decked outdoor space to the side where an old apartment had once stood.



The façade was retained intact, but pretty much every other aspect had to be knocked down and re-built.

Emmet and wife Denise had strong ideas on decorating and furnishing ,but having just had their third child, felt they could use some help in co-ordinating the interiors so that the house was completely ready to move into. For this they turned to interior designer and home staging specialist, Sinead Considine, who runs Upstage.

Knowing that the Longs' favoured style was classic contemporary, Sinead introduced them to her new range, 'Sarco', which she recently added to the Upstage collection whilst on a buying trip to Belgium.







The range carries all the hallmarks of furniture design that the Belgians are so good at and features uncluttered, simple designs in dark woods and hard wearing, washable fabrics. The couple loved the chunky two-tone coffee table in charcoal wood with pale grey inset panelling and charcoal framed tub chairs with cream upholstery in thick cord which Sinead suggested for the drawing room, and so the interior of the house began to be designed around these items.

The colour scheme they chose was based on two Farrow & Ball shades – a versatile soft pale grey which goes by the rather extraordinary name of Elephant's Breath and an off-white tone, called Shaded White. These were combined and adjusted throughout the house, depending on the availability of natural light and the role of a room; double strength of tone was used in some rooms and diluted shades in others.



The front door opens into a narrow hallway with dark chocolate wenge boards stretching ahead and down into the kitchen at the rear. Off to the right and accessed through wenge-stained doors are the drawing room and dining room, both elegantly furnished from the Sarco range in charcoal wood with contrasting cream fabrics and a thick cream carpet.

The chimney breast in the drawing room has been picked out as an accent wall and covered in anthracite coloured wallpaper sourced from MCRB, which is exact replica of the grain of the wood on the furniture. Hanging either side of the chimney breast and at intervals throughout the drawing room, are atmospheric shots of Dublin at night by Irish photographer Giles Norman.







The kitchen is a bright, airy space at the rear of the house, where a self-contained apartment unit once stood. Emmet took off the roof and demolished part of the side wall in order to inject more light into the space via a pitched roof light, deep windows and large glazed doors.

Wenge flooring has been continued from the hallway into the kitchen where it makes a luxurious and practical floor; its dark rich tones off-setting the white high gloss kitchen units and pale walls to enhance the room's bright spaciousness. There is plenty of space here for a square family dining table in wenge-stained wood, surrounded by Philippe Starck's Series 7 Phantom chairs. Splashes of colour have been introduced via a pair of orange wooden stools and two lively block colour abstracts by John Nolan from the Bad Art Gallery. And in one corner, a white leather armchair from 'Upstage is teamed with a chrome and glass table and tall silver vases from Niche Interiors.



Upstairs, the bedroom accommodation is on two levels. The first of these contains the master bedroom which has been decorated and furnished in restful, blending natural tones of mushroom, biscuit, cream and white, with double-strength Elephant's Breath on the walls. The white cotton upholstered headboard and round padded stool were made to order through Upstage and team perfectly with mirrored bedside tables and glass and chrome white-shaded lamps.

The adjacent guest bedroom is in dramatic contrast, with a bold monochromatic scheme. Pale walls in Shaded White and light mushroom coloured carpet provide a recessive backdrop for the bed with its luxurious dense black velvet headboard and black and white damask bedspread with matching scatter cushions from Upstage's Linens Collection.





Wenge lockers, tall Art Deco lamps with chrome stands and white box shades and a black and white picture by Sinead's sister, Fiona Considine, complete the look.

Another flight of stairs takes you up to the top of the house, where a second guest room and the children's bedroom are located. The children's room, for seven year old Ella and two year old Sophie, is painted once more in Shaded White and accessorised with a delicate sugared almond pink. Beds, lockers and storage units are all from Upstage's Bambino Range, and have been painted to match the room's colour scheme. Pink striped and checked bedspreads are by Lexington with pink and white striped scatter cushions from KA International and Lexington again.

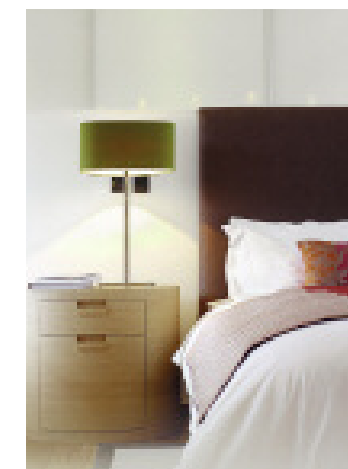
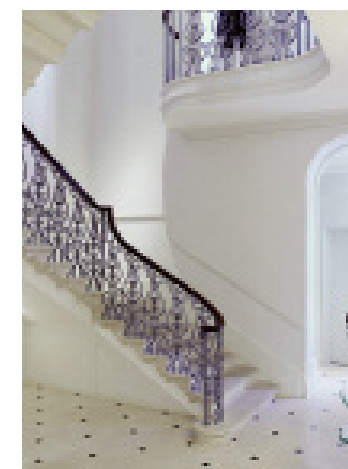
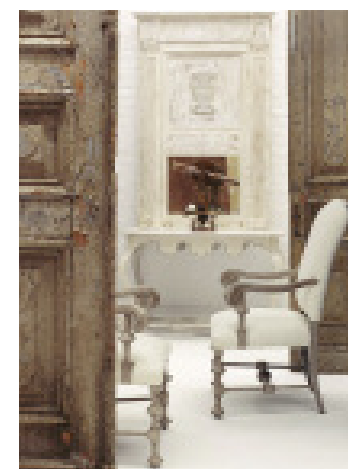
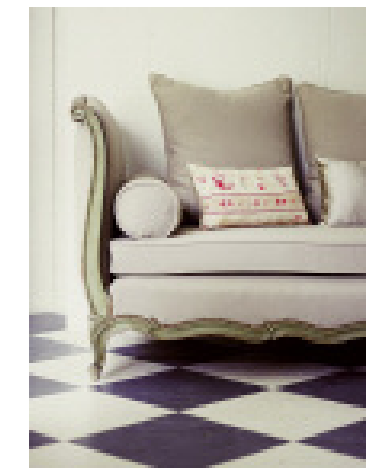
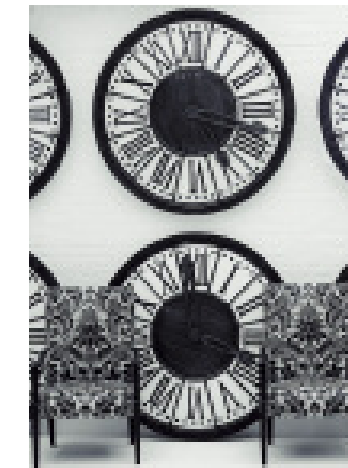
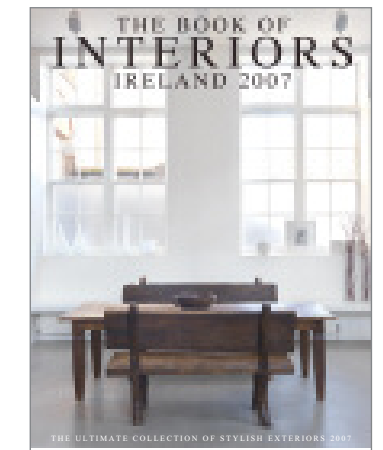
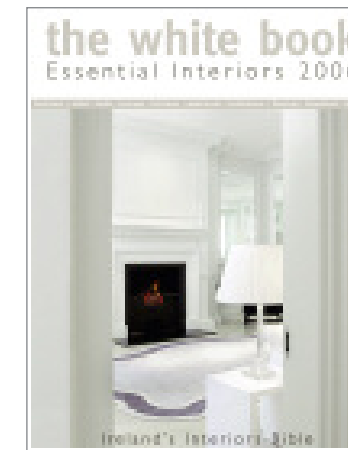
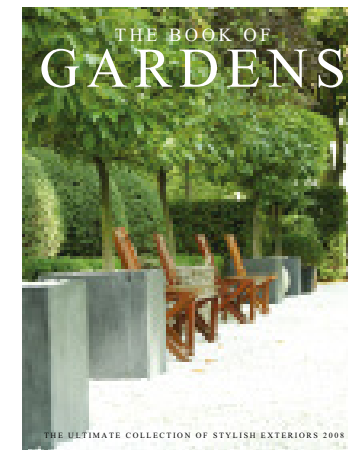
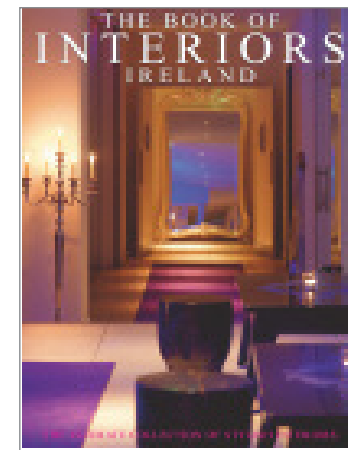


The reconfigured space works so well as a family home, that it is impossible to picture the building divided and sub-divided; a dingy apartment where a sun-bathed teak deck now stands. "It was never a grand house," says Emmet. "You can see that as it doesn't have the high ceilings and architectural details you would find properties belonging to the gentry- but it did deserve to be one house, and we're delighted with the outcome."

www.upstage.ie t: +353(0)16348118; www.hickenlighting.com;
 www.farrowandball.com; www.thebadartgallerydublin.com,
 MRCB t: +353(0)16798755; information on the history of Ranelagh
 from "Four Roads to Dublin" by Deirdre Kelly, published by O'Brien.

What's on your coffee table?

Subscribe to Ireland's most exclusive
Interior Design Books



Take out a subscription for The White Book and The Book of Interiors before December 31st 2007, and not only will you receive four issues full of gorgeous interiors direct to your door, but also the first edition of the stunning new Book of Gardens as your FREE gift (worth €24.95) (Published 1st December 2007 in time for Christmas stockings)

To subscribe, simply log onto www.thewhitebook.ie or www.thebookofinteriors.ie
 email subscriptions@montaguegroup.ie or tel: +353 (0)1 669 2101