

design anthology

UK EDITION

INTERIORS / ART / ARCHITECTURE / TRAVEL / STYLE



ISSUE 06

Depth & tactility

A compact Dublin home that's minimal
and moody yet designed for family life

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When interior designer Róisín Lafferty first saw what became known as the Ravensdale Residence, it was just an empty space. A narrow, triangular empty space in the heart of Dublin's city centre. Its owners, a couple with two dogs and two young sons, had a wishlist of things they wanted from the house that would fill this void, top of which was an open-plan layout with a designated dining area and some private adult space.

As briefs go, this was not unusual; the difficulty for Lafferty, founder of the award-winning design studio Kingston Lafferty Design, was the size of the site. "This was one of the smallest houses I've ever worked on," she says, "which made it a pretty cool challenge, because every inch needed to function at the highest level."

It was the architects Tyler Owens' decision to place the staircase in the centre of the building that provided a starting point for Lafferty. "Fitting the stairs into this curved cylindrical space in the middle of the house almost divided it in two," she says, "and that gave me the flexibility to create separate spaces."

The front of the house became a sophisticated and cocooning adults-only lounge wrapped in dark wood and polished plaster, an orange Mulhauser chair providing a pop of hot colour, while the main living area was put at the back. Or rather living areas, because even in this open-plan section, Lafferty wanted to create clearly defined areas for cooking, eating and living. There are no doors and a Crittall screen frames a linking view from the kitchen to the eating/living spaces, but each zone is marked out by a change in the flooring – concrete-effect slabs in the kitchen, pale oak boards in the living area – the transition from one to the next highlighted by razor sharp junctions.

"Creating separate areas made the hallway quite narrow," says Lafferty, "so I decided to make that a virtue. I built this boardwalk running from the front door all the way back down to the end of the garden so, when you open the front door, regardless of the different zones to the side, you get this defined visual path leading you right through the house."

The outside area at the end of this path could be described as more of a roofless room than a garden. Originally an awkward angle "which didn't work at all with the sharp lines of the inside," Lafferty turned it into an aesthetically consistent box by fencing off the back section, a decision that also provided the clients with a triangle of much-needed storage space. She then wrapped the floor and walls in a collage of Mutina's Puzzle tiles. This burst of playful pattern is at once surprising and familiar. Surprising because everywhere else the pattern is inherent in the materials themselves – the veins in marble and travertine, the nap of leather, the formation of timbers on the floors and walls. Familiar because the tiles' neutral

Previous page
The minimal, monolithic kitchen has a steel and glass partition dividing it from the living area

Facing page
Built-in storage helps to maximise available space

Below
The courtyard garden, with tiles from Mutina

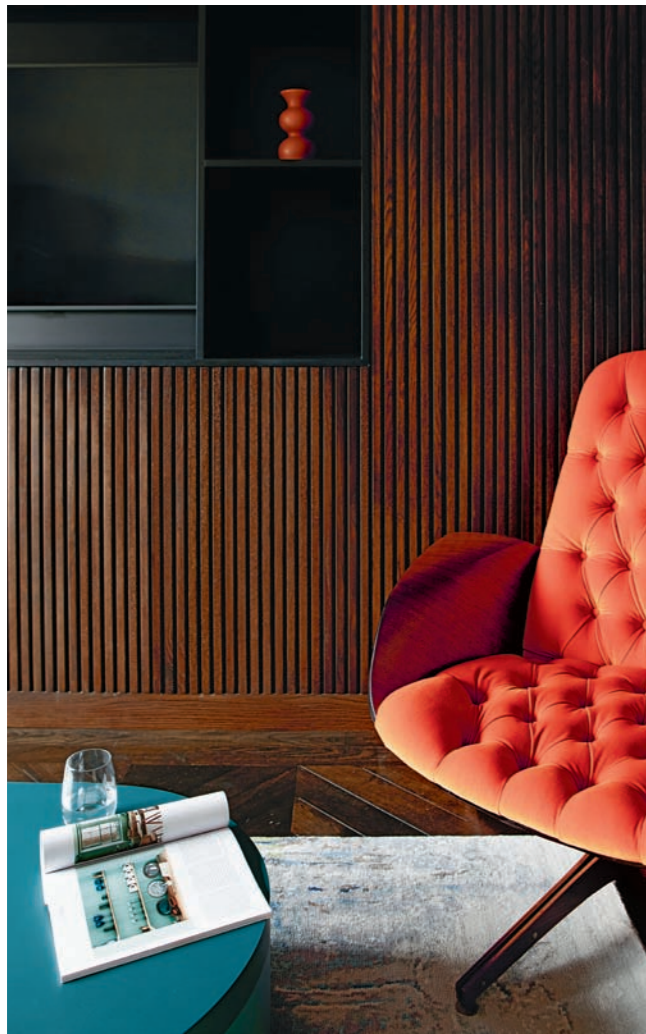


Facing page
The “adults only”
living space,
wrapped in
walnut panelling
and featuring a
Nortstudio table

Below
An orange George
Mulhauser chair
practically glows
against the dark
panelling behind it

tones and flashes of blue echo the same palette used within, while their clean geometry reflects all those razor-sharp lines.

In the garden, as in the house, the furniture is built in for a more streamlined look. “In a small space, loose furniture just looks jumbled,” says Lafferty, “so we made it part of the structure. Downstairs, we designed the whole back living area as a series of modular joinery elements, almost like building blocks, with storage hidden inside. Upstairs in the master bedroom, we created a very simple floating vanity unit and concealed a walk-in wardrobe behind a full-length linen curtain that makes the room feel as though it’s wrapped in fabric.”



The result is a level of minimalism hard to believe possible in a busy family home. The kitchen, for example contains no more than a hint of its function: even the oven is concealed behind a black walnut wall. There are no architraves and, while the invisible doors in that wooden wall do have handles, they’re the same size as the pattern of vertical batons, so the eye barely registers them as handles at all.

Rigorous minimalism can be sterile, but this house is more jewel-box than laboratory, an achievement that is down to Rafferty’s use of materials and colour. The palette is gentle – muddy neutrals downstairs, dusty pinks and reds in the master bedroom and bathroom upstairs – and the materials have been chosen for their depth and tactility. Dark black walnut, brooding smoked mirror and a band of intricately veined marble enrich the pared-down kitchen; a bench upholstered in soft navy-blue leather frames the dining area; pale oak floorboards line the floor of the living zone and a wall of grainy orange-red travertine transforms the diminutive tiled bathroom into a warming cocoon.

Lafferty explains more about the overall ethos of the design. “We focused very much on the feel of the materials,” she says. “Aesthetically, the brief was for a minimal, clean look, but this is a home so it also needed to be comfy and inviting. And durable too,” she adds. “We took a lot of our inspiration from nature, the decoration that doesn’t ever date, and we chose materials that improve with age and use. Creating an environment that will stand the test of time and enhance the day to day lives of the people who inhabit it is a part our responsibility as designers.”

This house has certainly been put to the test over the last few months. The coronavirus lockdown kept the family confined here for months; two adults, two energetic young boys and two dogs occupying one very small – but very well designed – space. A message that the owners recently sent to Lafferty proves that it has passed with flying colours, though. “Just to tell you that this house is amazing,” it reads. “It brightens our lives.”





“This was one of the smallest houses I’ve ever worked on, which made it a pretty cool challenge, because every inch needed to function at the highest level”



Facing page
Interior designer Róisín Lafferty describes the narrow band of timber flooring as a “boardwalk” leading the eye through the house

Above
Tucked into a narrow cylindrical space, the staircase sits at the centre of the house and therefore acts as a divider between rooms



Above
Muddy lilac walls in the bedroom,
which has a built-in mirror-topped
vanity unit with storage

Facing page
A walk-in wardrobe is concealed
behind a full-length linen curtain,
creating a cocooning effect



“Creating an environment that will stand the test of time and enhance the day to day lives of the people who inhabit it is a part our responsibility as designers”



Above
An opulent travertine vanity area
with built-in basin in the bathroom

Facing page
The bathroom layers hot colours,
from burnt orange to subdued pink

