

# "A COMMUNITY OF THOUGHT AND PURPOSE"

## Interview with UCD's New Professors Hugh Campbell and John Tuomey

by Sandra Andrea O'Connell

When on 8 September sixty first year architecture students took their seats at UCD for their first lecture, they were not only introduced to two newly appointed professors but also to important changes in the teaching of architecture. With the recent appointments of Dr Hugh Campbell as Professor of Architecture and John Tuomey as Professor of Architectural Design, Ireland's oldest school of architecture has taken the opportunity to set out some key new objectives. An essential part of Campbell and Tuomey's complementary teaching philosophies is a strong emphasis on research.

"We are interested to explore how architecture can develop through research and all our full-time and part-time colleagues will be engaged in this process", illustrates Hugh Campbell. For the professors, architectural research covers a wide range of areas from the more technological aspects and latest developments in sustainability to urban design and the culture of architecture as an expression of cultural heritage and identity. "The school will investigate the role of architecture and society and how architecture impacts on our lives, says Campbell. "Research through design is therefore another important constituent", adds John Tuomey. "Design is an expression of society and explores how we live today. Whenever we visit another country or city, we interpret their culture through their buildings", explains the school's new Professor of Architectural Design.

The appointment of John Tuomey – an architect who heads up, together with his partner Sheila, one of Ireland's most highly regarded and internationally successful practices, O'Donnell + Tuomey – marks an important return to the school's historic emphasis on engaging architects in practice. "Historically, UCD always had a Professor of Architecture who was also practising architect", explains Hugh Campbell. "However, as the weight of the administrative responsibilities considerably increased over the years, combining this role with practice became no longer possible". Fourteen years ago, Professor Loughlin Kealy became therefore UCD's first full-time (non-practising) Professor of Architecture. The decision to create two new positions – a full-time and permanent Professor of Architecture and a part-time, fixed-term Professor of Architectural Design – recognises the importance of having a practitioner leading the design studio. Both Campbell and Tuomey praise the contributions of their part-time colleagues in the design studio, many of them practitioners.

Hugh Campbell and John Tuomey have not only been colleagues at UCD for quite some time, Tuomey also chose Campbell in 1991 – alongside Simon Walker, Martin Henchion, Tom de Paor, John Parker and others – as one of the students to represent UCD at the Venice Architecture Biennale. "At this exhibition, UCD held its own among 40 international Schools of Architecture", recalls Tuomey. Seventeen years later sees Hugh

Campbell, as joint Commissioner/Curator with IAF Director Nathalie Weadick, heading up the Irish exhibition at the Venice Biennale and O'Donnell + Tuomey as one of nine practices in this year's group show *The Lives of Spaces*. For John Tuomey it is his third time in Venice, having represented Ireland also in 2004 with *Metamorphoses – Letterfrack, Transformation of an Institution* under Commissioner Shane O'Toole. He intends for this year's exhibition to have "a life beyond Venice" through ongoing research by the students into the theme.

Campbell and Tuomey have ambitious plans for UCD's School of Architecture, which will celebrate its centenary in 2011. First and foremost, they would like to see it as a thought-leader in research and a vibrant centre of Irish architectural culture. The new professors regard their school as a collegiate of scholars and a community of thought and purpose. They believe that universities are the essential meeting points for people in research, people in practice, and people from other universities and disciplines and they intend for the School of Architecture to make an important contribution to architectural research through projects, conferences and publications. "The lecturers and tutors are the custodians of the culture of architecture", says Hugh Campbell.

The School of Architecture currently runs several highly regarded Masters' programmes and intends to expand its PhD programmes. Essential to this ambition is a more interdisciplinary approach, based on joint research projects with other academic disciplines in UCD, such as the Social Sciences, the Humanities and the Arts, as well as links with other academic institutions at home and abroad (the school already collaborates with the National College of Art and Design). Campbell and Tuomey agree that a network with Ireland's other six school of architecture is also of importance. How do the new professors explain the huge number of applicants for the places at UCD and the emergence of several new schools of architecture? "Architecture orients you to develop solutions", says Campbell, "while other disciplines diagnose, architecture wants action".

Central to all academic activity in the School of Architecture at Richview is therefore the design studio. "We firmly believe in the substance of constructed architecture", says John Tuomey. He regards an on-going exchange with the construction sector as important for design and intends to invite contractors and developers to the studio to discuss construction issues with the students. What core message do the professors want to give their new first year students? "We want students to be open-minded", says John Tuomey, "studying architecture fundamentally changes the way you see the world, it is a discovery – the next time you are on a bus, you see the city in new light".



Dr Hugh Campbell (right) and John Tuomey, UCD's new Professors in the School of Architecture, are taking a break on the Richview Campus