

BLANK CANVAS

Zoe and Felim Maguire's stone farmhouse was a shell of a building before they turned it into the cosy, rustic home it is today

FEATURE & PHOTOGRAPHS BARBARA EGAN/REPORTAGE



House fact file



The property
Georgian stone-built farmhouse in County Sligo with walled garden, farmyard and some land.

Bedrooms
Three.

Bathrooms One and one en suite.

Improvements made When the Maguires bought the house, only the walls and part of the roof remained in tact. It was insulated with traditional hemp and lime, re-roofed, and a new window was

created to capture the evening light in the living room. A new kitchen was put it, underfloor heating installed, then the place was replumbed, rewired and refinished. All the joinery was replaced, much with in-period salvage.

Buying price
£150,000 in 2005.

Renovation costs
£240,000.

Now worth
£400,000.

Design brief

To renovate and restore a tumbledown Georgian farmhouse sympathetically with authentic building materials. The owners wanted to create a light-filled, inviting family home.

Felim Maguire had often passed by a derelict farmhouse in his native Sligo, set in what he thought the most beautiful surroundings imaginable, backed by a spectacular mountain view, and wondered why no one lived there. When he decided to buy a house with his partner Zoe, he found that this house was actually for sale, so they had a look around. 'It was really a beautiful setting,' says Zoe, 'I loved it from the start. We also liked the fact that it was surrounded by stone farm buildings as we saw the potential to renovate in the future. We decided to buy, but looking back I realise that we had no idea of the size of the project we were about to undertake.'

The wood-burning stove is from Sligo Stoves and Fireplaces (00 35 37 19 15 17 86, sligostoves.ie). The parquet floor is oak from VDF Flooring (00 35 38 68 23 42 02, vdf.ie).

STURDY FRAMEWORK

The house was just walls and half of a roof, it had no windows, doors or floors. On the plus side, the walls were solid »



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stone close to a metre thick and very sturdy. The layout of the original Georgian dwelling was still there and the site was incomparable. ‘We knew that it could be made into a lovely home, but had no idea how to go about it, so we called in the experts,’ says Zoe. Designer Linda Moffitt is well known in the Sligo area, and her husband Paddy Dwyer is a specialist in restoring period buildings, so Zoe asked for a consultation. She was bowled over by Linda’s enthusiasm – she loved the house and was thrilled to become involved in such a creative project, creating a family home from a neglected old building.

PLANNING THE PROJECT

Zoe and Linda tried to envisage how the home would be used: how the kitchen would function, whether Zoe wanted to keep the dining room separate and where the living room and the formal sitting room would fit in. Linda was very conscious of the orientation of the house. Some rooms had south-facing windows and were full of sunshine, while others only had north light. They decided to keep the ground floor quite open, using large glazed double doors to encourage the flow and bring in as much light as possible.

The kitchen faced onto the central courtyard, or the old farmyard. The original farm kitchen with a huge stone



TOP LEFT The two big leather Chesterfield sofas were made by Artistic Upholstery in Nottingham (0115 973 4481, artisticupholstery.co.uk).

LEFT Classic black and red quarry tiles in the back hall were rescued by builder Paddy Dwyer from an old conservatory that was being demolished and laid in a harlequin style.

ABOVE Zoe didn’t want an imitation ‘period’ kitchen so she went for a contemporary look, which was designed by Linda Moffitt (00 353 71 913 1690, visioninteriors.ie).

My favourite corner

‘I love the kitchen, which is warm and sunny and faces out over the old stone farmyard. The parquet floor has underfloor heating so it’s warm even to bare feet, and I find the blue units and pink Smeg fridge so cheerful. I’ve also added bright red accents. It’s a room that lifts the spirits, even on a dreary cold winter morning.’



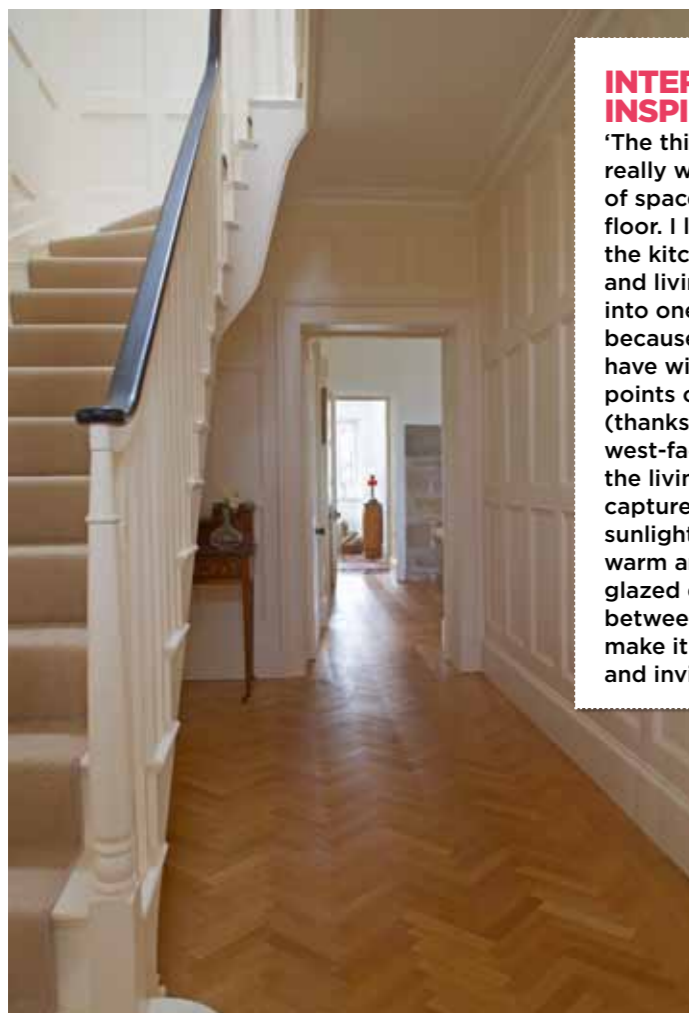
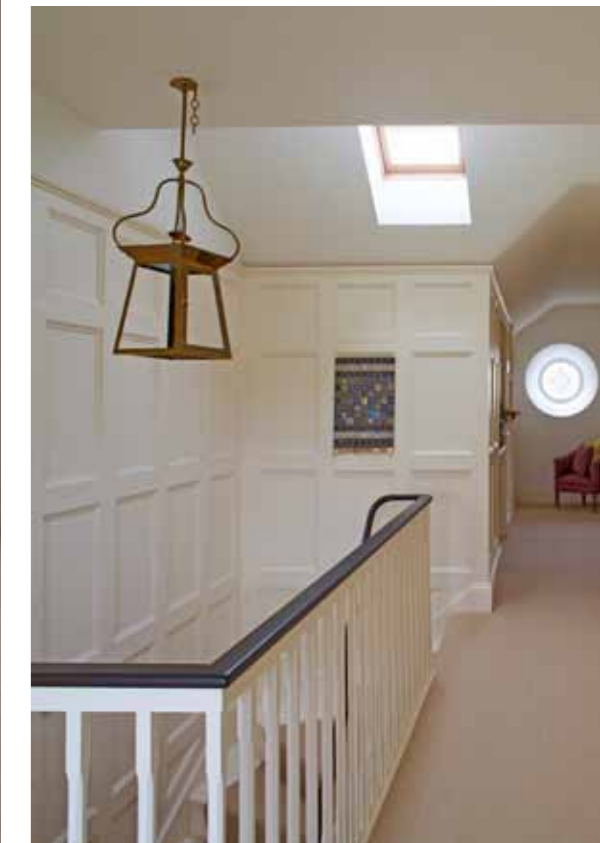


BELOW Painted wooden panelling in the upstairs landing helps keep this area light and bright, making the most of the natural light from the skylight.

FAR BELOW In the guest room, the antique brass bed is from Yeats Country Antiques, (00 35 37 19 14 55 89, yeatscountryantiques.ie).

‘We knew that it could be made into a lovely home, but had no idea how to go about it’

‘The idea in the master bedroom was to have a low bed so I could look out the window, and see the whole mountain,’ says Zoe.



INTERIOR INSPIRATION

‘The thing that works really well is the flow of space on the ground floor. I love the way the kitchen, dining and living room all flow into one another, and because the three rooms have windows facing all points of the compass (thanks to the extra west-facing window in the living room to capture the evening sunlight) it is always warm and sunny. Large glazed double doors between the rooms make it feel very open and inviting.’

ABOVE Panelling was often used on walls in farmhouses of this era. It has been finished with organic paint in Ivory from Auro (01452 772020, auro.co.uk).

fireplace became the living room and, because it only had a north-facing window, a new window was installed in the west wall to bring in the evening sunlight. East light came from the dining room and south light from both dining and kitchen. The hub of the home was designed to be in natural daylight all day.

WORK STARTS

The Maguires were very keen on the house being rebuilt using natural materials and along ecologically sound lines wherever possible. When work started, the first thing to do was to clear out the debris and clean down the walls removing all the old plaster. Once that was done, it was obvious that there was going to be a problem with the central two walls. There was one either side of the hall and both had fireplaces with chimneys in the thickness of the wall and were saturated with hundreds of years of soot. Even when they were cleaned, the

soot seeped through again so the decision was taken to take them down. ‘That was quite scary,’ says Zoe, ‘there wasn’t that much of the house standing as it was and I was afraid the whole thing would just fall down, but Paddy the builder was very matter of fact and competent and of course it was fine. In fact, it turned out to be a stroke of luck as the replacement walls weren’t as thick so we gained over 600mm on the width of the hall, which had been quite narrow.’ The roof was removed and then rebuilt with original blue Bangor slate, and the walls insulated with traditional hemp and lime material, so that they would remain breathable.

The decision was taken to use geothermal underfloor heating and supplement with solid fuel rather than use a boiler and radiators, both for the visual effect and for the long-term ecological and cost implications. Linda and Paddy both recommended new, »



GET THE LOOK
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‘It still surprises me how well the whole project turned out’



Learning curve


What would your advice be to someone taking on a similar project?

‘Get expert help. We couldn’t have done it without Linda and Paddy. It was outside our scope and the time we would need to even grasp the possibilities was impossible. Stick to your own job and let the designer do theirs, it will make things easier.’

Would you tackle another project like this?

‘No, we won’t be doing this again! We absolutely love our home and feel it is unique and would never want to move, but we would never have taken it on if we had any inkling of the size and scope of the project we were embarking upon. As it is, we don’t feel we could improve on this location at all.’

rather than salvaged, light oak wood block flooring as salvaged is often hard to adequately recondition and lay, but for the rest of the house, Paddy’s yard was a treasure trove. A committed conservationist, Paddy has worked on many old houses and would save anything that was being thrown away, often rescuing old building materials, shutters, tiles and fittings. All the shutters in the house came from his stock. Shutters were also used to create the panelling in the bathroom and all the sanitaryware is reclaimed. The windows are all new, but recreated in the original style from a window found on the floor.

‘It still surprises me how well the whole project turned out, I still shudder now when I think what we took on so unknowingly. It was an old house that had been derelict for so long and now it’s a warm home filled with sun and colour. It’s amazing what you can do with a lot of help from the experts!’ 



ABOVE The bath came from Paddy’s yard (00 35 37 19 13 16 90, visioninteriors.ie). He had salvaged it from an old bathhouse in Bundoran.

RIGHT AND INSET The wash basin and fireplace were also supplied by Paddy. The panelling is made up of old pine shutters.

