

MILLIONAIRES' ROW

The O'Connor family bought their mill as a holiday home but ended up living in it, writes **Linda Daly**

During the Emergency, in the 1940s, Dromore Mill in Bantry, Co Cork was dragged into action, its 8m cast-iron waterwheel harnessing the power of the Owennashingaun river to generate electricity for the local area.

Originally built in the 19th century to exploit the potential of hydro-power, the mill was also used to grind barytes quarried in north Bantry and at one stage may have been used as a creamery. By the turn of the 20th century, the wheel had stopped turning. It was recommissioned in the 1960s to grind corn.

The 400 sq m stone building was first transformed into a living space in the 1970s. A decade later, it was bought by an English wood turner who used it as both a studio and home, with stoneflagged floors and dark oak among its features.

When the current owners, Rory and Catherine O'Connor, bought the mill as a holiday home in 2004, it was dark and cold. They were living in New York at the time, and saw its potential as a "perfect place to spend summers" with their four young children.

"In 2009 we decided to move back to Ireland permanently but found that while wonderful as a holiday home the house lacked many of the comforts of a modern family home," says Catherine.

"There was poor insulation, wiring, plumbing, closet space and the kitchen was impractical. More importantly, the building had undergone several previous restorations and none of them were true to the original architecture of the building."

Catherine had studied interior design and worked in the industry in Cork, so she decided to take on the project herself, with assistance from conservation engineer Chris Southgate.

"We wanted to bring it back to a Victorian building. We were able to preserve the external envelope but the interior had been messed around with so much that there was very little left of the original features, except for the beams, which we did keep. We replaced all the windows and brought it back to Victorian proportions. We had to re-roof it as well."

The O'Connors wanted the home to represent family life with an "emphasis on beauty, comfort and functionality".

The house had beautiful, south-facing river frontage but the entrance was north-facing, so they reversed the orientation. Now, opposite the footbridge over the river, large double glass doors open into the main hallway.

To introduce as much light as possible, they installed a large, industrial-style open tread staircase in the central hallway. Made by local craftsmen from reclaimed oak and stainless steel, it replicates stairs in old photos of the mill. Light floods down from the central roof-light above.

To the right of the entrance hall is an inviting, open-plan kitchen and dining room – south-facing to make the most of the sun. O'Connor brought in Coach House Kitchens of Coachford to design the space, and had a large island installed, so that she could entertain guests while cooking. The 10-seater dining table, made from one piece of acacia wood from southeast Asia and sourced from Mango Crafts in Killybegs, makes a bold statement.



Drawn to the force of the flow



The living room lies to the left of the stairs and "beautifully captures the evening sun," according to O'Connor. The most impressive room in the entire house has to be the huge 10.5m x 5.6m drawing room/library. O'Connor turned this into a double-height space, and the cathedral ceiling, a gallery overlooking the room and a 9m-high chimney breast installed in an earlier renovation raise the eye upwards. An entire wall of bookshelves sits opposite, designed by Catherine and built from salvaged oak by local craftsman Michael Joe O'Sullivan.

The northern side of the ground floor is given over to the practical rooms of the house, including a walk-in pantry, laundry room, machine room, bathroom and a mood room that could be an extra bedroom.

O'Connor says she had fun designing rooms for her children on the first floor, each with a view of the river running past the site. "The very high ceilings allowed for internal balconies in each room. These are accessed by ladders and provide extra sleeping places or just great play areas. The balconies connect through to each other giving one long communal space between the rooms, while each balcony has a door that also allows for privacy." An office on this floor could also double as a bedroom.

The second floor reaches up to the eaves,



and O'Connor has replaced a heavy oak staircase with narrower stairs, again opening up the space so that light from above can pour in.

A gallery at this level overlooks the floors below, and there are two bedrooms here, the master bedroom running the width of the building. O'Connor wanted to include an en suite bathroom but didn't want to hide the roof trusses, so a half wall separates the bedroom from the bathroom,

which has a large, open shower and spa bath. Overall, she says, she wanted to keep the decor simple to "allow the building to speak for itself".

"There is a continuity throughout achieved with the use of natural wood, glass, stone and steel. I like to use neutral colour schemes – bright whites, deep greys and contrast these with dark wood, stainless steel and natural stone. Colour and texture are introduced through the

Dromore Mill overlooks the Owennashingaun, and Catherine O'Connor, top right, re-designed it herself, creating a double-height library/living room and a kitchen that features a large central island

fabrics and rugs using suede, linen, cashmere, and mohair. Key inspirations are Eastern philosophy with an accent on clean lines and simplicity."

O'Connor says her favourite aspect of the completed design is "the feeling of peace and harmony and relaxation".

That feeling of peace is to be found outside, too. The mill is surrounded by wooded grounds, with the river running the length of the land, with waterfalls, natural pools and a salmon leap providing some beautiful sights.

Life and work have taken the O'Connors back to New York, and Catherine is reluctantly selling the home where the family have spent many happy times. It's on the market through Michael H Daniels for €1.25m.

"The grounds are a paradise. [My favourite memories are] watching for salmon jumping up the salmon steps, seeing trout swim idly by, observing the heron as he sat waiting for a catch, or swimming in the natural pools and relaxing under the rushing waterfalls. I don't think we'll ever live in something as magnificent as it again."

Included in the sale or to be sold as a separate lot is a restored stone-fronted cottage to the rear of the mill, with a sitting room, kitchen/dining room, two bedrooms, bathroom and laundry, as well as a garage. michaeldaniels.com

The lowdown

Land: 4½ acres (1.76 hectares), with a river running through it. It could be sold in two lots – one comprising Dromore Mill and 3½ acres, the other with the cottage and 1 acre – or in its entirety.

Location: It takes 15 minutes by car to reach Bantry, less than 20 to get to Skibbereen. You can get to Cork city and the airport in less than 80 minutes.

Kitchen: Exposed oak ceiling beams, bespoke walnut units with marble and walnut countertops, Wolf stainless steel cooker and extractor hood.

Bedrooms: Six. There is a guest bedroom on the ground floor and three children's bedrooms – with ladders to their bunk areas – on the first floor. The master, with en suite bathroom, and a sixth bedroom can be found on the top floor.

Agent: michaeldaniels.com

They say: A Victorian watermill of immense character in a delightful riverside setting

We say: This is a shining example of renovation, alert to the building's past.

Revival for Victorian family home values

Houses are back in favour as families return to Rathmines, says **Linda Daly**

When the current owners of No 17 Effra Road moved to Rathmines in the early 1970s, the Dublin suburb was nothing like it is now. Much of the area was given over to flats, and the previous owner of their home had started to prepare No 17 for conversion, installing fitted wardrobes in one of the reception rooms downstairs and adding washbasins upstairs.

The young couple – who both worked in theatre and were starting their family – found the location and the house ideal. Effra Road is a stretch of Victorian redbrick homes, burrowed in between Grosvenor and Leinster roads. The pair could walk to their jobs within half an

hour and there was a choice of schools for the children.

While they could have bought a spanking new house for about €5,000 (€6,350) in the burgeoning Templeogue up the road, they stretched their budget to pay about €14,000 for the place in Rathmines. They preferred to buy a Victorian home with character than one of the newer architectural alternatives.

Rathmines has long been popular with the artsy set. Its famous residents have included James Joyce who spent some of his childhood at Castlewood Avenue and playwright JM Synge. Revolutionary Countess Markievicz lived around the corner, in Surrey House on Leinster Road. No 17 is a four-bedroom Victorian

home, larger than terraced equivalents today with a floor space of 150 sq m. The house opens into a long hall with two reception rooms off it. To the front, the drawing room is a good size and has plenty of original features including the sash windows and timber work, a marble fireplace, decorative coving and ceiling rail. There's also a central staircase rose.

In the dining room, the fireplace was sealed up and the surround removed back in the 1960s, when Victorian features were less prized, but it wouldn't be too difficult to open this up again. This room still retains large south-facing sash windows and decorative coving. It leads out to a sun room, which has access to the kitchen at the back of the house – there's a bathroom and utility room just beyond.

Up on the first floor, there are a total of four bedrooms, with an extra space that could be used as either a study or dressing room, or converted to an en suite bathroom. The large master bedroom lies at the front of the house, with two big sash



No 17 Effra Road escaped being converted into flats

windows. A family bathroom sits up on the second floor return. The attic, 6.5m wide, has been floored, and there are two Velux windows and power points here, so it could easily be converted into a fifth bedroom.

While there's very little new owners will have to do to start living in No 17, it is ripe for a cosmetic upgrade. The more ambitious could think about knocking down the sun room and extending the kitchen

right out, with floor-to-ceiling bi-folding doors to really brighten up the space.

The front garden is lawned; the split-level back garden has off-street parking with access to Kenilworth Lane East.

The owner says the biggest shift on Effra Road over the past couple of decades has been the return of families to the area. A large house across the road, which had been divided

into seven self-contained units, was recently bought by a family. There are 30 schools within striking distance, he says. As he looks to downsize to Co Wicklow, he says he will miss the local facilities and the neighbours.

No 17 Effra Road is on the market for €770,000 through Finnegan Menton. finneganmenton.ie

