

# HOMES

*with* **STYLE**

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# LESSONS LEARNED

Eight years after extending his home in Co Dublin, *Adrian McCann* looks back at what he's happy with and what he would change

“My wife and I put in a lot of effort mapping out the extension,” he says. “We gave a lot of thought to it and it really was well worth the extra time we spent. We changed things around until they felt right, imagining ourselves in the space we'd created on paper. We couldn't have achieved such a harmonious result were it not for having spent the time figuring out the space for ourselves.”

For instance, having a visual demarcation between the kitchen and living area was something they wanted from the very beginning, and which has worked out well. “The living space, which has ash wood flooring, wraps around the kitchen, which is tiled, in an L-shape, so the boundary is very clear,” he says.

They stripped out their old kitchen to put in new units and appliances, using laminate doors and a granite work top to complete the contemporary look.

After that it was a question of working with the architectural technologist to put together the design from their wish list, and hiring a builder they thought would be flexible enough to work with. “We knew we'd probably change some of the design as the build progressed. It's one thing imagining the space and quite another to see it come to life!”

“It was therefore essential the builder would be willing and able to change certain things as we went. For example, we chopped and changed the rooflights around - natural light is something you want to get absolutely right, because changing their position isn't an option once you've moved in. I just really wanted to get someone in who would be on the same wavelength, who would embrace change rather than view it as a problem.”

In order to get the right builder on board, Adrian got three companies to bid for the work, all based on recommendations. “My policy is to get two to three prices for everything, to make sure you're getting value for money. So that's what we did and we found a builder who had a very cooperative approach. He was able to find specialist suppliers himself, but there were some tradesmen that I knew who I wanted to put on certain things, and I also sourced some of the materials directly myself.”



Adrian sells doors and flooring for a living, so he knew where to get some items, and for others he relied on the expertise of his builder. “I project managed the build, even though I was working full time,” he says. “I made sure everyone got on site when required, but I did rely on my builder for the main construction work, and he was very good at keeping on top of things. A lot of the subcontractors I found through him, but I put into place separate contracts with each of them, negotiating with them directly.”

Eight years on, Adrian says that despite loving the space he's in now, he wouldn't embark on a similar project again. “The build was delayed by two months - in total it took five to complete - we were dying to get in. The charms of eating breakfast and dinner in the

hallway wore thin very quickly! But what I would say is that if I were to do it again I would probably consider a more eco-friendly approach to the upgrading.”

The one thing Adrian would change, he says, is the fireplace. “We couldn't get a stove because the chimney wasn't high enough to get a good draught, so we put in a gas fireplace with a sandstone surround. The extractor is at head height and on a cold winter day you can really feel a draught coming in. It took us a couple of years to realise that's why that section of the room could get a bit chilly in the winter.”

Getting things right the first time around does equate to savings, which is why Adrian advises getting a builder who's been recommended to you personally,

and if that's not possible, to check out as many of their references as you can.

“There are so many elements to a build, it's really important to have the right people in - if one single thing goes wrong you'll regret having made a hasty decision.” That's a lesson learned from experience.

*Extending your home is just like building a new one, but on a much smaller scale. Making the most of the space you gain and home you already have is a combination of your needs and creative thinking by your designer. If you're wondering how to get started, go along to the SelfBuild, Extend & Renovate Show, Citywest Convention Centre, Dublin, on 9-11 September where you can see lots of examples from leading architects. See [www.YourHome.ie](http://www.YourHome.ie) for more information and FREE tickets.*