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BACKYARD, John Dillon Street, Dublin 8

BOYD CODY ARCHITECTS

58 John Dillon Street is a small single-storey brick artisan dwelling, typical to the Liberties area of central Dublin. The house was seriously dilapidated, and the brief was to refurbish it and make a more generous home for the clients.

As the dimensions were restrictive and we liked the simple long, narrow form of the house, we decided to step out of the existing plan to recreate a long backyard and use it as an internal space. Large rooflights provide an uninterrupted view of the sky and flood the space with natural light. The backyard contains the dining area, kitchen and bathroom. Each room is divided from the next by satin-anodised, aluminium-clad doors and screens. The house is now entered through one of these doors, off Hanover Lane.

The main services for the house are accommodated in a deep back wall, finished in black formica, holding banquette seating, kitchen units, bath, bin store and boiler. It is also the main source of artificial light in the spaces. The insulation, mechanical and electrical servicing to the existing house are held within a new internal white plasterboard lining to the house. The floor and walls of the new backyard are finished in terrazzo, with mirrors used in various locations to extend and expand the perception of space.

address – John Dillon Street, Dublin 8
client – private
photography – Paul Tierney
design to completion – 2008-2011
site area – 55m² / floor area – 50m²
budget – private
McGARRY – This is a very elegant, cute little scheme, but I’m tired of this way of detailing glass and this take of void as corollary to external space. The trope about glass as being transparent and without presence is understood, but remains illusory for me. That’s a general point – much contemporary domestic work treats voids in this way. This is a very cool, sophisticated scheme, but that proposition that takes the yard and says, well, now we’re going to make it internal and conceptually insist on it as being void and external is a bit of a yawn for me. It’s not as if the light you get from it is appropriate to its use. So if I’m in the kitchen cooking, I have the light behind me. No doubt I’m nitpicking.

WILLIAMS – They haven’t done terribly much to the existing building, so you take that as you find it. And this is the new insertion, which is parallel, but it’s a tiny plot. All the points I think you make, Michael, are valid, but I suppose you are sort of questioning whether you do this at all. But if you say that that’s a given, and you do do it, I think they’ve done it exceptionally well. The detailing is beautiful.

RYKWERT – I think certainly a prize for ingenuity.

WILLIAMS – Yes, absolutely. It’s beautiful. This shot looking at the door – immaculate!

BRADY – What they’ve got out of meagre resources is phenomenal. It comes at a certain cost, and whoever lives in it must be willing to accept that.

WILLIAMS – It takes a house, and actually turns it into an apartment, getting rid of the outside space completely!

Ó CULÍV – I think it’s very clever, but I also think it’s quite cold. And there’s only one photograph that gives you a hint of how the yard links in with the existing building.

WILLIAMS – I daresay it’s quite difficult to photograph. There’s this thing about how you appreciate space as a person visiting as opposed to how you photograph it. And it’s that ability the brain has to compute space in a brain-eye thing; it computes space in a way a camera can’t do. That’s not to gainsay your point. Of course.

RYKWERT – For infernal ingenuity, I would give it an award actually. I think it’s so compressed.

McGARRY – Yes, super clever.

BRADY – I think the ingenuity comes at the cost of quite a lot of sacrifices, and when you sacrifice so much, yes, architecture gets to be very clever and very interesting.

WILLIAMS – If you look closely at this scheme, which I think is beautifully executed... Does it really go beyond incredibly clever intervention or interior design?


DESIGN TEAM – Dermot Boyd, Peter Cody, Oran O’Siochain, John Maguire, Kevin Walsh

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