

# INTERIOR DESIGN<sup>®</sup>

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A photograph of a steamy, golden-toned spa interior. The walls and benches are covered in a mosaic of small, square tiles. The room is filled with steam, creating a soft, hazy atmosphere. In the center, there is a large, rectangular, low-profile bench or platform. The floor is a light, neutral color. The overall color palette is warm and monochromatic, dominated by shades of gold, brown, and beige.

wellness in view

# dialogue between eras

*A velvet conversation pit is one of many delightful anachronisms at a historic schoolhouse turned residence in Galway, Ireland, by Kingston Lafferty Design*

*text: jen renzi*

*photography: barbara corsico/living inside*





**The first time Róisín Lafferty** met the owners of a landmarked Georgian-style schoolhouse-turned-cool-house in coastal Galway, Ireland, they'd set out tea and fresh-baked treats in their cozy, little kitchen for the occasion. "There was a homey feel from the minute you stepped inside," the Kingston Lafferty Design founder and creative director recalls. "They were a lovely, dynamic family of seven, quite young at heart and also a bit nostalgic." The charming historic abode suited the residents' personality, but it had issues, including outdated electrical wiring, no central air, and a single shower for all of them to share. A mishmash of rear-facing extensions and small service buildings that had been added over time also blocked garden views and the influx of natural light into the deep floor plate. "It felt very dark, and the configuration didn't make great use of the space," Lafferty says. "The clients loved the character of the house, but it just wasn't working for them."

A nearly five-year restoration, renovation, and redecoration effort ensued to expand the terrace house into a five-bedroom, four-bath residence. KLD collaborated with local firm Helena McElmeel Architects, which helped navigate the municipality's strict conservation board and took the lead on structural work.

The most forceful spatial modifications were made in the back of the property, where the updated kitchen now leads to a window-wrapped, skylight-capped modern addition housing an orangerie-style dining room (where a damp lean-to once stood) and a family lounge. An existing conservatory was also upgraded with new glazing to form a breakfast room, accessed via portals punched through the kitchen's super-thick stone walls, their depths clad with green marble tile to annunciate the transition from old to new. ➔

*Previous spread: A velvet-covered Hans Hopper Mah Jong sofa cushions a poured-concrete conversation pit in the rear lounge addition of a century-old schoolhouse turned three-story residence in Galway, Ireland, with interiors by Kingston Lafferty Design.*

*Top: A lean-to structure became the dining room, where a Thonet chair services a custom blackened-oak table and a Jan Cools acrylic on canvas hangs on the wall. Bottom, from left: In the front lounge, Jean-Marie Massoud's Le Club armchair stands between custom lacquered built-ins, surrounding an existing but updated fireplace, and 1970's Up & Up cocktail tables. The hatch between the kitchen and the reading room is original to the house, newly lined with green marble tile and framed by smoked-mirror panels.*

*Opposite: Original encaustic mosaic flooring was refurbished in the entry hall and capped by a vintage Murano glass chandelier.*



The décor follows a similar ethos of repurposing. A kitchen table was recycled, raised, and topped with a stone slab to form the cooking island, now illuminated by a cluster of pendant fixtures transplanted from corridors throughout the house. Antique cabinets left behind by a previous owner were carefully integrated into millwork, such as the main bathroom's armoire, augmented by a marble countertop and antiqued brass legs to create a vanity. Mismatched Michael Thonet chairs handed down from various relatives were grouped around the custom dark-stained oak dining table, imparting a collected-over-time feel. Also repurposed: an original pass-through hatch between the kitchen and the moody reading room, now framed with bronze-tinted mirrored panels that lend the latter space a subtly ominous aura. ("That room is 100 percent inspired by *The Handmaid's Tale*,"

Lafferty acknowledges.) Not worth salvaging, alas, was a beautifully hued but far-too-frayed stair runner, but its palette lives on in the home's prevailing tones of sky blue, burgundy, terra-cotta, and mustard.

KLD also layered in more current vintage pieces, such as the front lounge's mid-century Sputnik chandelier and angular travertine cocktail tables. Lending oh-so-'70's verve is the rear lounge's conversation pit, recessed into the concrete floor to preserve sight lines to the garden. "The builder kept asking why we were putting a swimming pool in there!" Lafferty jokes. Further channeling that era is the room's Mah Jong sofa, dressed in moss-green velvet. "I'd only ever seen the sofa in flashy patterned fabric, but looking at images from when the design first came out, in 1971, I realized it was usually upholstered in something plain, which I preferred," Lafferty says.

Upstairs, the sleeping quarters intermix traditional and modern elements, spiked with a dose of whimsy. The hotel-like main suite, which overtakes most of the second story, encompasses a bedroom, a walk-in dressing room, and a bathroom complete with a fireplace, soaking tub, and glassed-in wet zone. Much effort went into making the large bedroom feel more intimate. "Before, it was just a lonely little bed in a very big room that swallowed up furniture," Lafferty notes. Now, minimalist but period-appropriate paneling brings a sense of scale to the space, and artfully integrates a curvilinear velvet headboard and bedside sconces. The bathroom is not technically part of the bedroom but instead opens off a landing one half-flight down, where it can be annexed for overflow from the neighboring powder room if needed during brush-teeth or bath time.

While the goal in the parents' sanctum was to make a large space feel cozier, KLD's approach to the kids' zone on floor three was

**Above:** Davide Grappi's Moon pendant fixture illuminates the rear lounge, where a full-height storage wall in oiled, limed oak houses a gas stove and the TV; accordion doors modulate the degree of openness to the adjacent dining room.

**Opposite top, from left:** The cast-iron fireplace in the boys' bedroom is original, and the artwork above it is by Kelvin Mann. A print by Dominic Turner and a mid-century Italian sconce hang on a dining room wall. **Opposite bottom, from left:** A small study on the second floor boasts built-in shelving and Gam Fratesi's Masculo Meeting chair. One flight above, a landing outside the youngest daughter's third-floor bedroom serves as a lounge-y extension of her domain courtesy of a hanging rattan chair.



"There's a sense of emotion and atmosphere when you walk into the house"





the opposite: making smallish space live larger. The youngest of the three daughters, for instance, got the tiniest bedroom, so the hanging chair on the adjacent stair landing serves as her de facto lounge area. The two boys share a room, and there Lafferty took advantage of the high ceilings with peculiarly tall loft beds that offer plenty of floor space below for hangout and work areas. “The beds remind me of Lemony Snicket’s *A Series of Unfortunate Events*,” Lafferty says. “I like the creepiness of them!” Reference to narrative is, indeed, something of a through line for the entire project: “There’s a sense of emotion and atmosphere when you walk into the house; it just kind of washes over you,” she observes. “It feels like you’re part of a story.” One with a very happy ending. 🍷

**PROJECT TEAM**

**HELENA MCELMEEL ARCHITECTS:** ARCHITECT. **O’GORMAN JOINERY:** MILLWORK.

**PRODUCT SOURCES**

**FROM FRONT ROCHE BOBOIS:** SOFA (REAR LOUNGE). **DAVIDE GROPPI:** PENDANT FIXTURE. **FLOS:** WALL LIGHT. **BAKED EARTH:** TERRA-COTTA FLOOR TILE (DINING ROOM). **ROCCA STONE:** FLOOR TILE. **KNOLL:** SOFA (FRONT LOUNGE). **THROUGH 1ST DIBS:** COCKTAIL TABLES. **TILE STYLE:** HEARTH TILES. **SOHO HOME:** RUG (FRONT LOUNGE), SIDE TABLE (MAIN

BEDROOM). **MARTIN & BROCKETT:** CONSOLE (ENTRY). **GUBI:** CHAIR (STUDY). **SQUARE IN CIRCLE:** PENDANT FIXTURE (STUDY), SCONCES (BATHROOM). **HK LIVING:** HANGING CHAIR (LANDING). **IRUGS:** RUG (MAIN BEDROOM). **LIZZO:** CURTAIN, HEADBOARD, PILLOW FABRIC. **RAY SHANNON UPHOLSTERY:** CUSTOM HEADBOARD, CUSTOM PILLOW FABRICATION. **MIX & MATCH:** CUSTOM CURTAIN FABRICATION. **SOCIALITE FAMILY:** SCONCES. **ZARA HOME:** BENCH (MAIN BEDROOM), BEANBAG (BOYS’ BEDROOM). **KUTIKAI:** DRESSER (BOYS’ BEDROOM). **FINNISH DESIGN SHOP:** RUG. **THROUGH NEST:** PENDANT FIXTURE. **EICHOLTZ:** PENDANT FIXTURE (BATHROOM). **MOSAIC ASSEMBLERS:** FLOOR TILE. **VERSATILE BATHROOMS:** SINKS. **LEINSTER STONE:** COUNTERTOP. **THROUGHOUT FARROW & BALL:** PAINT. **VINTAGE HUB:** VINTAGE VASES, STYLING OBJECTS.

*Top: In the main bedroom, Haas 3.01 sconces flank the custom headboard and the Persian rug is vintage. Bottom, from left: Beneath a Verner Pantone pendant fixture, seating options in the boys’ room include a cotton beanbag and Iskos-Berlin’s Soft Edge desk chair. The paneling in the main bedroom is new, the side table marble.*

*Opposite: In the main bathroom, an antique armoire was modified with a marble counter and brass legs to form a vanity and medicine cabinet.*

