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This project presented us with a unique opportunity to convert three small terraced artisan houses into one dwelling. In the design, we wished to retain the integrity of the three existing houses. Each house is extended, and the addition is configured to maximise the natural light at the rear. A spatial matrix is thus created, both internally and externally, that relates closely to the workings of the house as whole.

House 3 accommodates on both floors the bathrooms, utility room and the vertical circulation, and in the addition is a studio at ground floor and a west-facing external terrace at first floor. House 4 internally holds the living area. It opens across houses 4 and 5 to form a room of generous proportion, and on to a courtyard at the rear. The original front doors are retained as shutters to glazed doors behind. A third bedroom and landing are located at first floor. House 5 has the dining area and a second bedroom at first floor, held within the existing footprint. In its addition are the kitchen and master bedroom. The master bedroom is located here in order to catch the morning light.

A strong spatial dialogue is created across the rear courtyard between the kitchen and the studio at ground-floor level. This is further reinforced by a concrete bench that moves across the back wall to form a work top in the kitchen, the steps to the courtyard, and a desk in the studio. The rear wall of the existing houses is expressed singularly through the use of a continuous rendered surface. These spaces all work, together with the living area, to provide free movement in this area through full-height sliding doors and screens.

This dialogue continues at first floor between master bedroom and terrace. The area is surrounded by a large translucent glazed screen. The screen provides privacy from the flats located behind the house. It also acts as a large reflector during the day, bringing light down into the courtyard, and as an illuminator at night, as it is artificially lit from behind.

The palette of materials is distilled down to glass, steel, iroko and plaster. The only introduction of colour is the orange of the kitchen and the shelves of the studio, which act as a counterpoint. A large illuminated installation piece was designed with the client (an artist) for the first-floor landing in order to provide image and light to this passageway.

Area – 160.7m². Stage – completed December 2002.
Section through bedroom and courtyard

Rear elevation

Original ground and 1st floor plans

New ground and 1st floor plans
ASSESSORS' COMMENTS

BETSKY – They took three houses and made them into one. It's a bit like that Beatles movie, Help.

FINUCANE – I also thought that this project would have that surprise element, like in Help, when you walk in the door.

ROBBRECHT – What I think is very well solved is the six spaces. If you look at the plan, you have three houses, and then six spaces, and they all have their own identities. And then it comes to this – there's a courtyard, there's a balcony. But I think it's very well resolved, and there are some qualities in it.

CONROY – I was wondering would they keep the three front doors. The circularity of the plan gets past the predictability of linear circulation.

ROBBRECHT – Although it's a very rigid way of composing, there are some pleasant aspects.

BETSKY – But then there are some fingernail-on-the-blackboard things, to me. Like that wall there – that fake archaeological wall – and this interior here, with, yet again, those heavy wood-framed windows.

ROBBRECHT – Yes, that's true. But when I look at the cross-section, I have immediate interest in it.

FINUCANE – I think they have come up with a solution I could live with very, very easily. I take your point that that's a bit daft in places, but accidents happen in all lives. But I think the way the light goes down through the centre courtyard, and that you can look down into it from above is lovely. It's a nice house.

CONROY – I think that little yard has a Tadao Ando quality, and the control of light and views is of a high order.


DESIGN TEAM – Dermot Boyd, Peter Cody, Jim Corbett, Ryan Kennihan

BOYD CODY ARCHITECTS
The Studio, 15 Upper Baggot Street, Dublin 4
T 01-6677277 / F 01-6677278
E info@boydcodyarch.com
W www.boydcodyarch.com