This project involves the construction of a new two-storey addition to the rear of a large three-storey semi-detached brick-fronted Victorian house on Dublin's south-side. Internal alterations are also carried out to rationalise the plan, and a new bathroom and solarium are located on the roof of the house. A new strategy for the garden is implemented in granite, gravel and grass to follow the geometries of the new addition and the existing house.

The client wished that the main family activity should remain on the first floor of the house, so a new kitchen is placed adjacent to the main reception rooms, connecting with the dining room through a moving oak bookcase and sliding oak doors to the living room beyond. Below, a playroom connects directly with the garden and new teak deck.

Externally, the addition is sculptural. It reads as an abstracted bronze-clad volume. It rests alongside the existing house, held in a teak fold, formed by the adjoining deck and vertical garden screens. The proportions and articulation of this sculptural object are determined by use and context. Through the subtraction and erosion of the orthogonal form, the addition reads more as an independent object at first floor, providing spatial relief to the large sash window of the dining room. At ground floor, the space turns and connects strongly with the garden through section. Light and views are controlled by the solid and void relationship of bronze and glass. Large pivoting bronze-clad doors provide all ventilation and access to the new addition, and a teak staircase runs along the northern boundary wall, serving the garden directly from the first floor.

Internally, the addition and all the other spatial interventions in the house are lined in pigmented rubber. Rubber is also used to face the fitted furniture in these rooms. A rubber and steel bench, for instance, lifts in a fold along the south side of the kitchen to form a window seat for the family. Three new bathrooms and a utility room are located on the lower floors. One space, a bathroom and solarium, is constructed within the roof and central valley of the house. From the solarium, there are panoramic views of the city, and the bathroom is sky-lit. The external walls, the lowered ceiling over the hallway below and the staircase serving this space are all clad in bronze to form another sculptural intervention.

area - refurb. 270m² / addit. 68m² / design to completion - 2005-2007 / photography - Paul Tierney
ASSESSORS' COMMENTS

RAMBERT – This is also in contention for the medal.

GERRARD – I would support that.

RAMBERT – I like this project very much, because it is a very good exercise in house extension. The box outside is very sculptural, that’s obvious; but I also like the way they worked on the house, on top of the roof. So, it’s more than a simple addition that comes from inside. I like the way they work on the material itself, the bronze, that makes a sculptural façade that you can see also from the upper level. That’s brilliant work. Compared to the houses we have seen – very conservative, very déjà vu – I think it’s much more creative, much more interesting. I like how they cling to the old house without any ambiguity. That’s why I think they deserve something special.

GERRARD – To me, it speaks of a type of virtuality, which I find very refreshing. It is absolutely sited in the now, and even in relation to on-line spaces or something virtual. You see some of these references here, and it’s hyper-modernity. It’s like a breath of fresh air after many of these works that are utterly conventional. I mean, I don’t see the whole city built like this, but as the occasional surprise it is really, for me, very, very refreshing.

RAMBERT – It’s not old modernity. It’s a very contemporary use of old elements.

HENCHION – I’ve no doubt that this is beautiful. I think these architects are at the top of their game. All the other versions of house extensions we’ve seen are trailing behind these guys and they don’t care to stop. They are consummate... So, yes, let’s have that toss-up to see who gets the medal.

ROLFE – Well, I have to say I would feel very uncomfortable giving this the medal. I mean, it is beautifully put together. This is a bespoke Rolls Royce compared to most of the others. But to me, my gut reaction is that it is bordering on the bling! You are straying into Victoria Beckham territory, as far as I’m concerned. You’re going to have to dress in a certain way to sit in that space. There’s no way you can slop around the place in your jammies on a Sunday morning, or have children standing on a squidgy sandwich there.

GERRARD – The floor in the kitchen is rubberised, and it is extending up the seat and up to the window. You could probably jump around on sandwiches no bother!

ROLFE – Well, okay. I suppose I’m going on my gut reaction here. I can see this is quality. As trophy architecture, this is superb.

RAMBERT – What do you mean by trophy?

ROLFE – This is like a trophy wife.

HENCHION – But I don’t think we can punish it on that front, if it is the Rolls Royce you say it is.

GERRARD – I think the car analogy is a little misguided because, if anything, it’s more like a concept car.

DE SMEDT – More of like an art piece actually. Like some sort of...

GERRARD – It’s like a Donald Judd.

DE SMEDT – Exactly.

ROLFE – Well, if it’s an art piece, what’s its meaning? What is it saying? What is it telling...
34 PALMERSTON ROAD

View of the original house
Exploded axonometric
Site plan
Section

opposite – floor plans
34 PALMERSTON ROAD

Side elevation
Long section through house

Rear elevation
Cross-section through extension

Long section through house
opposite – View from garden
you ... other than saying that the people here are superbly cultured, they can buy this level of style and perfection into their lives. I mean, I hope the rest of their lives are as perfect.

Rambert – Yes, but that's a quality.

Henchion – I would bet the opposite. I bet those clients didn't know they were getting that till they got it. And even if it is Victoria Beckham, it's Victoria Beckham on a good day!

De Smedt – The thing is, it should it judged for what it is. Like, I'm an architect who has never done house extensions, but I have lots of friends who do it all the time, and they are being forced to do really bad ones, by everybody – by the authorities, by the client. So here is a house extension that is very small but it's a beautiful piece. It's like an art piece.

Gerrard – I'm not interpreting it as a house extension actually. I see this as a stand-alone thing. It is so sculptural and it's such an incredible object. The fact that it is standing next to a period house is almost irrelevant; it holds its own.

Rolfe – You could imagine it by itself, overlooking Killiney Bay, sat into the bare rock.

Henchion – As in a good thing or a bad thing?

Rolfe – Oh, as a good thing.

De Smedt – We talk about the way it looks, but if you also take the interiors there are some quite innovative moments. These are some of the best moments of spatial innovation we have seen today actually. There's a lot of work with reflection – you know, how this section is even placed with this artwork. There are a lot of intentions that are quite modest. There are intentions even with the small size of the garden – reflecting it in order to extend it.

Later

Gerrard – I think this is remarkably refreshing in the wider context of everything I have seen today. It is highly contemporary. I like the use of materials. In some ways it is relatively conventional in its form, but in its resolution, on so many levels, I just find it a very, very interesting and innovative piece of architecture, which I really like.

Rambert – It's quite brilliant work compared to the other houses and house extensions we have seen.

Henchion – Economically I don't know how these architects survive. You just can't make money from these jobs.

Rolfe – Twenty years ago, there wouldn't have been these jobs.

Henchion – I'm not so sure it isn't actually slightly unfortunate. They are so identified with this scale of work they can't break out of it.

De Smedt – Maybe this award will lead to bigger projects.