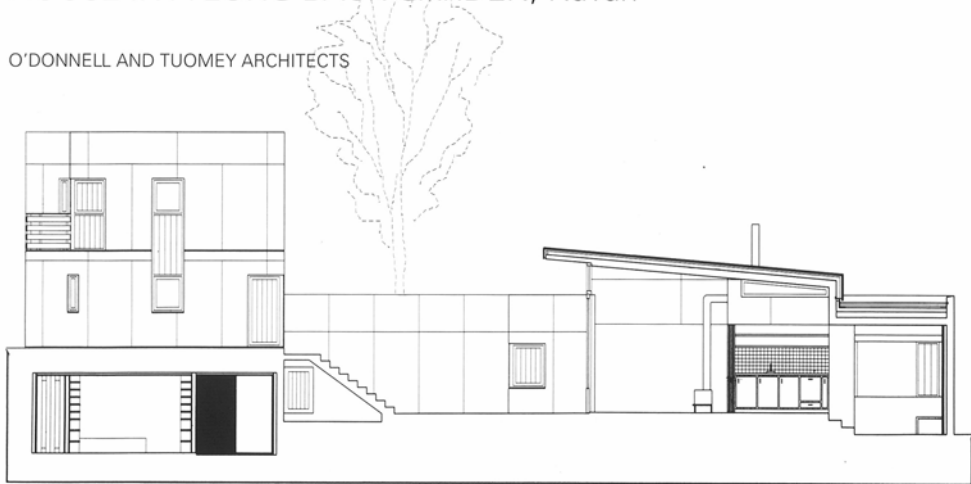


AWARD

HOUSE IN A LONG BACK GARDEN, Navan

O'DONNELL AND TUOMEY ARCHITECTS



A narrow, linear garden behind an existing restaurant on Railway Street, Navan, is the site for this new house. The house is designed in response to the clients' particular requirements. They needed to be near to but separate from their work. They had been living over the restaurant and used an existing courtyard – the hollowed out shell of a disused workshop – as an outdoor room.

The house is organised around three courtyards with external circulation between living and sleeping zones. The living space and bedroom tower are positioned on either side of the footprint of the former workshop. Storey-height retaining walls hold back the higher level neighbours' gardens on either side of the

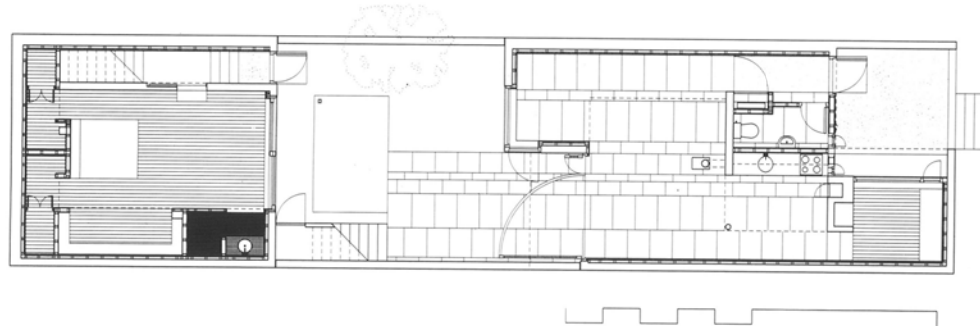
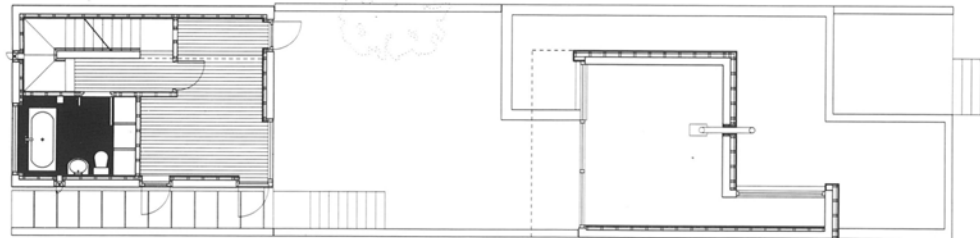
court; the living room roof is at the same level as the adjoining gardens.

The cast-in-situ cranked roof gives the living space a cave-like character. Glazed screen doors connect living and courtyard spaces, and the stone floor runs from inside to outside. Access to the three bedroom floors is across the sunken courtyard. The upper bedrooms have views across the gardens to the Navan skyline.

Concrete steps lead from the courtyard level along the side court to the existing raised garden at the rear. The house is built in concrete, and lined internally with plasterboard and plywood. External joinery is untreated iroko.

Area – 110m². Stage – completed 1998.



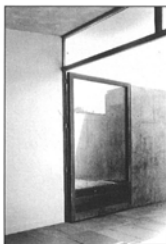
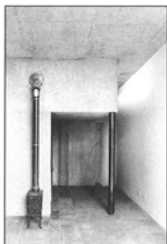


Cave-like living room sunken between neighbours' gardens

Clerestory light in the living room

View to kitchen and TV den

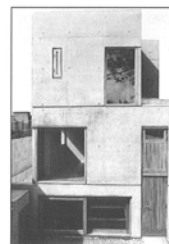
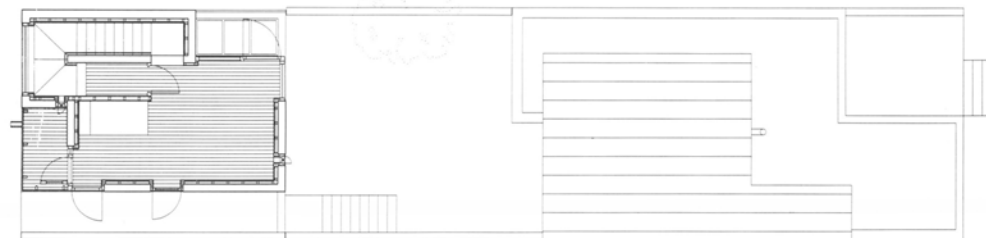
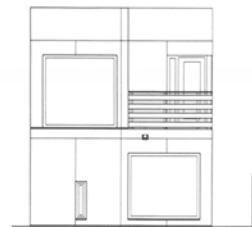
Glazed screen door connects living and courtyard spaces, and the stone floor runs from inside to outside



Garden elevation
Courtyard elevation
Second-floor plan

opposite

First-floor plan
Ground-floor plan



Three-storey bedroom tower

Open stairs winds around concrete structure

View from upper bedroom across courtyard and living room to Navan skyline

Upper bedroom timber screen and shutter

ASSESSORS' COMMENTS

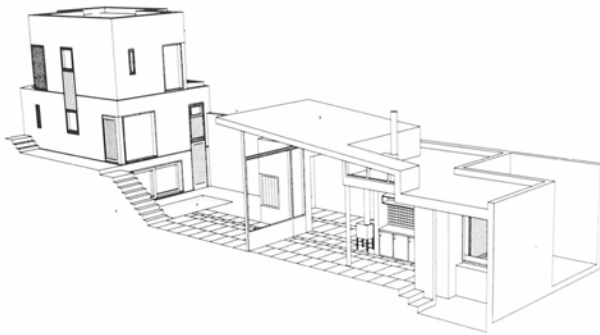
McNAMARA – Theo, you and I had a little discussion earlier about whether or not you would like to walk across that open space in the middle of the night.

DORGAN – Shelley, you and I were not discussing walking naked across that space late at night, but what the inhabitants of the house would like!

McNAMARA – The description is important in terms of establishing how the forms come about, the form of the tower and the cave, and how it is inserted into an existing courtyard or external room.

DORGAN – This was one of the projects that stayed in my mind over lunch. And I'm still picking up things from it, like the way the sleeping block echoes and reflects the tower in the distance. I really like the way the narrow yard is played with. I like the sense of privacy and mystery and play. But I worry that the owner will eventually compromise the integrity of the design because of the dislocation of living spaces from the sleeping complex.

McNAMARA – It's sunken below the adjacent gardens, so it is very protected.



DORGAN – I like the cave-like aspects of the living room, with the stove and all that, and given the climate of Navan, it's a very attractive proposition. That to me increases the unattractiveness of putting on your boots and your coat to cross the yard to go to bed.

McNAMARA – I presume the clients have worked closely with the architect, and it is a personal decision on their part.

DORGAN – Sometimes it is up to an architect to explain to the user what they should have. At least, that's how I understand most architects work.

McNAMARA – No, they won't put in a link, Theo. This is a tailor-made house to a tailor-made brief.

DOYLE – The owners have a restaurant. So it might be quite good to have the living room near the restaurant, but the bedrooms are far enough away so you don't hear the late-night noise.

TANSEY – I think it is very unusual. It's so unexpected. I visited this when it was under construction and I was very struck by it. The construction is very powerful in its simplicity, with the poured external structure and the inner sleeve making the rooms inside. And the section is very interesting –

the sleeping block is only two storeys at the back, and only really becomes a tower when you drop down to the level of the courtyard and living space.

LION – I think it is very well designed and everything, but what kind of house it is, I don't know. I understand that they have a restaurant, and they want to have another life, so they organise a kind of city, with different buildings around a square. I regret the very small location plan – for me, it could be the key to understanding it. I'm afraid it is a pictorial answer to the very particular situation of this family.

McNAMARA – I think it is important that this courtyard space was already there, and the house was built around it. But Yes, you said that it was a pictorial response.

LION – It is a project the way you explain it, and now I think the building is more important than the project, with this square between four façades of concrete. The courtyard is a room now without a roof, but it is a room.

DORGAN – What you see as a virtue, Shelley, Yves sees as a fault.

LION – I would need to visit it because I don't really understand the situation.

DOYLE – I don't know if the people building this cared about being very practical. I think they just wanted to build a little mini-monument. I like it. I think it is an enjoyable house, and using concrete is very unusual. They must have been very agreeable clients to accept bare concrete for their house. They must have liked the idea of having something very different. I think the concrete is amazing. Does the joint here go around the corner? It is difficult to work out the joints in the panels – I'm trying to think of the concrete detailing and where the rivets are going in for the shuttering. It must have been difficult to do it. I must say, I think it is very brave. Concrete is a

material that's hard to use. And the design of the timber windows and shutters is very nice too.

McNAMARA – I agree with you. For me it is one of the most memorable projects of the day.

DOYLE – But if you think back, this use of concrete wouldn't have been that unusual in the 1940s. And wasn't Robin Walker's house built in simple concrete in the 1960s? It's funny to see it turn up nowadays. But it is a memorable project ... and to think somebody went through with it so strongly.

McNAMARA – What I enjoy about this project is that it is dealing with architectural elements and not with design, so to speak. It is trying to make space for its own sake.

TANSEY – The execution of the house has been very rigorous. The building hasn't lost the power it had while it was under construction. It still has a rugged, naked quality, and I think the internal/external relationship is refreshingly ambiguous.

McNAMARA – I think it is interesting that the windows on each level relate differently to the ground, the courtyard, and the town.

TANSEY – One thing that bothered me when I visited the site was the introverted quality of the house. But I see from the photos how the view from the upper level of the tower is focused on a tower beyond in the town.

O'DONNELL AND TUOMEY – established in 1988.
(For a fuller biography, see page 21.)

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