

MOVE

As he sat in the car with his brother Michael, Joe Fallon was feeling guilty. They had just been to see a house in south Co Dublin – about the fifth in Michael's search for a fixer-upper – and Joe, an architectural technologist, had once again dismissed it. "We're two of three brothers and are a close-knit family, but I was beginning to question if my reaction to the houses was due to some sort of unconscious sibling jealousy, but I just felt we couldn't add much more to those properties; they and their sites had been maxed out," says Joe.

Then he saw "the one". As they left the rejected house and drove down Woodbine Road, in Booterstown, Joe spotted a run-down late-1940s house with potential. "It had a really good site and there was loads of scope for development," he says. "The existing house had a simple shape and simple form in the roof. When you get a house like that it is easy to develop, whereas if you get a house with lots of different dormers and roofs, it's hard to pretty them up."

Since its construction in 1948, the house had been given a single-storey bathroom and bedroom extension, which was built to the side in 1997. In all, it measured 132 sq m and had a side garage. It was unlike the other houses on the road, as it was detached, and had pebble dash and shutters. Its two sash windows upstairs and larger window downstairs had a face-like appearance.

Michael, who has an electrical contracting firm, and his wife, Sinead, who is an artist, needed some convincing. The back garden was north-facing, but Joe pointed out that, at 18 metres, it was long so wouldn't always be in shade.

"Joe had great vision for it," says Michael. Joe adds: "Sometimes when people are looking at houses, they want a south-facing garden, to have the sun in their face, but north-facing gardens aren't necessarily in the shade all the time. I'd be more concerned about gardens that have to contend with a neighbour's mature trees that block out the sun. There were spaces in this garden that weren't north-facing."

Last year there was a trend among buyers for homes in walk-in condition. Estate agents put this down to high costs and a shortage of construction workers. As a result, the sale of the house on Woodbine Road had been hampered. It had been on the market for about a year and its price had been reduced. Michael and Sinead's bid was accepted.

Along with Eric Stilwell, also an architectural technologist, Joe came up with a design that replaced the side extension with a two-storey one with roof lights. A bay window and new facade would be added to the front and there would also be a single-storey extension to the rear, bringing the floor area to just over 220 sq m.

The application was submitted last October. The neighbours were happy to see something done with the house and permission was granted, without objection, within six weeks.

There's nothing ostentatious about the design. Michael had wanted a Juliet balcony to the rear to maximise the views of the adjoining golf course, but Joe knew planners disliked them – because of privacy issues – so it was left off the plans.

Initially, they toyed with the idea of going up to a third level and punching out a porthole in the gable to give views of the Irish Sea, but a Google Earth search revealed that an office building blocked the vista, so that idea was scrapped.

The aim was to build as quickly as possible. Michael, Sinead and their two daughters were renting a house locally, and construction started in January, with Michael as project manager.

"I took hold of the reins and kept driving it on," he says. However, even he was knocked off course when the lockdown came into effect in mid-March.

"The manufacturers had no supplies and the windows were a problem because we missed the pre-lockdown deadline for ordering them by about two days and it held us up by four weeks."

He had ordered some materials before the lockdown, so was able to continue on site. When restrictions were lifted,

BRYAN MEADE



“It had a simple shape and form. A house like that is easy to develop

Joe, left, designed the project with his colleague Eric Stilwell; a light well illuminates the double-height hallway, below

Oh brother, this home is a self-build triumph

Any family rivalry was left behind when an architectural technologist helped his sibling hunt for a fixer-upper in Dublin, then designed him a new light-filled home, writes *Linda Daly*



The detached Booterstown house dates back to 1948

Michael called in as many favours as he could to get construction going again – in a socially distanced manner.

"He probably utilised all his favours and friends to get it over the line and used mine, too," says Joe.

"Everyone played their part. I can't emphasise enough the importance of good people, and I was lucky to have Joe who knew his stuff," adds Michael.

By August, the eight-month project had come to an end and the family moved into their fully finished house.

The front of the property has a traditional look, in spite of its outsized, anthracite-framed, aluminium-clad windows. The old granite sills were reinstated and old tiles were used on the roof. The windows are placed to make the best of the north-facing site. From the front door, you walk into a double-height entrance hall with an open-tread staircase and a light well. A feature window to the back of the hall has views of a recessed pond in the back garden.

A home office, snug, lavatory, sitting room and an open-plan kitchen, dining and living room, make up the ground floor, and there's also an outside utility room and boot room off the kitchen. Upstairs, two of the four bedrooms have en suite bathrooms, and the main bedroom overlooks the golf course.

Sinead was responsible for the interior design, opting for a neutral grey palette



THE LOWDOWN

What is it? A self-build project on the site of a 1940s house

Where is it? On a residential road in Booterstown, south Co Dublin

Who designed it? Eric Stilwell and Joe Fallon, both from Joe Fallon Design, a team of eight people, which includes architects and architectural technologists, based in Dundrum, in Dublin, and Co Wexford. Fallon is a fellow of the Chartered Association of Building Engineers.

Fallon's work: The company works on a mix of residential and commercial projects, with clients ranging from healthcare providers to social housing authorities and sports clubs across Ireland. Some of its more interesting projects have included Blackstairs caravan and camping park

and Templeudigan playground in Wexford. Fallon is currently working on a church. He renovated his own home, an old farmhouse in Co Wexford. The company was shortlisted in two categories in the Irish Construction Industry Awards last year, for the Architectural Practice of the Year and Small Residential Project of the Year awards.

The biggest challenge: "Managing the budget. I always tell the architects and architectural technologists in my firm that we can't draw the Taj Mahal for someone who has a budget of €150,000. It's about managing expectations," says Fallon. **The biggest mistake clients make:** "Too many people have a list and think that if everything isn't ticked off the list at the start they shouldn't buy the property."

Check out: joefallon.com

on the walls and adding splashes of colour with her art.

The house has high levels of insulation, and a heat pump was installed with the help of a grant from the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland. There are two fireplaces with enclosed stoves, so that probably brings the building energy rating down to a B.

"The house is exceptionally warm. It costs about €900 a year to heat," says Michael. "Functionality is key. We have a charging point for electrical vehicles, there's broadband in all the rooms, multi-room surround-sound and remote-controlled lighting throughout," he says.

Cathal O'Toole, of Shamrock Landscape in Wicklow, landscaped the garden before the family moved in. He designed the planting scheme and laid the patio and artificial grass. A block-built shed to the rear mirrors the brick in the house.

Despite the travails that 2020 has thrown at everyone, Michael says working on his self-build project has been a shining light in the gloom.

"I had an itch I needed to scratch to build my own house. Not every wife would take on the enormity of such a project so I'm grateful to Sinead for allowing me to do it.

"Ultimately, the results can be seen in the end product."

RURAL RESTORATION WINDOWS INTO THE LIVES OF PREVIOUS OCCUPANTS

Tiny details matter when it comes to renovating an old building, especially if you want to honour the generations who came before, finds *Louise Roseingrave*

Part of the draw to Co Clare is the people, who are kind and full of fun. While I was doing up my cottage in Kilshanny, I was working in Dublin. At weekends, I stayed with a couple in Fanore, who stopped charging me and my dog, Ralph, for the use of their self-contained, pet-friendly rental.

Early mornings were often spent tracking across the old green road, through the rocky limestone terrain of the Burren, high above Black Head lighthouse with its views across Galway Bay. Months before buying the house, I had moved back to my old family home, where I stayed midweek, to save money while working in Dublin.

Every cent was going towards the house, where I was investigating the possibility of restoring the original single-pane, timber sash windows, rather than replacing them. Only one or two of these beauties were still in working order. Some were propped

open, others had lost their fragile glass and were boarded up, and the rest were badly rotted.

The conservation contractor, among others, told me they were too far gone, but that didn't stop me trying to find a craftsman with the skills and patience to carry out a sympathetic repair job. I believed the rotten wood could be removed and replaced with profiles that replicated the original ones. There are also companies that can add double glazing to sashes without destroying the look of the original window.

Dick Cronin, a former conservation architect for Co Clare, had published a list of craftsmen for heritage and conservation work. These trades are thin on the ground and the work is time-consuming and expensive. Compared with large heritage projects, my job was not worth anyone's while. Every builder that arrived



BEFORE

As the old ones were beyond repair, it was important to find replacement windows that reflected the age and style of the cottage



AFTER

to price the roof, along with all visitors and the odd unfortunate passer-by, was made to inspect the rotting windows and offer an opinion on whether they could be saved.

"Too far gone" was the consensus. Finally, accepting this

was a dead-end endeavour, I decided to replace the windows and began the task of researching the best replacements I could afford. The windows in my house are as tall as me – 164cm (5ft 4in) – and I was once again taken aback by quotes of about €10,000

for 11 timber sash windows. I could have made a compromise and opted for uPVC, which was considerably cheaper and can look remarkably effective. Instead, I took the uPVC price as a goal and began looking further afield for a quality timber window that I could admire for the rest of my life.

A British company appeared to fit the bill. It offered beautifully finished wooden windows, with good-quality hardware and free delivery to Ireland for the same price as the uPVC sash quotes I was getting from Irish companies, supply only. While I would have preferred to buy Irish, the almost insurmountable challenge of restoring an old house on a meagre budget meant that I had to compromise, again, in order to do my best by the house.

Another drawback with the UK company was the need for a local fitter. The windows were factored in as part of the final quote for

the roof and, as there was a six- to eight-week lead time, I needed to make sure the windows were measured to exact detail and to decide on colour and style. The existing windows comprised two sash panes, one over the other. The company could add a central glazing bar to make a four-pane sash, which I loved the look of but was conflicted about – I would be departing from the authentic prototype.

There is a gorgeous little vernacular cottage on the road between Kilfenora and my house that had an unusual three-pane sash window, one of the prettiest I have seen, though it has sadly since been replaced. It was vistas such as this that were making me second-guess the decision to remain faithful to the existing windows.

There are a handful of cottage farmhouses in the immediate area that are an exact replica of mine. Strong, solid structures that were built, I am told, to a specific style by the Irish

Land Commission, about 100 years ago. At that time, the house was built for the O'Dwyer family, whose ancestors are buried in the local graveyard. They used to live a few hundred metres to the west in a stone-built farmhouse that catches the morning sun, before moving into my house, "the new house", where they lived and farmed as a family unit of children, parents and grandparents.

I agonised over decisions so seemingly insignificant as a glazing bar on a sash window because a big part of this process was a feeling of deference, not just to the house, but also to the people who lived and cared for it, long before I was born.

Perhaps it is because it was they, and the family that moved in after their departure, gave this house its heart – that feeling you experience when you walk into someone's home – through their laughter, chat and stories, and lives lived well.