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TribuneProperty

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New lifestyles carved from stone

Working from home, designer Pat McCarthy is helping to create a new style of rural regeneration in Kilkenny, based on the Irish traditional clochán village

Caroline Allen

HAVING successfully serviced markets ranging from London to New York from his live/workspace in scenic South Kilkenny, designer Pat McCarthy is making it possible for others to do the same.

In a new take on rural regeneration, the designer is working with Mark Guard, a London-based Irish architect, to bring a different perspective to the farming community of The Rower, Inistioge.

After renovating a two-storey stone farmhouse he bought in 2000, McCarthy went on to build a studio on the site which covers almost three acres. An approach by an American woman and her Irish husband to rent the property gave him the impetus to create a series of stylish living spaces in a clochán or village-style setting to facilitate what he describes as "the new way of working".

"People are now really hungry for space and quality of life. They are finding alternative ways to continue their careers by working remotely and taking advantage of technology and proximity to airports," McCarthy remarks.

"Working from home wasn't as widespread when I bought the house which was built in 1824. I remember my brother coming with me to look at it and saying 'Typical Pat, out in the middle of nowhere,'" he laughs.

However, he managed to maintain his wide ranging portfolio of clients which currently includes the QVC shopping channel in the US, Irish and international manufacturers and retailers and a voluntary project established by Asral Charity in some of the poorest and most disadvantaged parts of Mongolia.

"I was involved in marketing and design in New York and had a design consultancy business in Dublin. I wanted to live in the countryside and continue with my business and design work," he recalls.

Having woven his way around the lanes and byroads of Kilkenny, he came across the perfect set-



PHOTOGRAPHS: MARK MCCALL

ting. "I loved the stone structure of the house. There wasn't much else. The dwelling was standing and there was a walled garden," he says.

"Mark Guard had designed a house for a friend of mine. I wasn't sure if my house was for him but he understood perfectly what I wanted to do in fusing traditional and contemporary. He has a really great knowledge of the pure Irish rural vernacular. He could preserve traditional aspects of buildings and yet do something quite radical by bringing in light and opening up spaces."

Initially McCarthy and his team worked from the third-floor mezzanine of the house, with him using it as a base and travelling extensively. "As the business developed, it was necessary to move out of the house and I commissioned Mark to design a separate open-plan studio in the remains of a solid stone barn building. I wanted the studio very much connected to the outside space," says McCarthy.

Using the extended remains of the stone outbuilding, Guard devised a striking studio on two levels which provided ample space for McCarthy and his team to work on projects. After being asked to rent it out, he relocated his business into a new section connected to the main house. The double-height space incorporates a glazed meeting/design room upstairs, overlooking the garden, with an office area downstairs.

Having already bought his neighbour's house after she died, McCarthy developed the vision of using her dwelling and the series of linear stone out-



buildings to create a small community. "I had the idea that they could become part of a series of interconnected buildings, based on the clochán. I wanted something contemporary but that would respect the Irish rural tradition with a strong design influence," he relates.

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A community re-established with new lifestyles

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"I had a discussion with Mark about the whole space and how it might work together over a period," McCarthy outlines. The completion of River House is a step further down the road in realising the plan which includes further development of the gardens.

The 232sq m (2,500sq ft) River House is based on three connected outbuildings in local stone. "The idea was to keep the exterior as traditional as possible, with dormer windows to the back," he says.

Interior designer Kari Rocca worked with the team to seamlessly blend old and new. Exposed stone, wooden floors and stone bathrooms and the restored kitchen dresser contrast with the white handleless kitchen from Delgrey, designed by Guard; sleek low seating; streamlined storage and chrome bathroom fittings.

The granite-topped island in the kitchen commands a vista of the countryside. Upstairs in the shower of the main en-suite which features dark grey travertine, a break in the wall also blurs the boundaries between indoors and outdoors.

To avoid long corridors and maximise space upstairs, the main bedroom and a second bedroom are in one area with a separate guest wing. The

garden room, one of the three reception rooms downstairs, could become a fourth bedroom.

The main living space features a Danish inset stove and folding glass door, surrounded by high planting. High ceilings, Velux windows, and pared down décor including Leo Scarff stack lighting, add to the sense of space, light and comfort.

Clever touches include multi controls on the lighting system and the embedding of the stairwell into the stone wall with the rail painted white. The home office is outside, ensuring that work doesn't encroach on home life. Reclaimed gates set the tone at the entrance.

McCarthy's next project is to renovate his late neighbour, Mrs Meeney's house and dairy. This will be done in two sections and in line with work on the gardens. "There will be flexibility in the design so that it can function as one large space or two individual units," he says.

McCarthy has eyed the lean-to haybarn on the site as a potential location for a raw concrete studio for his own business.

While the initial plan is to appeal to homeworkers in search of a base, he is also toying with the idea of offering short-term Kilkenny retreat-style accommodation



in the future for those who want to write or work on a project while getting away from it all.

While the lights in his elderly neighbours' homes surrounding his site have been extinguished for good,



McCarthy remarks that it is nice to see the community being re-established albeit with people living a very different lifestyle.

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