



View along Kincora Road towards the main entrance to the sea

1.0 | BACKGROUND

Denis Byrne Architects is a Dublin-based practice with a strong focus on residential architecture on constrained urban sites. The practice's work is driven by clear architectural ideas, developed through careful spatial and sectional planning and a disciplined, resource-conscious approach to materials, construction and cost. This approach underpins the delivery of domestic projects that prioritise spatial quality, environmental performance and long-term adaptability.

Denis Byrne is a member of the Royal Institute of the Architects of Ireland (RIAI) and the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA). In 2017, he completed a PhD by practice through the invitational Practice Research Symposium programme at RMIT University, Melbourne, undertaken at its European campus. This research-led approach informs the practice's work at all scales, supporting design decisions grounded in critical inquiry, environmental responsibility and everyday inhabitation.

As head of Denis Byrne Architects, Denis provides clear design leadership informed by social responsibility, public engagement and professional service. His contribution extends through active participation in conferences, policy discourse and advisory bodies,

including participation in national policy and advisory bodies concerned with the reuse and long-term performance of buildings. Since 2018, he has been a member of the RIAI Committee on Architecture and Public Affairs, supporting the profession's engagement with civic and cultural issues. These roles directly inform the practice's approach to domestic architecture at both strategic and detailed levels.

Established in 2009, darc space is the practice's gallery and research platform in Dublin, supporting architectural research, debate and public engagement through exhibitions, events and publications - reinforcing the practice's belief in architecture as a cultural and civic endeavour, including at the scale of the single house.

Recent Awards

- BAYA Awards 2024 Shortlisted 'Housing'
- World Architecture Festival Awards 2023 Finalist 'Housing'
- KPMG Property Industry Excellence Awards 2023 Winner 'Housing'
- Mies van der Rohe EU Award 2023: Nominee
- RIAI Irish Architecture Awards 2023: Winner 'Housing'
- BAYA Awards 2023: Winner 'Public Building of the Year'
- RIAI Triennial Gold Medal 2022 (2010-2012): Shortlisted

- Mies van der Rohe EU Award 2022: Nominee
- AAI Irish Architecture Awards 2020: Award Winner
- Civic Trust Awards (UK) 2020: Highly Commended
- Irish Building & Design Awards 2019: Winner 'Architectural Project of the Year'
- Property Industry Excellence Awards 2019: Winner 'Design Project of the Year'
- RIAI Irish Architecture Awards 2019: Winner 'Workplace of the Year'

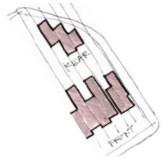


Hospital, Co. Limerick: Social housing



Dominick Hall, Dublin 1: Social housing

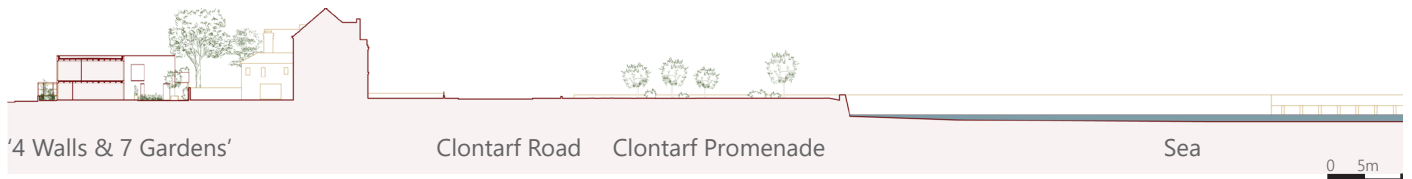
Architect: Denis Byrne Architects
Client: Private client
Engineer: Bakkala Consulting Eng.
M&E Engineers: JAK Consulting Eng.
Contractor: Sugrue Builders Ltd.
Duration: 2017- 2025
Project Size: 250 m²
Value: Und.



Sketch - Grain



Site plan



Site section towards the project to the sea

2.0 | PROJECT

The project is a compact urban house designed for a couple downsizing within the Clontarf neighbourhood. Rather than conceiving the dwelling as a discrete object set within a garden, the house is organised as a continuous domestic landscape, in which internal rooms and external garden spaces are treated as equal architectural elements. Positioned on a compact brownfield mews site at a curving urban corner, the house is carefully aligned with the established urban grain while achieving a sense of generosity disproportionate to its footprint.

Four defining walls confirm this grain and organise a sequence of interior rooms and seven distinct gardens, creating a strong sense of being enclosed within landscape despite the urban context. At ground level, private rooms are inward-looking towards planted courtyards, providing shelter, privacy and varied microclimates. At first-floor level, the main living spaces enjoy sunlight, air and more distant views, screened from surrounding buildings and extending to a sea-glimpsing terrace.

The building is recessed from the street and enclosed by a stained timber fence, avoiding the impact of a two-storey volume at the street edge. The fence varies in height and

porosity to balance privacy and public presence. The house turns the corner and progressively steps back along the side elevation, acknowledging the southeast-northwest grain of the adjoining mews developments and forming a contextual bookend.

The house was designed for a couple downsizing who wanted a comfortable and easily manageable dwelling house for their mature years. As keen gardeners, the clients played an active role in the design of the seven

gardens, each with a distinct character and planting strategy.

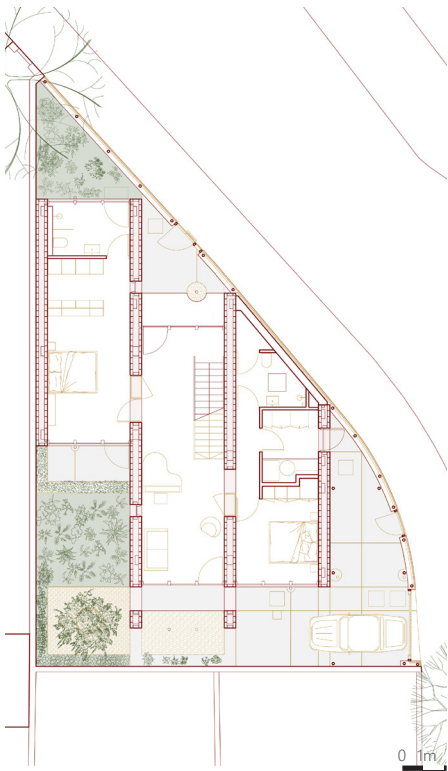
"We are a couple, of retirement age, downsizing and we wanted an interesting, low maintenance, light-filled, two-storey house on the tight mews site by the sea. We wanted an open plan living and entertaining space sufficient to host large dinner parties and an industrial-scale kitchen. We also required some feature garden space that enliven our views from the house and provide green external space."



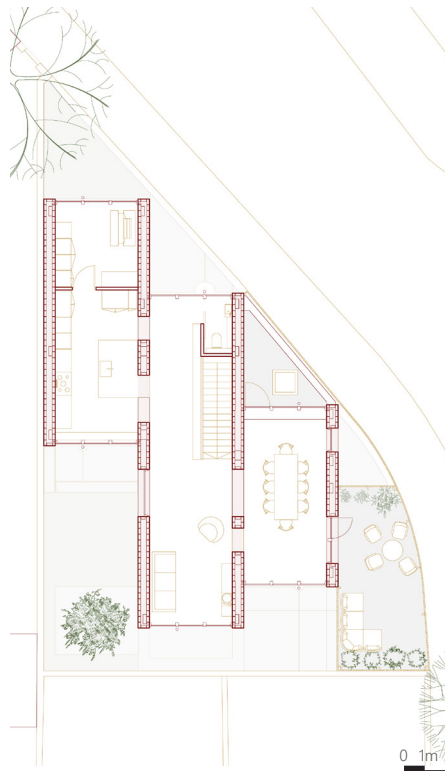
Seafield Close elevation



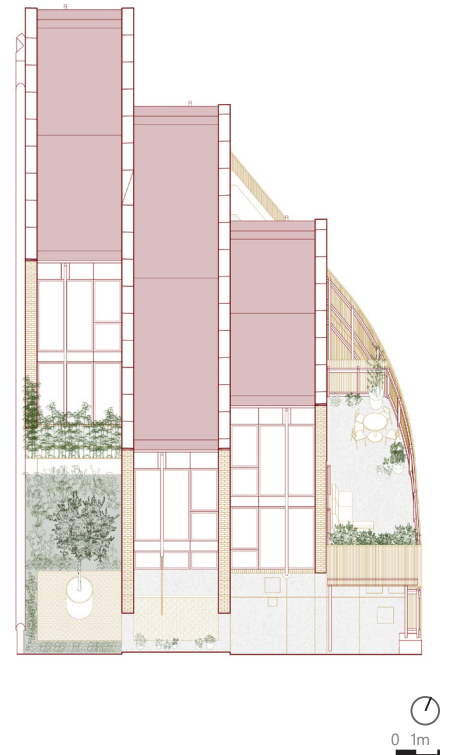
Kinora Road elevation



Ground floor plan



First floor plan



90 Degree axonometric

3.0 | EXCELLENCE

The project demonstrates how a clear architectural idea, rigorously applied from early concept through to completion, can deliver spatial richness within tight urban constraints. A high level of architectural quality is achieved through careful planning, sectional development and sustained attention to detail, using spatial organisation rather than scale to generate generosity, daylight and calm within a compact footprint, challenging conventional expectations of the urban mews house.

Innovation is embedded in both the spatial strategy and the integration of landscape as a primary organising element. Seven gardens are incorporated within the footprint of the house, fundamentally rethinking the relationship between dwelling and garden in a dense urban condition. Developed in close collaboration with the clients, both keen gardeners, each garden has a distinct character and actively contributes to daylighting, ventilation, biodiversity and seasonal variation. Together, they animate internal spaces, support passive comfort and offer an age-friendly, inclusive approach that extends the role of landscape beyond amenity to become integral to the architectural and environmental performance of the

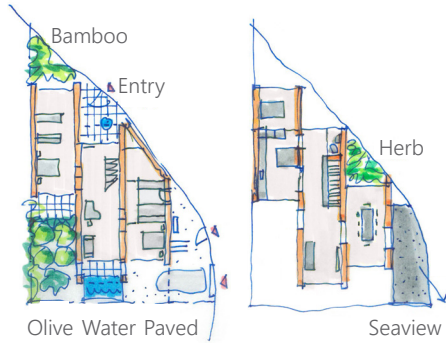


Cross view from the living room

house. Material choices — brick, timber and stone — were guided by availability, durability and tactile quality during a period of significant global supply-chain disruption. Local sourcing reduced embodied carbon and informed a disciplined design approach, resulting in a robust and coherent material palette. Operational energy demand is reduced through a heat pump system supplying underfloor heating, supported by a

clear and legible airtightness strategy. Internal brickwork is rendered only where it forms part of the external envelope, allowing the airtightness line to be expressed directly in the architecture through the junctions of rendered and unrendered masonry. Daylighting, natural ventilation, shading by vegetation and low-VOC finishes contribute to occupant comfort, health and wellbeing. Sustainable urban drainage is integrated beneath the car parking

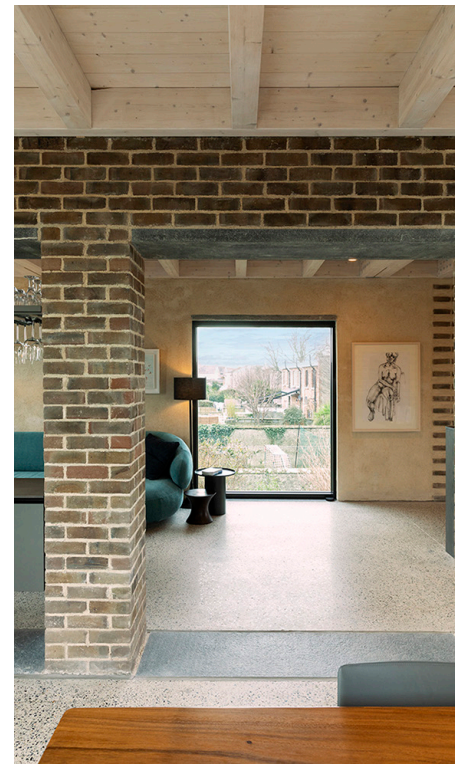
area, with all external surfaces draining to permeable planted zones. Close collaboration with the clients ensured this compact house met their specific requirements for a low-maintenance, energy-efficient home capable of supporting their social lifestyle while remaining adaptable to future needs.



Ground floor and first floor sketches



One of the seven distinct gardens



Exterior views from the dining room

4.0 | INNOVATION

Innovation in this project lies primarily in the rethinking of the house–garden relationship on a constrained urban site, supported by structural and constructional strategies that reinforce spatial clarity, economy and performance.

1. A built site composed of seven gardens

The project reframes the conventional relationship between house and site. The house replaces the idea of a building set within a garden with a continuous domestic landscape, in which rooms and gardens are conceived as equal architectural spaces. Rather than treating external areas as residual or peripheral, seven distinct garden spaces are integrated into the plan and section, each performing a specific spatial, environmental and experiential role.

This approach allows the house to achieve a sense of generosity and openness disproportionate to its footprint, extending everyday domestic life into carefully calibrated external rooms. The architecture is therefore experienced as a spatial sequence rather than a singular object, unfolding across the site through alternating moments of enclosure and openness. The faceted and fractured elevations are a direct consequence

of this strategy, emerging from the interlocking of rooms and gardens

2. Diaphragm masonry walls with concealed concrete structure

The spatial strategy is supported by an innovative structural system based on four freestanding diaphragm masonry walls (450mm thick). These are stabilised through timber cross beams rigidly connected to reinforced concrete posts concealed within the wall thickness, allowing the walls to act as planar elements without the need for returns or buttressing.

This results in a clear and economical structural diagram, aligned with the architectural intent, in which walls, floors and ceilings operate together in a restrained Cartesian composition.

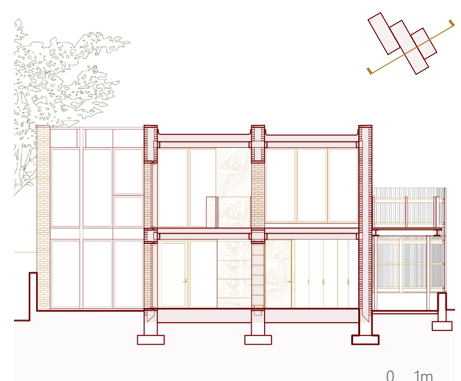
3. Exposed airtightness detail

A bespoke detail resolves airtightness requirements within fair-faced brick construction. Where walls transition from internal to external conditions, a dovetail junction is introduced, with rendered brickwork set back by 15mm from the exposed masonry. This achieves a flush finish while making the change in performance legible.

The detail turns a technical necessity into an expressive architectural moment, reinforcing the project's commitment to clarity, restraint and material honesty.



"Dove-tailed" joint. Airtightness strategy



Cross section diagram



Cross view from the staircase



Interior view of the living room

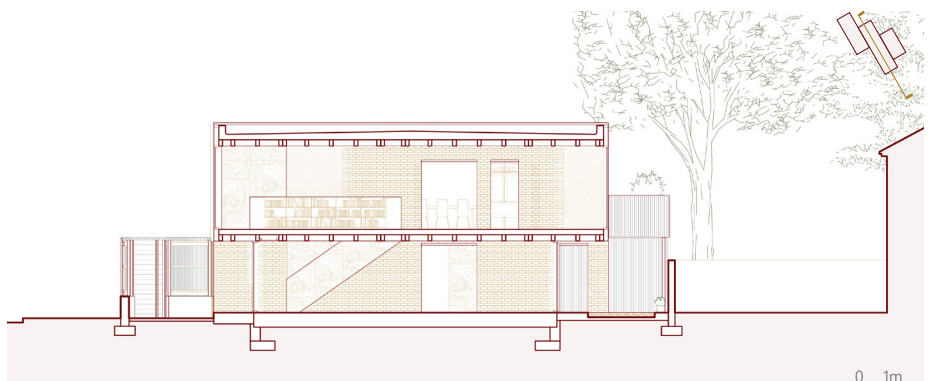
5.0 | CHALLENGES

The primary challenges included a constrained and irregular corner site, restrictive planning parameters and the complexity of reconciling sensitive neighbouring urban rhythms with a curving site condition.

The prolonged delivery period coincided with pandemic- and conflict-related - global material shortages, requiring flexibility in procurement and detailing. These challenges were addressed through early coordination, careful sequencing and close collaboration between architect, client and contractor, allowing design quality to be maintained while responding pragmatically to changing conditions. The completed house is a precise and well-resolved response to its constraints, demonstrating how thoughtful design and disciplined execution can transform limitation into architectural quality.



Bathroom inward-looking planted courtyards



Long section