

# A TRICK OF LIGHT

When Russell Hart and Emer Fitzpatrick visited the house that was to become their future home they were distinctly unimpressed. But then the sun came out ...

PHOTOGRAPHY **MARK SCOTT** WORDS **BEN WEBB**

**RIGHT** The sofa is by Habitat. The curtains are from Ikea. The painting is by Willy McKeown from the Kerlin Gallery.

**OPPOSITE PAGE** The vintage wooden rocking chair is from 20th Century Furniture. The cushion was made by Pippa Blue using vintage fabric from AStór. Russell made the shelves out of birch ply. The fireplace is made from concrete. The solid floor is made from oak. The framed photo is by Russell. The vintage print is from Prague.



**WHO LIVES HERE** Russell Hart and Emer Fitzpatrick, and their three children Eoghan, 7, Alban, 5, and Fionn, 2.

**THE HOUSE** A 1960s build in Galway.

**WHY WE LOVE IT** It contains a fantastic art collection and boasts imaginative use of space and colour.



From the outside, Russell and Emer's house looks utterly ordinary, just one more compact house in a typical 1960s estate. But open the front door, and you are in for a series of lovely – and tasteful – surprises. First of all, you are struck by the light and the size – it's spacious and airy – but look closer and you notice how a magical choice of colour, furniture and objets d'arts has conjured up a home brimming with personality and its own unique style.

The dining room has dark chocolate brown walls, which are the perfect backdrop for the couple's paintings and photographs. Homemade shelves high on the wall provide a dramatic home for a treasured vinyl collection, while cork floor tiles in the study area make a perfect place to pin up the doodles and artwork of their children.

But the house certainly didn't start this way. Russell and Emer, who met while working at the Irish Museum of Modern Art (IMMA), have cast a creative spell. "The house looked very dingy the first time we saw it and it was in very bad condition," Emer recalls. "It didn't help that it was a cold and dark day, but Russ suggested we should give it another go."

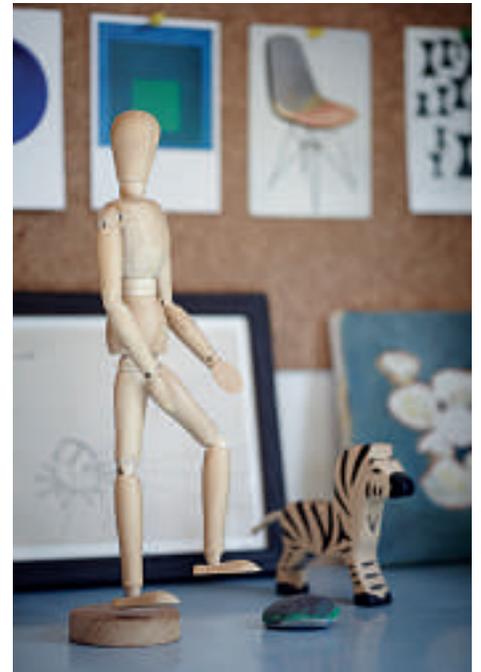
The second viewing was completely different. The couple spent an hour walking through the rooms and gradually a vision began to take shape. "This time it was a beautiful, bright day and we saw that if we opened up the rooms and put more glass at the back of the house it could be a great space."

**ABOVE** The main kitchen units were designed and built by the couple out of plywood. The worktop is oak. The stainless steel unit was bought from a catering company. The shelves were designed and built by Russell. The chrome toaster is by Dualit. The wall colour is Inkwell by Colortrend. **TOP RIGHT** Bright yellow adds a cheery splash of colour to the hallway. **OPPOSITE PAGE** The dining table is a family heirloom. The chairs are by Marcel Breuer. The pendant is from Urban Outfitters. The bench around the table was built by Emer's father. The bookcase was designed and built by Russell.





**ABOVE** The sofa is by Habitat. The curtains are from Ikea. The cushion was made by Pippa Blue using vintage fabric from AStór. The framed artworks are called Joke Poster and Tip Poster by Caner Aslan. **TOP RIGHT** The wooden model came from an art shop. **OPPOSITE PAGE** The chair is by Eames. The cork tiles on the wall are the perfect place to pin up postcards and works of art. The floor is oak. The table was second-hand and customised by Russell. The painted stool is from Ikea.



Russell and Emer, who run a boutique B&B in Galway called the stop b and b at Kilcullen House, demolished the small extension at the back and created a new one. They knocked through many of the internal walls to open out the space and replaced windows with glass doors at the back. Suddenly, light flooded through the house.

“We wanted to be able to cook, work and play in connected, open spaces,” Emer remembers. “In a few years time, though, we may put in sliding doors between some of the rooms. When the boys are older and have their friends over we may want to have separate spaces again.”

The couple follow the principle that form follows function – so everything must first and foremost work well. The kitchen shelves, for example, are open so that when they are cooking it’s easy to find herbs and spices. The chunky oak worktop is ideal for chopping on while the stainless steel unit they bought from a catering company can withstand the hottest of pans.

“We are really enjoying the utilitarian thing,” Russell adds. “We just picked up a set of steel-legged, powder-coated stools from AStór in Galway. They came from an art college in France and are very well worn. They still have paint marks on them from the students, which we love.”

The interiors evolved over time. “We started with white walls and installed an oak kitchen and floor with the idea that we could paint it later,” Emer explains. “But we like it as it is now. We like the way wood ages and all the marks and scratches.”





ABOVE The bed head is an antique and the angle light is from Ikea. The side table was designed and built by Russell out of birch plywood. The wall is painted Inkwel by Colortrend. The throw is from Habitat.

Russell agrees. “We don’t like interiors that are too austere or staged with everything matching,” he explains. “I love to see people’s personality in their home. Our kitchen table is an old family piece and we’ve taken a few other antiques from Emer’s mother. We have a mix of antiques, different types of artwork, painted charity shop finds as well as Ikea pieces.”

They are also very happy to make pieces that will do the perfect job. There are Russell’s shelves that house his records and a collection of books while Emer’s father made a bench around the kitchen table and even knocked up a treehouse in the garden for the boys.

Many of the walls are still white, but some carefully chosen ones are quite the opposite – olive greens, dark blues and deep browns. Not all the experiments have been a success – they painted the kitchen in their old Stoneybatter house a very dark shade of green but it didn’t work at all. “When it works it’s great but you have to find the right place for dark colours,” Russell admits. “Through trial and error we have found some good walls and spaces for bold colour. It’s amazing how much it can make certain objects and artworks stand out.”

Art is very important to the couple – many of their friends are artists and they have built up a substantial collection. They also want their children to grow up surrounded by art, as it has played such a large part of their lives. They often swap the artwork – as well as some of the furniture – between their home and the B&B. “It keeps things fresh at home and at work,” Emer says. “Placing an object into a new context can be exciting as you see it in a completely new way.”

The couple has really enjoyed updating the interior design of the B&B, formerly known as Kilcullen House, which had been in Emer’s family for many years, and continue to add to its contemporary charm. They concede it’s very hard work running such a hands-on business while also bringing up three young boys, but believe it is a good lesson for the children to see them working hard for themselves. They also meet fascinating people from all over the world. “It’s given us a very positive view on people



as more often than not they are open, interesting and kind,” Russell says. “It’s good to be reminded of this on a daily basis.”

A tour around their cheerful B&B reveals the two houses share the same design characterful DNA. “We see the two spaces as going very much hand in hand,” Russell says. “Again form following function is an underlying ethos – it needs to work, but obviously it’s nice if it looks good, too!”  
[thestopbandb.com](http://thestopbandb.com)

**LEFT** The bed is Mydal, by Ikea. The armchair is from Ikea. The original floorboards are painted in Chemise by Farrow & Ball. The top picture is called Das Jahr by Marlene Reidal. The wall is painted in Drab by Farrow & Ball.

### IDEAS TO STEAL

- Add personality to a room by painting one wall in a deep shade as it will make artwork and photographs really stand out.
- Cork tiles are perfect for displaying kids’ pictures, postcards and other fun mementoes.
- Let your interiors evolve over time.
- Customise old pieces of furniture with a lick of paint and new fabric.
- Check out catering companies for great value items such as a stainless steel island.
- Open shelving in the kitchen means you keep all handy kitchen accoutrements within easy reach.