

ALI GREHAN NOMINATES

THE TIMBER YARD

ARCHITECTS O'DONNELL + TUOMEY



The Timber Yard, Cork Street

by Ali Grehan

There is no doubt that there must be a significant shift in levels of expectation and ambition by the public, developers, professionals, and of course, planning authorities, when it comes to the routine built environment – the environment that most of us inhabit for most of the time. There is no dearth of design talent in Ireland and there are new generations waiting to take their place. Yet, new development often fails at the most fundamental levels - why is this? Why does our Minister for Education announce that school buildings do not need architects, who cost too much and can be replaced with engineers or surveyors? I gather from a conversation with the Minister that this was prompted by a local experience involving a small school extension. It is an inescapable point, that we experience the world at a scale of 1:1 and this experience can affect our view profoundly, which brings me to the site of my selected building.

Cork Street and its extension the Coombe Bypass, now re-named St Luke's Avenue, was part of a big idea, the insertion of a road network through the city adequate to meet the ever-increasing demands of the modern motoring citizens. A consequence was to splinter tightly woven city blocks and cast fragments adrift, promote dereliction and facilitate plot accumulation. In the case of the Coombe Bypass this is most poignantly expressed by what was once the stone entrance arch to St. Luke's Church, now a severed limb set in a plaster cast of new development. But in loss there is opportunity and here the opportunity presented was to make a new street, a modern street.

This opportunity has been realised incrementally but in some cases poorly, leading the current DCC Liberties Local Area Plan to assert that we must now "establish consistent scale and grain" along Cork Street. We must also be exceptionally careful about the buildings we permit here and everywhere in the city, in particular where there is a perception that any development is better than no development. But what is good architecture? My definition is architecture that is clear, generous, appropriately ordered and scaled, positive to

context and well crafted, all of which is demonstrated in the Timber Yard. This recently completed development of 47 apartments commissioned by Dublin City Council's Housing Department negotiates a challenging context, each edge presenting a different scale and character. The solid foundation of the plan, which makes a new public square and maintains tight street edges, is developed in section and elevation with great interest, the resulting clean forms sliding and cutting between their disparate neighbours, achieving the requisite transition in scale with elegance strength and clarity. Materials are restrained and of high quality. The value of the work that goes into making tightly budgeted, tightly planned buildings to complex briefs, while still producing spaces and places that are inventive and memorable must not be underestimated. It is this value that is embedded in the Timber Yard and it is this value that we must demand if we are to make a good city.

Ali Grehan

Ali Grehan is Dublin City Architect. Prior to her appointment in February 2008, she was Chief Architect for Ballymun Regeneration. Other public sector appointments include Fingal County Council and Luas. Educated at UCD and the North London Polytechnic, Grehan worked initially with Greenhill Jenner Architects London and Richard Hurley Architects in Dublin.



1 Timber Yard is a Dublin City Council scheme of 47 apartments designed by O'Donnell + Tuomey, to be completed in 2009