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<th>Sorrento Heights, Dalkey, Co Dublin</th>
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The original house was the smaller of a pair of semi-detached houses built along Sorrento Heights, in a neighbourhood otherwise defined by large freestanding apartment blocks. The existing two-storey house was approximately 60m², and provided limited accommodation for a growing family. Built into the surrounding hillside, the steep terrain denied ready access to the elevated side and rear gardens, and the house failed to take advantage of its orientation and the views over Dublin bay to either side of the apartment building located opposite. The client's brief was to renovate the existing premises, increase the accommodation, and gain access to useable outdoor space that would complement the internal living areas.

In reworking the plan, all the bedrooms and associated service spaces are located on the ground floor, located off an inner hall, which, in turn, is connected to the main entrance hall and external porch. External steps are incorporated into the entrance porch to negotiate the level difference between ground-floor level and the road outside. Two of the bedrooms open to the existing rear courtyard, formed by a large retaining wall. The third, main bedroom is at an elevated level over the road, and enjoys a view of the bay and Howth Head.

The main living spaces are located on the first floor, with the kitchen, dining and living rooms formed from two interconnecting spaces. A new retaining wall is built along Sorrento Heights, and the ground levelled to the rear to form a generous external terrace. This has the advantage of visually extending the living room and providing useable outdoor space to the main living area. The terrace also provides access to the rear garden.
Internally, materials include iroko and white plaster. Iroko is used to form the floor-finishes, stairs, to line out the bathrooms, entrance hall, porch, balcony, and to provide the elements of fixed and integrated furniture that are distributed throughout the house. All opening window and door sections have timber reveals. The ground-floor entrance porch and first-floor balcony operate as two deep timber-lined reveals, with their respective opening sections brought deep into the plan. At times this internal timber landscape of surface and object pushes through the external envelop to the outer surface of the building. Externally, the building is unified by employing a simple rendered finish to the outer surface, and working with the existing openings to create a single, enlarged cut form. All fixed glazed elements have satin-anodised aluminium frames, and are brought forward to finish flush with the elevation.

area – 115m²
design to completion – 2004-2005
photography – Paul Tierney

opposite
Section BB
Ground and 1st-floor plans

Exploded axonometric
Section-elevation AA
SORRENTO HEIGHTS

Oblique view showing recessed entrance

View of 1st-floor living area from terrace

opposite

Elevation to Sorrento Heights
ASSESSORS' COMMENTS

BENSON – This house is in a terrific location – Dalkey is one of the wealthiest areas of Ireland.

STEVENS – What makes this house work, for me, is the fact that its living spaces are on a piano nobile. The bedrooms achieve a privacy by being downstairs, and then you come upstairs to the living spaces, that can be open and have these amazing views out over the treetops. The architect is clearly thinking from first principles, beyond the usual formula of living rooms downstairs, bedrooms upstairs. This project seems more concerned with contemporary living than some of the other house designs we have seen.

HRAUSKY – This project presentation is very clever, because the drawings show how they are thinking, what goes together, what is one element, what is a separate element. You have the external shell, then you have the interiors. Here you have a solid wall
like this, and then you have a wooden wall. Why a wooden wall? Because it's a part of the scheme, part of a concept.

STEVENS – It's very, very deliberate. It's deliberate, it's clear and it's not fussy. You have this kind of dense lower level, then you come up through the narrow staircase into this light-filled space.

HRAUSKY – I must say that I like this kind of house, not only its skill, but how it is organised – the prioritising of this wall over that wall, the different materials, and so on. It may look like some other projects, but this is the better one. In a way, I have a kind of a feeling that there's a sensibility here you find with Siza, with these interiors. That somehow came into my mind.

PIÑOS – I disagree. Siza is always more mysterious. In a way this project is very obvious, but it is clear in its concept. And it's very well drawn. But in comparison to Siza, it's another thing.

HRAUSKY – Of course.

PIÑOS – Downstairs, I worry about the composition of the hall. It seems very long. But I like the entrance. The door becomes the wall, the thing that opens. It's very well done, very precise.

STEVENS – You could be critical. I'm kind of sick today of looking at bourgeois, expensive, minimal houses. Houses do not have to look like that to belong to the world of architecture. And there's the privacy thing again: these huge big windows here look across to that house. It's not clear if there are blinds or anything designed in order to give you privacy.

HRAUSKY – We seem to like this also, I think, very much. I think it could be an award. Even if you think it's too expensive.

STEVENS – I think it could be an award.

BENSON – It is disciplined, spare and elegant. But there is much competition amongst domestic architecture of this kind. I'm unsure if it's outstanding, whether that's achieved here.