

Going underground



A brief for a new laundry room was extended when architects Lawrence and Long suggested that the work involved in digging down into rock to unearth the new space would involve so much effort it would be worth doing more with the project



This house was extended about 10 years ago but the owners recently felt the need for some more space and asked architects Lawrence and Long for a laundry room. But once it was realised that this would involve a lot of work to dig out the leafy, earthen slope beside the house – which contained a fair share of rock – the architects suggested the clients consider extending the brief to do more with the resulting space.

So now the finished project also includes a utility, shower room, tall library, a living room facing onto a new courtyard and a roof terrace complete with hot tub. The interior has been extended by 37sq m.

The original late-Victorian house, in Shankill, Co Dublin, is semi-detached with a single storey to the front – whose door is reached via a bridge – and two storeys at the back. The house sits on a steep slope – hence the excavation work, which resulted in a sunken double-square shape.

One half of this has become a secret courtyard that is open only to the sky and is planted with tropical ferns. This brings dappled light in

through the glazed wall of the living room that makes up the other half of the double square. The living room is punctuated by slender steel columns and has frameless glazing on two sides.

The excavated space is lined and protected by weighty concrete walls, and is partially covered with a 1m deep concrete roof slab. This contains a hot tub, light periscopes, walk-on rooflights, seating and planting areas. Stairs run up the retaining wall beside the courtyard to link the new subterranean level with the action on the roof.

The roof garden is divided into planes on different levels and of varying sizes. Roof dwellers' privacy is protected by tall slatted timber screens through which there are views of the Wicklow mountains in the distance.

The owners are already using the new space to its full potential. One is a keen gardener who has started to grow food on the roof terrace.

The main bedroom spills out onto this and one can imagine the joys of waking up to freshly picked strawberries.



Left The lower terrace level has views through the clerestory window into the hallway below
Above Looking from the new living room into the courtyard Top right The sunken courtyard
Middle right The shower room Bottom right The library in the hallway

PHOTOGRAPHY: MARIE LOUISE MALPENNY AND LAWRENCE AND LONG