



Healthy Flowing Homes

Finding her cottage hard to sell, architect Patti O'Neill took a step back and developed the Healthy Flowing Homes approach which transformed the desirability of her home.



Patti's cottage was part of a single storey terrace from the 1840s and several modifications had been made over the years which created a confused layout. In the 1950s or 60s a kitchen was added to the front, turning the entrance around through the gardens. In the 1980s the floor was lowered and the second floor was added with two bedrooms and a bathroom and toilet, now directly overhead, as you entered the home causing further discomfort in the house.

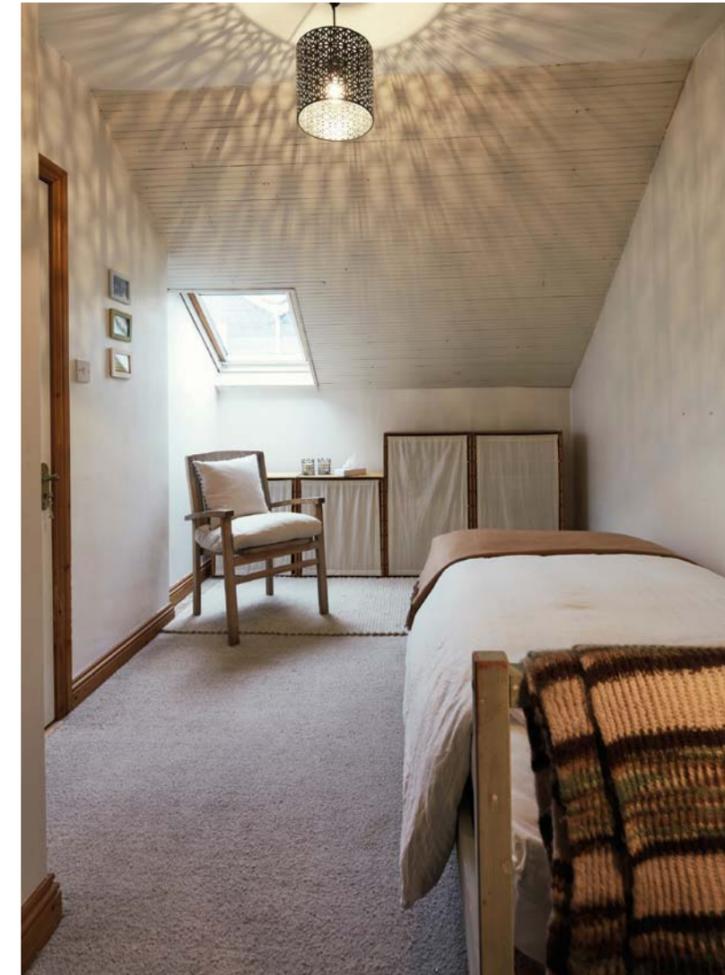
When Patti first bought the house she undertook a comprehensive conservation renovation which involved removing the cement from the exterior and some interior walls and repairing with lime render. She also rearranged the ground floor to create two living spaces facing the garden to the south. Nine years on, she made a decision to put her house on the market.

'When I went to sell it there were no offers for the first two years. So I took a step back to understand what someone entering the property for the first time was experiencing. I was so used to living here that when I stood back I was quite shocked to see that the first impressions of entering the house were all wrong – it caused confusion and was unsettling,' says Patti.

She began to develop the principles of the approach that she now calls Healthy Flowing Homes. This gives top priority to the user experience. 'It means that our instinctual experience, our first impressions and the way we use a space are taken into consideration while designing. It also considers the orientation to the sun, the views and the connection to outdoor spaces and entrance approaches,' explains Patti. 'Analogies to the body help while designing a home, for example how we enter spaces, where we prepare our food, where we relax and where the bathrooms are found. Particularly in the kitchen it is important to establish the optimum centre of control through the positioning of workspaces, windows, light and door positions. This will have an effect on the food that we make, eat and that in turn will nourish us'.



Patti's cottage before the restoration commenced.



In practical terms on this project, this led to the introduction of a glass porch which redirected the entrance into the house through the first living room. The passage to the kitchen was also closed. 'This transformed the house by having a welcoming stove and sofa to greet you in the reception room. In the kitchen I rearranged the windows and door into the courtyard, creating a comfortable dining area which gets the evening light. The toilet was also separated from the kitchen and is now accessed through the porch, again creating a healthy flowing home.'

The kitchen is a simple polished cast concrete which gets lovely sunlight throughout the day. The colour of lip-sync grey rose on the back wall gives a warmth and picks up the colour of the brick whilst the beige sandy colour gives an earthiness to the kitchen also found on the yellow wash of the stone walls. The same is picked up in a flint yellow gravel in the courtyard.

In terms of styling her home, Patti chose to use modern elements to contrast with the old stone and brick walls which create so much character. She particularly likes her new hardwood windows. 'I reinstated the original sized windows and put back limestone cills.

'The windows are bespoke solid wood which is rare nowadays because they are usually made from industrialised profiles. I find them very beautiful and they complete the home,' says Patti. 'My favourite spot in the house is the ground floor living room looking through the uninterrupted glass at the garden beyond'.

Originally built most likely as servants' cottages for the large terrace houses on the North Circular Road, Patti had been attracted initially by the stone and lime mortar construction, slate roof and south facing garden. With the changes now made, she feels that she has allowed the house to breathe and opened up its charms. Now there is a calm and clear pathway into and through the house.

The renovations took two months and surprisingly there were no complications – and it sold straightaway!