



PERIOD REVIVAL

THIS BEAUTIFUL RATHGAR HOME HAS BEEN RENOVATED AND RESTORED TO OFFER BEAUTIFULLY-DESIGNED CONTEMPORARY LIVING WITH ALL THE VICTORIAN OPULENCE THAT BEFITS A PROPERTY OF ITS KIND.

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DATING back to between 1858 and 1879, this handsome house in Kenilworth Square, Rathgar, has been restored with heart and soul. It's perfectly located on a Victorian square and overlooks a beautiful green area.

But as with all historic home restorations, it hasn't always been plain sailing. The house was bought by the current owners in May 2020 – and hence endured all the setbacks and delays associated with the difficult Covid period. And Covid aside, there were many obstacles along the way – mainly structural – to ensure that the homeowners and

North Design, whom they worked with on the interior design aspect of the project, were kept on their toes.

Lauren Martin and Louise Rankin are co-founders of North Design and worked together on this project. "Chris Ryan Architects did the initial plans for the home, including the new extension to the rear of the basement level. When we were appointed on the project, we started with these plans and developed them further, incorporating all interior elements. It was a full gut-out and redesign," says Lauren, who acted as project lead.

THE DESIGNERS INCORPORATED A VERY SPECIAL FEATURE AS A MEANS OF CONNECTING THE OLD AND NEW ELEMENTS OF THE PROPERTY – A CELLAR-STYLE BRICK-SLIPPED ARCHWAY WHICH LEADS BACK TO THE GROUND FLOOR OF THE HOUSE.





THERE IS ACCESS TO THE PANTRY THROUGH A SECRET DOORWAY THROUGH THE JOINERY UNIT, DESIGNED TO HIDE AWAY THE PANTRY ACCESS.



The property was in relatively good condition but in need of an upgrade, she explains. "Unlike most of these properties that aren't being used as primary residences, it wasn't converted into flats. All the distinctive features in the main part of the house were still intact, which made it a great base to work from. The original windows had mostly all been removed at some point and replaced, so we looked to restore these to what was once there."

In terms of layout, the ground and first floors were designed as you would traditionally expect to see in these houses, with a large entrance-level hallway, drawing room to the front and dining room to the rear, with a connecting butler's pantry. On the top floor, there are three bedrooms – the primary with en-suite, a large spare bedroom overlooking the green and a smaller bedroom, also to the front of the property. There is a main bathroom on this level, with a laundry store up a small set of stairs.

THE KITCHEN IS BRIGHT AND AIRY
WITH CONTEMPORARY VIBES.





THE LIVING SPACE HAS A CONTEMPORARY FEELING, WITH CLEAN LINES AND INVITING FURNITURE. “WE DESIGNED THE OAK SHELVING EITHER SIDE OF THE FIREPLACE TO DISPLAY PERSONAL ITEMS AND ADD WARMTH TO THE SPACE.”

But it was the basement floor that needed the most work, Louise recalls. “It had been abandoned for some time. It was dark, damp, cold and poorly laid out. There were no existing features to be kept on this floor. Traditionally, with this level being used for the workers of the house, most of it had been reconfigured over time, resulting in the space being a maze of small pokey rooms.”

The house hadn’t had a mechanical and electrical upgrade in a long time so, along with the interior elements, it needed to be completely gutted to allow for new plumbing, rewiring and a new heating system. “And although we weren’t making huge layout changes to the ground and first floors, the structural stability of the house had to be examined as the floors were sloping in various areas of the house,” Louise says.

The ground- and first-floor flooring is original to the house but all of the existing floorboards had to be carefully lifted and relaid and stained, while in the basement, large-format stone like porcelain tiles were laid. In addition, all the windows had to be restored back to original sash windows and the stained-glass windows on the mid-landing were redesigned.

“All the original ceiling roses were kept and restored, where possible. If some had extensive damage, we had them replaced to replicate what was once there. All

the original coving, skirting and architraves were also retained and restored where possible,” Louise explains.

Lauren adds, “As this property was of a specific architectural era, we wanted to retain and showcase the period elements as much as we could, to bring it back to its authentic self. We worked alongside the architects, who specialise in conservation architecture, to ensure the sensitive nature of this property was retained throughout the project.”

Starting with the basement level, North Design set out to create a contemporary but homely space, while incorporating some traditional elements to link back up to the floors above. The layout was completely remodelled to create a large living room to the front of the property, with the kitchen centrally located and a dining area to the rear.

“The basement floor was to be the functional area of the home, complete with lots of storage, a utility room and a pantry. And as this was basement level, and although not a particularly dark space, the clients wanted to keep the colour tones lighter to help make it feel more open,” Louise says.

The living space has a contemporary feeling, with clean lines and inviting furniture. “We designed the oak shelving either side of the fireplace to display personal



THERE IS A STUNNING STAINED-GLASS WINDOW ON THE LANDING. THE ORIGINAL WINDOW WAS BADLY DAMAGED AND HAD TO BE REPLACED WITH A BESPOKE DESIGN.





THE SMALLER BEDROOM WAS TURNED INTO AN IMPRESSIVE HOME OFFICE – THE BRIEF WAS ‘OLD WORLDLY’.

items and add warmth to the space. The tiled flooring runs throughout the basement level, so a large rug was added for comfort. The gas fire has a custom-designed black granite mantle surround.”

The kitchen, similarly, is bright and airy with contemporary vibes and offers access to the pantry through a secret doorway through the joinery unit. This was a tasteful detail, designed to hide away the pantry access and to avoid having another door in the kitchen space. “As the ceilings were much lower in this space, we had to be clever with joinery, bringing it up to the ceiling to help elongate the height, while picking more flush ceiling-mounted and wall-positioned light fittings.”

The designers incorporated a very special feature as a means of connecting the old and new elements of the

property – a cellar-style brick-slipped archway which leads back up to the ground floor of the house. “The curved archway connecting the stairwell with the kitchen was an idea to add interest to an otherwise darker area of the basement. By cladding it in the brick slips, it adds texture and lends itself to a cellar feeling that you’d often find in the basements of these houses years ago. We added brass and glass lighting to give a wash of warmth to the walkway,” Lauren points out.

This basement level is the homeowners’ day-to-day space and so it has a more relaxed feeling than other areas of the house, with less structured furniture and more contemporary touches. However, the show-stopping brick-clad tunnel is a fitting reminder of the history this building holds and what lies ahead, as it leads to the stairwell to the ground floor.



“THE LARGE VELVET BUTTON-BACK HEADBOARD GIVES A HOTEL SUITE FEELING AND SENSE OF OPULENCE.”

On this next level, the objective was to inject lavish, rich jewel tones to showcase the spaces both for day and for night-time hosting. North Design set out to keep as many of the original features as possible, including all the ceiling roses, coving and floorboards.

“Starting with the hallway, we stained the existing floorboards throughout this floor, to achieve a rich walnut tone, while using brighter contrasting tones on the walls. We brought in some low-level panelling on the walls in the hallway and up the stairs to add some depth to the large space,” Lauren says. “With the furniture on this floor, we tried to source original antique pieces where possible. The hallway table and mirror work well in scale, while adding a strong opulent feel.”

As the clients love to entertain, it was important to have a dining room that could seat a large number of guests. “In the dining space, the clients were keen to incorporate the red colour traditionally seen within these dining rooms,” Louise points out. “Once the perfect red was chosen – ‘Kimono’ by Farrow & Ball – to reflect bygone eras, we painted the picture rail in contrasting black – ‘Dressage’ by Colourtrend - and overlaid with

carefully curated antique and custom-made furniture pieces. There is a small pantry/bar through a doorway off the dining room, which is perfect for ease of access to bar storage and the sink, as the kitchen is in the basement.”

The sumptuous sitting room was pinpointed as the couple’s space to entertain, before and after dinner in the next-door dining room. “This room needed a sense of opulence and to reflect their personalities. Jewel tones and brass elements were used on the lighting and furnishings which complemented the dark green painted walls and peacock-printed wallpaper chosen to complement the decoration that adorns their tree at Christmas. The silk curtains were carefully selected to pull out the beautiful gold tones,” Louise explains.

Lauren adds, “We wanted to have fun with this room, as it was to be used as an entertainment space. Using jewel tones as the base palette, we drew attention to the fireplace wall with a beautiful Cole & Son wallpaper from The Pearwood Collection. The sofas were custom made and are a perfect balance of structured but comfortable. Again, we sourced antique elements along



THE CLIENTS WANTED BOTH BEDROOMS TO HAVE A SENSE OF CALM AND TRANQUILITY, WITH THE CLASSIC DESIGN DETAILS YOU'D FIND IN A VICTORIAN HOME.



“WE WANTED A SENSE OF GRANDEUR WHEN YOU WALKED IN THE MAIN FRONT DOOR. IT WAS TO FEEL BRIGHT AND WELCOMING AND CLUTTER-FREE.”

with mixing in some custom-made pieces, such as the two alcove consoles which give perfect symmetry along the fireplace wall.”

Moving upstairs, there is a stunning stained-glass window on the landing. The original window was badly damaged and not up to glazing standards, so North Design had it replaced with a bespoke designed stained glass in keeping with the original design.

A serene ambience pervades the top floor. The large guest room offers delightful views over Kenilworth Square, while the main en-suite bedroom is at the back of the house. Lauren and Louise aimed to keep the primary bedroom lighter in colour tone and more in line with the feel of the basement-level aesthetic, to create a calm, tranquil space. “We designed the large velvet button back headboard that sits in

between the two doorways. The scale gives a hotel suite feeling and sense of opulence,” they explain.

The smaller bedroom on this floor was to be turned into a home office and the brief was ‘old worldly.’ “The client has a lot of books,” Lauren says, “so we wanted to create a masculine library feel. We designed high, open shelving in a rich painted brown colour and incorporated a writer’s desk with a leather top. Then we mounted his beloved guitars on the wall as well for a personal and decorative element for the room. We also kept the original floorboards in this room and stained them a dark black walnut tone.”

All the wardrobe storage was designed by North Design. “We went bespoke to maximise the clients’ personal storage. But we used freestanding pieces in the guest bedroom, as it would be infrequently used in comparison. The clients wanted both rooms to

have a sense of calm and tranquility, with the classic design details you'd find in a Victorian home."

The designers explain that, throughout the property, the clients wanted more neutral colour tones in order to create a fresh and bright feel, except for certain key areas. "The formal living room, dining room, ground-floor bathroom and office were spaces in which we were given scope to push the boundaries with the colour tones and wallpapers chosen," Louise says.

The majority of the colours selected are by Colourtrend, with a few from Farrow & Ball. The bathroom was given added character with the use of a Graham & Brown wallpaper – the 'Resplendance' design from the Explorer collection – above the panelling. The detail in the wallpaper adds interest and vibrancy to the spaces. The fabrics, then, are very much a mix. The designers introduced as many textures throughout as possible, using velvets for comfort in the plusher-feeling rooms, with silks for the curtains for added luxe.

The lighting style and requirements differed throughout. "On the basement floor, a contemporary take was needed, whereas on the ground and first floors, the clients preferred a more traditional chandelier in all these rooms as the main lighting source," says Lauren. "We wanted a sense of grandeur when you walked in the main front door but a style that is classic and in keeping with the original features of the house. It was to feel bright and welcoming and clutter-free."

Bright and welcoming it certainly is. In Kenilworth Square, North Design have managed to create a home that spans the centuries and brings together history and contemporary living. Over three floors, they have seamlessly moved from modern minimalism to Victorian elegance, celebrating the past while embracing 21st-century design. And all while creating the most perfect party space for the lucky homeowners.

THE BATHROOM WAS GIVEN ADDED CHARACTER WITH THE USE OF WALLPAPER ABOVE THE PANELLING, WHICH ADDS INTEREST AND VIBRANCY TO THE SPACE.



Source Directory

Interior design: North Design, northdesign.ie
Conservation Architects: Chris Ryan Architects, chrisryan.ie
Contractor: Caracon Construction, caracon.ie
Flooring: RK Custom Flooring, rkcustomeflooring@gmail.com
Joinery: SM Wood Design, smwooddesign.ie
Lighting: the main bulk was sourced from Hicken Lighting, hickenlighting.com Some occasional lighting and other lighting came from Neptune, neptune.com, Sutherland Interiors, sutherlandinteriors.ie and Mullan lighting, mullanlighting.com
Fire and fireplace mantle: manufactured and installed by Heatco Woodfuel, heatco.ie
Carpet: Deco Designs, decodesigns.ie
Porcelain tiles in basement: Tile Style, tilestyle.ie
Curtains and headboard: Murphy Sheehy, murphysheehy.com
First-floor hallway table and mirror; front living room antique elements and gilded mirror above sitting room fireplace, dining room table, mirror and chairs, Straffan Antiques, straffanantiques.com
Living room sofas and armchairs: Sutherland Interiors, sutherlandinteriors.ie
Living room two alcove consoles: SM Wood Design, smwooddesign.ie
Stained glass window: Rathmines Glass, rathminesglass.ie