

# A castle near Croker

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When the rundown house they had bought in Dublin, near Croke Park, collapsed due to nearby demolition work, Paul Berry and Gerry Rodgers set about creating a flexible, modern dream home from scratch

APPEARANCES CAN BE very deceptive. Behind the traditional brick facade of a small terraced house at the back of Croke Park lies a completely new building, a generous living space of breathtaking modernity and minimalist decor. When Paul Berry, of Adonis Flowers on Patrick Street in Dublin, bought this rundown late-19th-century shop-cum-house with two garages five years ago, he had a clear vision of what he wanted, which amounted to creating a completely new construction. "It was about how we wanted to live, and it took three years for planning approval. So we had three years to play with it. Jonathan [Wormald, the architect] would say, 'No, you can't do that', and I would say, 'Yes I can'," he smiles.

Berry and his partner, Gerry Rodgers, had lived in a basement on North Great George's Street for 15 years, so light was a number-one priority. Coming in through the front door, there's an immediate sense of spaciousness and stripped-down modernism, a vista that draws the eye across the vast living room, with its marble floor, into a garden and courtyard, which is surrounded on one side by perimeter walls, and on the other by glass. "It is open-plan, and bringing the garden into the living room was important. That's why these doors took time to find," says Berry. "The digging-out [to increase height] was something. I insisted on that height. The original height was awful - it was a tiny house. This is now a flexible space; you could clear it out and have a dance here. I wanted that flexibility."

They bought the house in a rundown condition for 250,000 five years ago, after a long search to find somewhere they could afford. Owned by Croke Park, and originally intended for demolition, the house was sold by auction. When work started, the building collapsed, leaving only the front door, a buddleia tree and surrounding brick. "A friend said it was very expensive for a door," smiles Berry. That door, completely restored and strengthened, is all that remains of the original building.

Finding a builder was the first task. Berry got nine quotes before hiring Ivan Duggan, a "brilliant, fussy builder". Work began in January 2008 and took the best part of the year to complete. The result is a cool, logically managed environment, with everything from water taps to the high-tech sound system carefully planned and realised. According to Berry, the main living space was designed around a brown leather, L-shaped couch, bought in Sligo. A high-gloss black unit with walnut top nearby contains a drinks cabinet with tilted sliding shelves for wine, a small sink and a larder for glasses and bottles. "I wanted something that looked like a sideboard," says Berry. Walls throughout are painted white.

The kitchen, which overlooks the main living area, features budget kitchen units, a shelf for extra storage, two cookers, with an American fridge, all purchased from DID. It overlooks a lovely walnut and chrome dining table in the living area, made to Berry's specifications by Abbey Furniture in Northern Ireland. A dramatic open-sided walnut staircase is a notable feature. Elsewhere, sliding glass doors hide a plasma TV and a gas fireplace in the living area. The pair collect modern Irish art, and have purchased many works from the Cobalt Café on North Great George's Street.

Contemporary in colour and form, the bedrooms and bathrooms are designed for comfort and pleasure, their one luxury being a television over the bath. "All the white goods, sinks, bath, bidet and toilet were purchased from the UK on Ebay," says Berry.

Wallbeds in the guest rooms, with pillow-top mattresses, were deliberately chosen for flexibility of space, and a well-ordered walk-in dressing room in the main bedroom features a descending hanging rail from the Panelling Centre. "We are not hoarders, and we clear out once a year and give clothes to charity. We are big recyclers."

The garden space they describe as "Italy meeting France meeting Ireland", with a planting of Italian cypress, French box hedging and Irish "wildness", and it is Berry's intention to have colour all year round, in white, purple and green.

The pair, who moved in just before last Christmas, have recently acquired a new companion, Sam, an energetic Chinese Shar Pei from Tullamore, and are finally beginning to reap the rewards of their effort and 400,000 investment. In the garden, Berry, a bit of an architect manqué, says that they are enjoying the house and wouldn't change anything. "I really loved this project, and sort of miss it now - I think even the builder has separation anxiety."

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