

Lights, camera, build!

FANCY A STARRING TELEVISION ROLE FOR YOUR HOME? NOW'S THE TIME – *ABOUT THE HOUSE* IS AGAIN LOOKING FOR BUILDING PROJECTS TO FEATURE IN ITS NEXT SERIES. LORNA HOGG SPOKE TO LAST SEASON'S GUINEA-PIGS

So how does a building project end up on national television – and is the extra pressure of cables and cameramen a good thing for all involved? Viewers of the last series of *About the House* will remember John and Gabrielle Morehead from Cork, who added a second storey with a zinc roof to their flat-roofed home to create an exciting piece of domestic architecture.

This task was undoubtedly simplified by the fact that John is an architect, and designed his own project. "We needed to extend the dwelling to provide additional accommodation," he told us. "We had a terminal flat roof problem which needed attention, and did not wish to jeopardise the use of our garden, so a first-floor extension seemed to be the obvious solution.

"Being on a corner site, the form of the extension needed to address both roads. Having the extension perpendicular to the existing building, but parallel to the entrance road, gave the building the dual aspect we wanted. Also a cantilevered design did not have to match the footprint of the ground floor in terms of roof configuration, or room sizes. This allowed greater flexibility. We were, as a result, able to create the best conditions to get maximum benefit of orientation, stair location etc."

This was, of course, all created through use of timber frame structure, imported from Austria. "The Austrian firm built the extension to our own design, installed it ready for completion by a local crew under our own supervision." Fans of timber-frame building know that this

speeds up a build. In this case, the envelope was done in eight days. Conventional construction can need months of drying out, and a wide variety of subcontractors to complete.

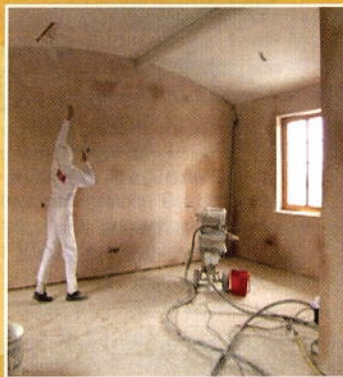
John describes the experience of being architect and client on television as potentially a double nightmare! "On the plus side, you get what you want – you don't have the client holding you back with restrictions, and you can

experiment a little. On the other hand – what you want and what you can afford can be a very different thing!"

John watches the programme *Grand Designs*, and sympathises with the problems of escalating costs, delays, weather worries, rows with architects, builders, fitters, suppliers. "We just couldn't have that. We had to ensure that costs didn't go through the roof, so we planned carefully – and



The Morehead's are very happy with the finished result



even then we did come in a little over budget."

He feels the experience of being under a television microscope was a good one. It provided deadlines for a start. "Looking back, we would have been happy enough to rough it and do the job over a few years. The timber package with windows and roof would have gone in on schedule, but we might have taken longer over the fit-out – perhaps up to three years. But then again, we'll have three extra years to enjoy it."

Television concentrates the mind – and builders. "We were under pressure, which was good. We decided to get on with it and go the whole hog, and that meant five visits to film. We told everyone the situation, including suppliers, which helped to focus things. It wasn't just another job – there was a great buzz as well."

The downside was the time lost for filming. "Of course, there was disruption – not a lot of work was done on those days. You can't make much noise, and you have to be on site. But any disruption is more than off-set by the increased work rate and co-operation leading up to deadline. What was especially fascinating for me was how the filmed pieces were edited and mixed – not necessarily in the order they were shot."

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Another bonus was the relationship with the crew. "It was great gas. We had a barbecue one day, and had to send them packing back to Dublin! We partied well when they were down, enjoying a

good chat after the shoot. Our daughters absolutely adored Duncan. On one occasion he stayed to watch the programme with us. The first time our

daughters saw our slot, they recognised only Duncan initially, not themselves!"

So would he recommend the experience? "If you weren't well organised, it could be a problem. I

could see how things could deteriorate. I would advise using the shoots as part of the entire project management process. I'd say to work out how to use the shoot to maintain deadlines. Also, it's great to have Duncan as a sounding board. People can get too close to a project. Duncan has been there before, and seen and done it, so he can spot problems. He asks relevant questions after which, if prepared, you can feel much more confident about the undertaking. But the team make you feel really relaxed and give great encouragement and enthusiasm to the project, even if you're at a low ebb. Use the shoots to take a break, and have lots of grub around and it'll go well!"



LIGHTS, CAMERAS, ACTION ...

About the House is currently looking for projects which will commence in April 2003. This deadline primarily relates to new builds. There's more flexibility for restoration or renovation – May is the deadline for the start of the project. In all cases, the work must be complete by October in order to allow for full filming. There are four categories – new builds, restoration, (which can range from a cottage to an old mansion) and two categories which include extensions and renovations. You are expected to have done all the basic preparation in administrative terms – e.g. planning permission, organisation of builders, architects, necessary paperwork. To be considered, your project **MUST** have or you must supply:

Full planning permission and compliance with new Building Regulations

Full architectural drawings

A site location map

A site map, with photographs of existing development/site

*A building schedule
Recent family photographs*

Send all of these, as soon as possible, to
About the House, P.O. Box 8041, Dublin 2
You can also get details on the RTÉ website –
www.rte.ie/tv/aboutthehouse

