



Domestic Occupation

Living in O'Donnell and Tuomey's Hudson House.

- Richard and Tricia Hudson in discussion with Theo Dorgan and Dominic Stevens.

TD Theo Dorgan
RH Richard Hudson
TH Tricia Hudson
DS Dominic Stevens

RH When we went to John and Sheila and they saw the site they said they wanted to do something with it. They asked us to write them a letter just saying what we would like out of our dream house, each of us, no matter how ridiculous it was and just one of the things we said was we wanted to have a courtyard and we didn't expect it to be dividing the house completely. But as soon as we saw it we...it was more or less instant...there was no hesitation about it at all. It seemed to be by far and away the best way to use the site.

TD So in many ways does the site dictate...

RH ...the design? Oh, definitely. Yeah. We did say that we wanted to live in a place that had a lot of light because we spend most of our working lives inside, working in the kitchen and the restaurant so that when we do have free time we like to be able to be in the light and to be aware of whether it's raining or not or sunshining or whatever, and they certainly achieved that.

TD So what was the biggest shock when this came back to you...the design?

RH It was no great shock at all to be honest.

TD But, I mean, were you not a bit taken aback at the suggestion that you should live in a poured concrete interior?

TH No, you see it didn't strike us as odd. I think it's because we had lived upstairs and had had to walk down and out through the yards all the time. It was just a more compact version of what we were doing.

RH It appeared to be a very practical solution to our problem.

DS John and Sheila photographed it when it was a concrete shell and then there was the site visit which I didn't come on and then it got finished and then they were saying, 'Yeah, they've moved in and they're very happy', and I was kind

of wondering, 'Who are these people - the custodians of all this concrete?'

RH I think we are probably more selfish than other people. I mean this is something that was built for us and we weren't out to impress anybody.

TD We're all made very aware of what our homes are like when people come to visit us. I can imagine you seeing friends that you haven't seen for five or six years and they walk in and you're there gleefully waiting for the response.

RH Oh, they love it, yeah.



TH Do you know, a lot of people just say, 'Oh, is this it now after all that fuss?', which I find interesting because therefore it's not so odd at all. How many of them would live with a split I don't know. People come in and go, 'Oh, I was kind of expecting it to be different.' I don't know whether they think that because the outside is so stark that the inside will in fact be stark and then they discover that in fact it's just like anybody's home.

DS The way you come in you're in the building before you know it... you certainly don't know where this step stops and this step... and then you're in it and the first time - if you haven't looked up at the concrete there - the first time you think it's amiss or different or odd is you look

out and there's this concrete tower. And you think, 'That's odd.', and then you realise you're probably in something that looks quite similar... so it reveals itself in some ways quite cleverly.

TH It's like an in and out house.

TD What's different about it in the three dimensions than the drawings and the photographs is that you walk in and you feel that instant feeling of comfort and relaxation. You don't feel called to marshal the responses that have to do with, 'Must study, must give decision.' And that's despite the scale. Do you know, we have memories of that kind of scale. The eight foot five-and-a-half inch setting is only temporary, I hope.



TH It's a wonderful height, wonderful height.

TD Can you track back now into your own growing-up? Can you track back a memory of spaces like this, high volumes?

RH Well yes I can because my family home is in Blackrock - it's just an ordinary detached house of no great significance but my dad was the first interior designer in this country and for 20 years he had every lord and lady in the country coming in and out to himself. And I was a youth - I used to sit in the van and deliver furniture, help hang the curtains. And you'd be hanging curtains in windows 20 foot high. So you certainly knew what the other people lived like. So, I don't know - maybe that had something to do

with it - where you could see there was more to life than living in a terraced house.

DS So you both in different ways have always been really conscious of how you feel where you are.

TD My theory is that most people live lives of fear and they make as few choices as possible. That's my observation.

RH As far as I'm concerned, the bravest thing we ever did was selling our house out in the country and buying this property in the first place. Now, that was brave. Building this was nothing compared to that. Nothing. Doesn't go into the same category at all, does it? When people say, 'You're very brave to go with this...'

TD People are coming at this as if it is a major event in the history of domestic Irish architecture. But the truth of it is it comes far more out of your sense of yourselves, out of what you want, and the architects picking up on that innate sense of what you want.

RH Yes. To us it is a very personal thing. I don't feel like I have stretched any boundaries or stretched any barriers by building this.

TD It seems to me that the interesting thing about this for architects is that this is an architect giving physical form to what they would sense from you and hear from you about the space you wanted.



TH They were very specific about us not being specific. They said, 'we would like you each to write a letter, and I don't want you at any stage to say "I want an airing cupboard", you're not allowed to mention anything specific. What you have to say is what you would like overall.' And that was very difficult, actually, because you had to sit down and say, 'God, if you don't want an airing cupboard, what am I supposed to write about?'. And to sit down and think, 'Actually what I want is light, and I want height, and I want...'

RH And I wanted somewhere I could go and watch Sky Sports.



TD They seemed to somehow have latched on by careful listening to a sense of the space you wanted to live in and then they brought their own ideas to bear on it. And they tried to give shape to it.

TD It has to be one of the tests for a working building that it can keep its own integrity and at the same time be hospitable to the messy, ordinary, everyday business of living and colours and fabrics and clothes and shoes left lying around and pots on the cooker and so on. It has to be robust enough to survive that.

DS A house is a mixture of ridiculous fears and ridiculous dreams. A house is such an intensely personal thing.

TH Because you use it so intensely.



DS I do a lot of extensions for people's houses. It's a tricky realm for an architect. You become part family counsellor or social worker. It's so much more complicated than, 'This is the living room and there's the bedroom.'. Every family that you visit thinks that everybody lives exactly as they do and so they don't tell you anything. And I sense that the way your lifestyle was going to be was different enough to warrant careful description and explanation.

TD It's about shaping desire, isn't it. But first people must be brought to a point where they can articulate their desires. And a lot of the time I think architects make people feel uncomfortable. People never settle down with their architects.





And so everything becomes kind of stiff, or the architect is able to go so far and either then wants to railroad in extra stuff or loses interest altogether and doesn't like the house anymore. And the understanding that there's a layer of occupation that goes on and will continue to go on once they're gone. And for yourselves as well, that in 10 years it'll seem like the same place and yet be totally different. The architect is brought in because he or she has a vision, or can shape one. It would be a shame if what you were tempted to do to a place obscured that or took from it. I think the balance works very well here. And in fact before seeing how you made this your own home, I would have had a fear that the

architecture was too severe and dominating. Whereas, in fact, it's not. It's surprisingly accommodating. And I think that's one of the great pleasures of the building

TH It is very accommodating.

TD I suppose accommodation should be, shouldn't it?

TH But accommodation very often isn't accommodating.

TD Do you find yourself looking at buildings in a different way?



RH Well, we appreciate architecture more, yeah. But there's not all that much of note around here anyway. But we've always looked at buildings, we've always said, 'That's an interesting corner, that's an interesting window.' It has to be said that not a day goes by without one of us, one of the girls or one of us saying, 'Look at that angle there now. Look at the light coming in there.' or you'd be over there saying, 'Look at the reflection.'. It's a constant...

TD Isn't that what we dream of, though, when we think of finding the ultimate house? The thing is to be constantly finding new things.

Dominic Stevens is an architect, author of recent book *Domestic*, and studio lecturer in UCD.

Theo Dorgan is a poet and broadcaster and head of Poetry Ireland.

Richard and Tricia Hudson live and run a restaurant in Navan.

All photographs except p.37 by Ros Kavanagh.



Hudson House plan and view

