



A COLLABORATIVE JOURNEY

Ulster Tatler Interiors explores a unique property
designed by HBK Architects.

This house, designed by HBK Architects in association with Alan Farrelly, is singular in its genesis.

Architect and client collaborated in a unique manner where client challenged architect to create a suitable design according to an expectation that the style of the house would ultimately be 'cosy and contemporary.' At the outset, the architects received a four-page bullet brief of elements that must be included in the house. It was the most comprehensive instruction list they had ever received from clients and one that would determine content but not style of the overall house.

For architect Stephen Salley; "The design process was very intensive, it began in 2005 and was refined through about four different designs where the aesthetic was further adapted."

The highly analytical clients conducted research on what they wanted over a period of a few years; this consisted of taking over 200 photographs of one off homes in the county of Dublin from Howth to Delgany. They then short





shaped site overlooking a greenbelt, the architects explain; "the position of site entrance was already decided as part of Master plan on the east and shortest side of the site. We immediately set up a long axis from the main entrance at the front (east) of the site to the back (west). We felt it would be good to give the site extra depth by creating as much incidence and layering along this line as possible. It becomes the main line of circulation within the house."

The house is essentially a three-storey, square house with an area of 6,000 square feet. "Tall windows run from floor through two storeys and sit within deep brick piers. The piers give a real feeling of solidity to what is actually a timber frame house." The cruciform axis that centrally defines the house on all floors allows a sense of drama to be integral to the home. Both clients and architects emphasise the importance of a journey through the dwelling.

At the entrance, one initiates this expedition via a shallow set of stone steps that lead up to the entrance of double doors. On entering, the eye is led to the garden beyond that features a peaceful water feature, stepping-stones and a contemporary gazebo. The approach to this haven is naturally interrupted by the presence of a triple height hall that encourages the eye upwards. The ground floor contains an interesting assembly of spaces; kitchen and breakfast room to rear of the house with step down. Through this one enters the family room, affectionately named the New York room. Alongside is a dining room and both rooms share a tunnel fireplace. The dining room includes an interesting configuration of windows for an internal room that are defined by their symmetry and mix of frosted and clear glass.

listed the houses to their favourite five, contacted the architects of these houses and invited them to be interviewed on site to select the best candidate.

They also had composed scrapbooks of favoured design elements, furniture and fabrics but the deliberate decision was made by the clients to not share this information with the architects as they felt style would be largely pre-determined by this level of research. Thus the architects were armed with a textual brief only and asked to 'go marry that to this site.' Stephen Salley strongly believes that it is due to the 'level of research undertaken by the clients that we were confident they could analyse the design put before them.' In terms of further collaborative partners, the builder Donnagh Higgins paid tremendous attention to detail and finishing. Externally the landscape contractor Doylescapes ensured that the surrounding gardens perfectly complemented the architectural aesthetic, whilst Scott's Wiideplank Flooring provided hardwood flooring inside the property. All suppliers involved in the project provided excellent solutions.

The site limits of the house were pre-determined as it is located in an exclusive development of one-off residential homes. Located on a wedge-



This space is modelled along the lines of the Scandinavian winter room. Through double doors the dining room directly communicates with the living room, essentially a music room where two principal elements, the grand piano and spiral staircase dominate. The first floor accommodates five bedrooms again located around the landing and stairwell. There is a mezzanine above the living area downstairs that acts as a library space and adjoins the master bedroom suite. The other four bedrooms share two ensuite bathrooms and this becomes a clever and effective use of space. Bedrooms each have their own character, various furnishings and wardrobes, while a themed palette of grey and muted tones allows an attendant narrative to link these spaces. From the master bedroom, a wrap around balcony can be accessed that offers views of the nearby fields, Howth Head and Lambay Island. The second floor contains a gym, study and wrap around balcony that is essentially private. A sequence of 21 windows, six large to enjoy the corner views and fifteen small that overlook the other houses, give this storey a commanding panoramic aspect. The house is effectively passive and has five renewable elements; a timber frame, completely sealed membrane, under floor heating, heat recovery and ventilation system, solar panels and a polymer coating on some windows for solar control and glare reduction.



In comparative terms, it is apparent that the architects have paid tribute to Frank Lloyd Wright's iconic 'Fallingwater' in Pennsylvania and the 'Robie House' in Chicago. These influences can be seen in HBK's incorporation of weighty cantilevered balconies that share an affinity with the appearance and composition of Fallingwater. Also the combination and offsetting of horizontal with vertical elements is certainly in evidence, a design strategy that results in the grounding of the building on its site. This approach was often used by Lloyd Wright and is manifest in both Fallingwater and the Robie House.

Client confidence in the architects has paid dividends in that the clients admit; they went back to their original checklist after moving into the house and happily acknowledged that the brief had been one hundred percent achieved. This house has seen painstaking attention to detail in terms of architectural design, interior finishes, appliance choices, furnishings and fittings as a result of the collaborative endeavour.

For architect Stephen Salley, "We had clients with this project who while unrelenting in their own research, gifted us freedom to design." When asked how they find the house now, eighteen months on, the clients explain; "We experience magic moments of memories of the journey and design decisions as we make our way around in daily life – it is exactly what we had hoped for."