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Take me to church



Plenty of well-designed homes afford breathtaking views from the inside. It takes a special effort, however, to create a sense of being constantly in touch with the wildness of your surroundings, or even a part of them.

The architectural team behind Teach Bing, at Dunfanaghy in picturesque Co Donegal, may just have achieved it. They designed the house to blend with its surroundings in an unusual and uncompromising way: by building a physical model of the view before they began to draw the house itself. The uncommon approach has paid dividends. This striking coastal home is the latest

Inspired by a nearby modernist church which borrowed its design from the landscape, Teach Bing on Horn Head, with its wide angles and swooping roof, mimics the surrounding dark-coloured hills of Muckish in Co Donegal, writes **Dara Flynn**

project by MacGabhann Architects, conceived by a team that included Tarla MacGabhann and his brother Antoin, as well as fellow practitioners Eoin Bradley and Björn Patzwald.

Horn Head, the peninsula on which the house sits, overlooks Sheephaven Bay, and the house name is an anglicisation of *Corran Binne*, meaning “Hollow in the Hills”. It’s an idyllic place to build a holiday home. Any resident of, or visitor to, the Hills of Donegal will know that coastal homes there need to shelter and

protect their occupants as much as they should nestle into the landscape and take advantage of the sea views. Teach Bing does both. According to MacGabhann, it takes its architectural cue directly from this landscape, specifically from the undulations of the mountain it looks upon.

“The second-largest mountain in Donegal is Muckish, and it’s an interesting one,” he says. “On one side, it’s rectangular, almost like Table Mountain in Cape Town, and on the other it resembles a sleeping dog or pig. It has a

Picture perfect

The house overlooks Sheephaven Bay, and the mirror-like zinc roof is designed to reflect the sky and the Atlantic

complexity of form, there’s more stuff going on with it.” The view from Teach Bing is the undulating side of the mountain.

The mountain in question is the same one that inspired locally born modernist architect Liam McCormick to construct The Church of St Michael the Archangel, in Creeslough in 1971. “McCormick is one of the fathers of modernism in Ireland, and we use him as our inspiration a lot,” says MacGabhann. “We thought if Muckish was good enough for him to base his church design on, we should look to it for inspiration as well.”

The view is the stuff of watercolour paintings and meets the eye in three layers: Sheephaven Bay in the foreground, with a layer of green; rolling pasture in the centre; and towards the back, the dark-coloured hills of Muckish and the Derryveagh mountain range. ➔



→ “We built 1:1 scale card models of that view, which gave us a physical object that was used to generate the design for the house,” says MacGabhann.

However, the team knew the house had to cater for more than the view. “The most important thing wasn’t the concept, of course; it was the clients’ brief. Their aspirations and their requirements were applied to our model, and this informed the design. That’s quite tricky. We also needed the house to be an economical, efficient design. We cannot take someone’s money and present them with an expensive design, only to say, ‘Yes, we know it’s expensive, but look, it’s in the shape of the mountain.’”

These practical parameters informed the shape of the house, the way in which

Setting the scene

The kitchen, above, features an angular enclosure for the extractor above the Aga that echoes the L shape of the house; an oak unit and radiator cover, far right, divides the lower seating level; large windows in the bedrooms, right, and living area, below right, make the most of the panoramic views



The complex shape means there is enough going on, so there was no need to use lots of different materials

it is angled to create a sheltered, sun-filled enclosure. The site itself, as much as the view, had its own say in the design, too; the house was oriented to make the most of solar gain on its southwesterly aspect, which in turn naturally identified where bedrooms, main living spaces and a private courtyard should go.

This external space is like an extension of the interior, with large glazed sections that slide back to merge the inside and outside. The plan is basically an L shape. The prominent chimney visible from the exterior is the team’s architectural expression of the hearth of the house. “When you’re at the fireside in a home, you’re at its centre; its heart. That’s a very symbolic thing, and the chimney so visible on the exterior is pointing at that main living space.”

If the team looked to the best of current international thinking in terms of design, when it came to materials they

kept it simple, swayed by those used in the locality for generations. “There’s no point importing high-tech materials from Europe when we have what we need here,” says MacGabhann.

The basic structure is concrete cavity blocks and it has been rendered in the traditional roughcast wet-dash render that is also evident on McCormick’s church. The second key material is the zinc on the roof, reflecting the sky and the Atlantic, with its silvery, almost mirror-like finish. This will weather over time to turn a blue-black, in a nod to the ever-changing nature of the Donegal

skies, and will further blend the house into the pastoral canvas surrounding it. The roof has been designed to funnel water into a cylinder towards the side of the house. “In Donegal, it’s either raining or drizzling most of the time,” says MacGabhann. “This feature celebrates that, connecting the occupants more to the environment, as you have this trickle of water all the time, much in the way the Japanese embrace water in their designs.”

Internally, this is a simple, crisp home. “The complex shape means there is enough going on internally, so there was no need to give expression to individual

areas with lots of different materials,” says MacGabhann. A generous entrance hall doubles as a boot room for storing hiking and surfing equipment, leading to the main open-plan, split-level kitchen and living space, which in turn leads to a dining area. Glass is used extensively to make the most of the views on all sides. The mezzanine is an extended landing dictated by the shape of the roof. As a result, it is a one-and-a-half-storey home. It has a large footprint of nearly 3,000 sq ft, with four bedrooms.

“One of the most striking elements of the interior design is the angular feature





Paul McGuckin

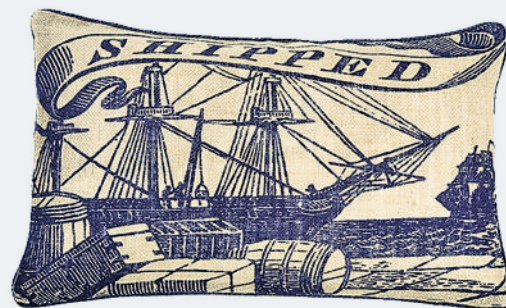
above the Aga range cooker, which was built to conceal the extractor and mimics the L shape of the house plan," says MacGabhann. "The Aga is not against a wall, so many people would resolve this by buying a stainless-steel extractor and hanging it from the ceiling. We see little point in buying something off the shelf when you can design something better and more affordable."

There's oak throughout, both on floors

and in a bespoke storage unit that divides the lower seating level from the kitchen and also conceals a radiator, with fins incorporated that allow for the proper flow of air. White walls and ceilings bounce the plentiful daylight around the space. "One is able to experience the landscape," says MacGabhann, "not just view it."

macgabhannarchitects.ie

Get the look



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Solas Dune small lantern. €25.95, carraigdonn.ie



Karlsson vintage round wall clock. €29.95, harveynorman.ie



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