

House in a Long Back Garden in Navan

ARCHITECTS: O'Donnell Tuomey Architects

Architects' Account

A narrow linear garden behind an existing restaurant on Railway Street 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

PROJECT TEAM:

CLIENT:

Richard and Tricia Hudson

ARCHITECTS:

O'Donnell Tuomey Architects

Shelia O'Donnell, John Tuomey, Fiona McDonald

STRUCTURAL ENGINEERS:

Michael O'Grady

CONCRETE CONSTRUCTION:

Warnock Brothers

GENERAL CONTRACTORS:

Brian Darby

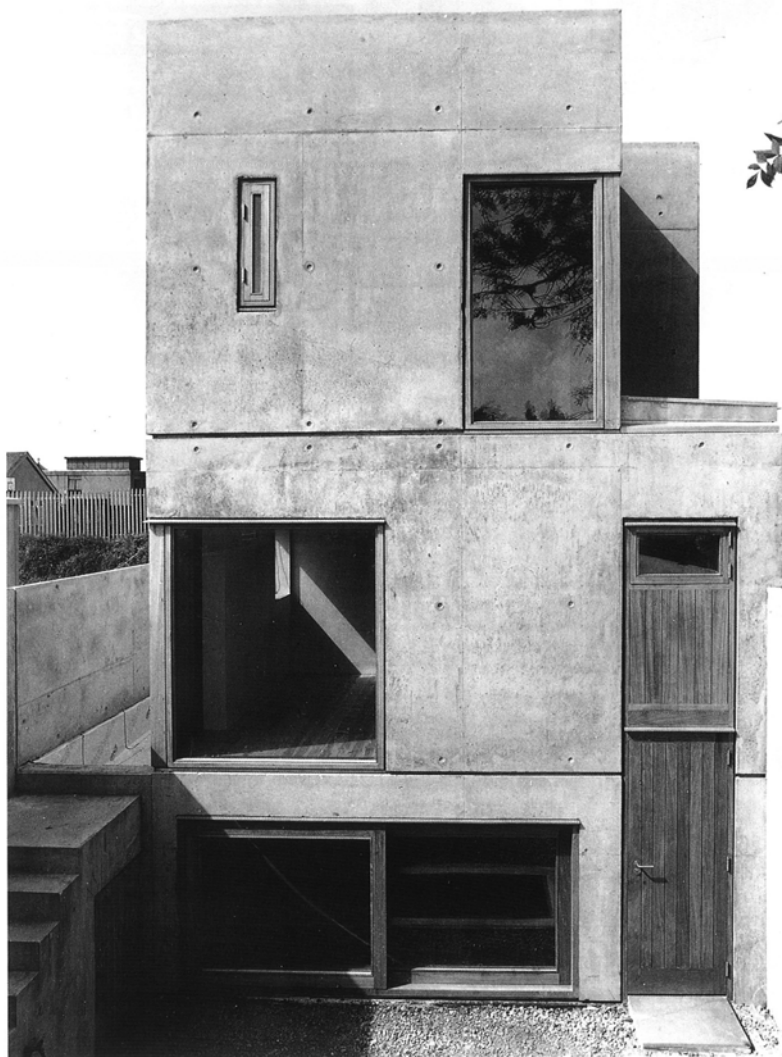
PHOTOGRAPHY:

John Searle

Dennis Gilbert

Floor area 110m²

Completed 1998



Bedroom block elevation

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 3 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.

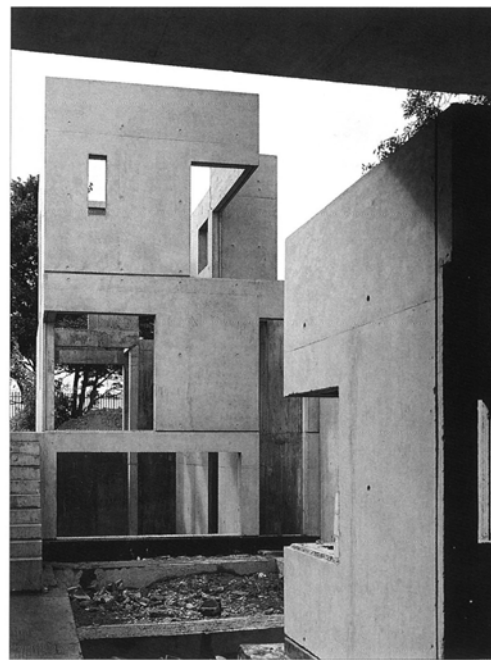
Because of the unusual site restrictions, with difficult access and the surrounding gardens at an upper level, the project was carried out in three phases of work: site works, excavation and drainage; concrete structure; carpentry and plastering with services, roofing and joinery subcontracts. Separate contract documents were prepared for each phase of the work. The concrete work was carried out

in a six-week contract by Warnock Brothers, after which Brian Darby, a local builder, took on the task of lining-out the concrete shell with timber floors, stairs and other domestic necessities. Because of the changeover of contractual responsibilities the concrete shell stood empty for a number of weeks, looking more like an abandoned ruin than a building on site. The clients had a candlelit party to celebrate the topping-out with strawbales for seating in the living-room. With the structure complete the character of the house was established and joinery and finishing details were designed to reinforce the primary sense of the integrity of the construction.

Electrical sockets and switches were clustered on the plaster wall linings and there are no light fittings on the concrete walls or ceilings. All rooms have underfloor heating. The flagstone floor surface extends without interruption from the living-room into the courtyard and the window frames are set flush with wall linings and floorboards.

The rooms are small and the total floor area is minimal but the house appears larger because of the spatial involvement between inside and outside. The central sunken courtyard is the heart of the house, and the pool and stair are thought of like built-in furniture in this outside room.

Bedroom block during construction and after.





Critique: Tom de Paor

I suppose that a house becomes a restaurant when it is decided that the many pleasures of entertaining become a way of life – six nights a week. Dining-room becomes front of house. Popularity demands that this public room and its servant spaces increasingly consume the original home. Conventional domesticity has no room left and requests re-invention.

Here the found logic of a casually accretive composition is embraced and developed formally. Fortright about their making and how they will age, the new works extend the compression and release in plan and section of the existing ad hoc assemblage. Legible as part and as whole, they stand distinct yet comfortable with their anonymous precedents.

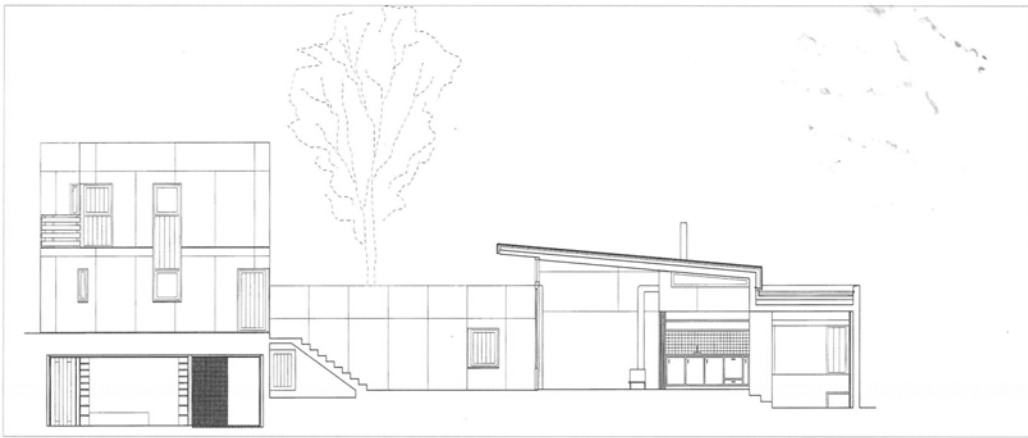


The ground is excavated and full height concrete retaining walls poured against the permanent shuttering of its context. Family life is cast-in-situ as an open-plan valve to the workings of the restaurant (a bay window to



Below:
Tower stairs

Below left:
Living room/kitchen



dine at, a pointedly modest kitchen, a conservatory to lounge in with large glazed screen/gate into courtyard and a study/bunker as cul-de-sac), both retreat yet extension from the existing working yard. A tidy stack of intimate rooms contrasts with this – a timber tower-house sleeved in concrete freestanding against the garden beyond (a basement bedroom with low courtyard view, a sunken bath addresses garden, a bedroom with view of stars, and a bedroom with balcony to distant views). Remembering the footprint of earlier abandoned structures, the courtyard – very much an outdoor room – mediates between public and private, between horizontal and vertical. In this enclosed new world pivots the life of the household. An array of apertures for humans and other domestic animals is offered. The light is good.

As a miniature peninsular city, this urbanism unfolds intriguingly from Railway Street into its backland to re-invent itself. Earlier additions are re-appraised by what is added. Already in the garden a timber gazebo sits hopefully in the gaze of the tower, a perhaps provisional model for a future layer.

This work feels like a holiday house or perhaps a house on holiday. Unfettered by convention, hand-me-down ideas of domesticity are interrogated and resultant new potentials put rigorously to use. It is a bespoke refuge, delightfully modelled around and articulate of the everyday rituals of a particular family life. Each activity is built in and every moment celebrated – occasionally at the risk of parody. This level of response is extraordinary. It achieves its ambition. Another type of inhabitation is discovered.

