

MacGabhann Architects who have practices in Letterkenny and Belfast on how they advise you to think about what you want to achieve in your home.

‘The extension is a particularly Irish phenomenon. It doesn’t happen as much in Germany, Switzerland or France. There, if people want a bigger house or apartment, they move, whereas here, because we have larger plots, people alter or change their homes all the time. We get a lot of enquiries, and a service we offer is to have a consultation on site and sometimes people after that realise they don’t actually need an architect as the changes to get what they want are so small. Or people can come to the office for free consultation for a chat.

People shouldn’t consider too much. Things usually happen organically as they are unhappy with their situation such as the same old kitchen, not harnessing a view, obtaining another bedroom for a growing family. They realise they need something to happen and when they come to us for the consultation I listen for 30-50 minutes and they identify all their problems. They often have the solution themselves so all I’m doing is putting a skin on their idea and sometimes we come up with a better idea, but it’s normally a collaboration.

Sometimes people will say they want the build to be in such and such a style but I say to them forget about what it looks like, first let’s try and get the solution because you’re looking at it from the inside and your experiencing it so let’s do that first, then we’ll think about how it looks after. But if a client comes to us and says they’re living in a mock Georgian house and they want to do a mock Georgian extension and they’re not discussing any other look, then we politely say we’re not the right architects. It’s often the case an extension should be in keeping with the existing building but if it’s a mock Georgian house, there’s no point mocking a mock Georgian house. But if it was a true Georgian house then I would have the greatest respect for it.

Despite all the talk of energy conservation and renewables, architecture fundamentals haven’t changed that much in the creation and enclosure of space. What has changed is the conservation of the energy we pump into it but it hasn’t changed radically what we do as we have always worked to ensure a building will benefit from passive solar gain. I know other firms who have never really thought of that kind of thing in their work but it would have been ridiculous even for us to ever put glazing on the north side of a building so it hasn’t changed for us in terms of architecture. But technology has changed and our walls are thicker, we’ve put more insulation in, more double glazing. Ten years ago people were talking of the u value of glazing, five years ago people were talking about the u value of glass and now people are talking of the u value of a glazed unit.

The home is where we sleep and have our pleasure time and it’s very important that you try and make it as pleasant as possible, so if in doubt or if there’s something you’re unhappy about, call an architect and have that architect come out and have a discussion with them and it could be the end of it as that consultation isn’t very much in the grand scheme of things but it can be fundamental to what way you’re thinking about a project.’



Top: Clontarf Extension.
Below: Plug in Cottage.

