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Treat your kitchen like a piece of furniture, not a stand-alone element



**Dermot Bannon:** We spend 80 per cent of our time at home in the kitchen, so with a few simple rules it can easily be adapted to suit the way we live now

# The heart of the home is in the kitchen

The way we use buildings has evolved beyond recognition over the last 40 years. Office environments are becoming less formal thanks to the influence of large companies such as Google, as are schools and even hospitals.

If public buildings are changing and evolving, why are we still building houses the way we did 40 years ago?

After spending the best part of a year researching and writing my latest book, the problems that I come across in my private practice are deep rooted in the fact that our house design has hardly evolved in four decades while how we use our homes has changed dramatically.

It's the heart of our homes that we struggle with the most: the kitchen.

Most kitchens are used at least 80 per cent of the waking day and the traditional formal rooms are used less and less. The kitchen is fundamentally an informal space where we spend our time and want our family and friends to use.

Every informal contemporary kitchen needs to perform three basic functions. First, it has to provide a good dining space that can be used for family occasions and will feel special enough for the odd dinner party.

Secondly, it has to incorporate a family or social space to have an area for sitting or hanging out in, and finally it needs to have a well-functioning kitchen work area. To get these spaces to work there are a few simple rules.

Don't just buy a showroom kitchen. Most of us are seduced by what we see in the showroom regardless of what suits the room we have or want. Think about the space you're buying for.

This is where most people go wrong. They start with the kitchen units themselves, as opposed to laying out the room to work.

Start by pushing your sitting, relaxing and dining spaces to the end of the room, so you don't have to cross through them on the way to somewhere else; this is normally at the periphery of the room on the outside walls and connect these spaces to the garden. If you get the layout of the

whole room working, you are 90 per cent of the way there.

Separate your kitchen with an island or peninsula. We spend a lot of time living in the kitchen space, so it's nice to separate cooking areas from the other spaces. Islands or peninsulas are perfect functionally, but their real appeal for me is that they pull the working space away from the wall, forcing users to face back into the main social space, which encourages a connection with people and perhaps a view. Island units are great, but make sure you get a big enough one. It will need to be at least 90cm wide x 180cm long. Make sure that you have 140cm walking



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Design your kitchen around your own specific needs

space around it.

Imagine yourself in the perfect work space and draw up a list of things that would help you. Do you like to cook in a sequence or do you regularly need a specific prep area and layout space? Would it be helpful to have all your appliances at eye level? Design around your own specific needs, quirks and desires. I designed my kitchen with a large drawer for plates and bowls opposite the dishwasher, they are almost back-to-back so it's much easier to unload. Lay out workzone spaces and appliances the way you want them, and not just in a standard way.

If you're designing a house from

scratch and have the space, you should include a small pantry/ storage area with floor-to-ceiling shelves to store food and utensils. It could even be one large cupboard. Being able to put heavy items, above waist level is great for your back and means no more tins of beans stuck at the back of a cupboard under the hob.

Now treat your kitchen like a piece of furniture within this space, as opposed to a stand-alone element you would have selected in the showroom. Keep the materials as simple as you can, this will make the space feel less cluttered. Simple is best.

Spend as much money as you can afford on work tops as it is the surface which will take the most abuse and the surface area that you see the most. Stone or quartz are great and can make an inexpensive kitchen look really high end. If you are going to invest anywhere in the kitchen this is where I would do it.

The final way to really make an open plan kitchen space work is to play around with lighting so you have good task lighting in the kitchen which can be turned off when you are in the dining or living areas and softer lighting in the living space with lamps to create a cosy space. The dining space needs to have its own pendant which can be pulled down close to the table creating an intimate space when needed.

Dermot Bannon will be signing copies of his new book *Love Your Home, Secrets to a Successful Space* in Dubray Books, Grafton Street, Dublin on Sunday November 9 at 3pm



# Importing fresh ideas for getting people housed

Other countries facilitate shared ownership and the building of housing schemes where some facilities are owned in common, writes **Stephen Bourke**

Housing campaigners say there's a crisis of affordability for those stuck in the doldrums between the social housing list and mortgage approval. They're not waiting for the government to do something about it, though. Two groups want to bring development models popular in other countries to Ireland: housing co-operatives and co-housing.

"There's this grey area between people that aren't able to be on a housing list, and people that just don't have capital resources, or aren't even able to plan far enough ahead to get a mortgage," said housing campaigner Barry Phelan.

"If you can afford your rent, you're doing well. With the 20 per cent up front, [a mortgage is]

impossible as a single person," he said.

But as a group? Phelan proposes a co-operative model – in essence, a house-share that is owned by its tenants rather than a landlord. He said he was sick of the precarious lifestyle and short tenancies common in the Irish rental market.

"Over nine years, I'd lived in 11 different places," he said. "When you move, you still have boxes you haven't unpacked from the last move."

Last year, he and some friends formed a company and took out a loan to buy a derelict house on Aughrim Street in Dublin 7. They've been refurbishing it since they moved in in May last year. "I can unpack my stuff at last," he said.

To spread the model, Phelan is forming an Irish wing of a Brit-

ish organisation called Radical Routes, which helps co-operative groups secure finance. Under the Radical Routes model, co-op groups form a company limited by guarantee and borrow on the basis of a business model – bypassing landlords and allowing tenants to be in charge of their own homes.

That allows tenants to put money into the drill holes in the wall, put money into renovation, and more importantly, set their own rent and decide when it's paid. One of the Aughrim Street co-op members wanted to open a bike shop downstairs. That flexibility allowed him to stock the shop first, before he had to pay rent.

While Phelan attacks the problem of affordability from the perspective of a tenant, Hugh Brennan of the Ó Cualann Co-housing Alliance plans a developer's solution.

The "co-housing" model is different to a co-op. Individual dwellings are owned outright, but other facilities are left in common ownership to encourage everyday interaction among residents and to build a sense of community. The idea emerged in Denmark during the 1960s, before being imported

to North America.

Brennan is planning to go ahead with a pilot co-housing development somewhere in south Dublin or north Wicklow in the next 12 months. Half of the development will be social housing, while the other half will be affordable private housing for "a complete mix of age, of ethnicity, of income." The Alliance is even open to including student hous-

“If it's not making money, there's no social dividend

ing – but doesn't want to become a landlord.

Brennan intends to deliver housing at €150,000 per unit by negotiating concessions on development levies and site prices from local authorities – and by cutting profit back.

"If you look at the cost of building a three-bedroom, fourteen-hundred square foot house out of blocks, traditional concrete block cavity construction, or timber-frame construction, it can be done for that price," he says. "In terms of our mark-up, we can control that."

Social cohesion and levelling the playing field is fundamental to the Ó Cualann proposal. "We were hoping that the centre area would be pedestrianised, and your vehicular access would be around the back. We tend to put a big value on our cars and they are a huge status symbol," said Brennan. "If they're not present at the front of your house – if they're hidden behind – it takes away that one other thing, that onepmanship."

"We're a social enterprise. For me, the important part of the social enterprise is the enterprise. If

it's not making money, there's no social dividend," said Brennan. "We limit ourselves to a 5 per cent profit, and 50 per cent of that goes back to the [wider] community."

Both models face an uphill battle, especially for finance. Negotiations with two Dublin local authorities are ongoing, but the Ó Cualann scheme still needs to find a site which will make the plan viable. Even with mortgage approval for half of the homes, the Alliance still needs to borrow from the Housing Finance Agency.

Although British laws governing co-operatives were updated in the 1950s, Ireland retains the original Industrial and Provident Societies Act from the 1890s which, Phelan says, is outdated. Without a strong tradition of co-ops in Ireland, Phelan says, it's difficult to get the proposal accepted by financial institutions.

"There are places you can go for advice, in Britain at least. When I was buying [the house we're living in now] and ringing solicitors they were talking to me about it as if I had ten heads. I suppose people are used to doing it a different way."



## Heritage Stoves Competition

The winner of the Heritage Stoves Belleek 11.5kw room heater stove worth €799 is Lynda Kenehan from Kilmallock, Co Limerick. Congratulations Lynda.