

O'DONNELL AND TUOMEY

In our new column architects write about those who inspire them, who in turn nominate others, and so on.

*RIBA*J editor Hugh Pearman starts by applauding O'Donnell and Tuomey, who next month reveal their choice.

TRUE TO THEIR roots as architects who, fresh out of college in the late 1970s, worked for Stirling Wilford on projects including the Stuttgart Staatsgalerie and the Tate's Clore Gallery, Sheila O'Donnell and John Tuomey are concerned with the architecture of solidity, meaning and place. Not for them the quest for transparency and glitter, nor the lure of random form-making. And although they emerged as architects during the era of post modernism, in their own work they took a purer line.

Back in Dublin at the start of Ireland's economic revival, the practice became the leading member of the collective practice Group 91, where like-minded young architects banded together to design the regeneration of the Temple Bar district. Group 91 adopted a sophisticated programme of selected refurbishment, rebuild and the threading-through of new public space. Their own buildings there – the Irish film centre and Gallery of Photography – take their place in this sequence of spaces and narrow streets. The revival of Temple Bar was one of the great urbanistic success stories of the early 1990s.

Since then the practice has continued its highly-crafted approach in such buildings (among many others) as the tightly urban, super-rational Ranelagh Multidenominational School in Dublin: the evocative timber-clad forms of the Letterfrack Furniture College in Galway; the hovering mass of the somewhat Aalto-ish Stirling Prize-shortlisted Lewis Glucksman Gallery at University College Cork; the near-Brutalist perforated concrete tower of the Sean O'Casey Community Centre in Dublin (*RIBA*J, October 2008); the newly-completed riverside Lyric Theatre in Belfast; and a quiverful of fine Irish houses including the geologically-inspired 'sleeping giant' house at Killiney (*RIBA*J, March 2007).

Now the practice is building in London: the large students' centre at the London School of Economics with its angled, gravity-defying perforated brick walls.

O'Donnell and Tuomey exemplify the business of real, in-the-bones architecture. There is nothing remotely superficial or formulaic about what they do. Every project is thought through from first principles. A clear intelligence and strong sensibility guides their work, and it looks very much like work that will last.