

# A winning IDEA

When building their own house became an exhausting process, this family found an unusual solution to the challenge

WORDS AND PHOTOGRAPHY *Barbara Egan/Reportage*

**HOME PROFILE**  
**THE OWNERS**  
 Eimear Cullen, 37, a teacher, and her husband Dermot, 39, a sales manager, and their three children, daughter Blaithín, three, and two-year-old twins Ciarán and Eanna  
**THE PROPERTY**  
 Four-bedroom self-build house in Co Galway, Ireland  
**PRICE** £200,000 (site and build)  
**WHAT IT'S WORTH NOW**  
 £200,000

**LIVING ROOM**  
 A generous corner sofa that comfortably seats the entire family is the centrepiece of the light and spacious living room. A warm neutral paint on the walls and flooring in beautiful oiled and smoked oak make the space feel cosy



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**HALLWAY** (*right*)  
A striking wallpaper, Eco by Tektura, sets the tone in the hall and accentuates the height of the ceiling. The dark wood console table creates a handy place to organise essentials, like keys and post

**KITCHEN** (*far right*)  
The couple wanted a square table to seat eight, which proved a tough call. They eventually found this Pinetum Como dining table and chairs in McDermott's Furniture in Co Mayo. The stunning mural is by illustrator Orlagh Murphy

**ENTRANCE** (*below*)  
The exterior is ultra modern but retains the warm, welcoming feel of Eimear's family farmhouse, which still stands nearby



As a child I played in the field where our house now stands, as it was part of our family farm. I always loved the idea of building a home and raising a family in the place where I grew up in the west of Ireland. We also had the option of building on Dermot's family farm further north in County Tyrone, but I won the toss on this one! Here we're close to Dermot's workplace and my parents live next door. When Dermot's away travelling for work it's great to have my family so close by. We both worked at Galway Crystal, on the shores of Galway Bay, a company that makes traditionally crafted crystal, and Dermot still works there.

We wanted to design a home tailored specifically to us and bought lots of books and magazines for ideas. Dermot was taken with a wet room he'd seen in a hotel and thought it made good use of space. I'd set my heart on a 'snug', a room we planned to use for peace and quiet with lots of bookshelves.

The layout of the house was dictated by the site, which is elevated and sunny with lovely views all around, so we wanted lots of big windows. We took all our ideas to an architect who put it all together, and came up with a few more possibilities, such as adding high ceilings to increase the feeling of space.

The whole build took two years. Dermot was project manager and put a huge amount of time into it. We got the home we wanted, but he'd never do it again as it was very time consuming with a full-time job. We were both exhausted by the end. The house

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**STYLE TIP**  
Woods with a striking grain bring texture and interest to a sleek, modern kitchen





**SNUG** (above)

The shelving was designed by Linda, the couple's interior designer, and was built by a local carpenter. It provides much-needed storage but also acts as a piece of wall art that changes constantly with the different displays

**MASTER BEDROOM**

(below) An oversized headboard, covered in a patterned fabric from Kobe, puts the bed centre stage

*'I'd set my heart on a snug – a room we planned to use for peace and quiet, with lots of bookshelves,' says Eimear*

was structurally complete but we just didn't know where we were going to find the time and energy to decide on all the finishes and furnishings. Then one evening, while driving home from work, Dermot had a 'light bulb' moment and came up with the solution.

He was flicking between radio stations and heard a call for volunteers to have their home designed by an interior designer and filmed for television. We filled in the application form and were eventually selected to appear in the self-build category of the show!

Two designers made a presentation to us with suggested wall and floor treatments, as well as

mood boards. We chose Linda Moffitt of Vision Interiors. She had listened to everything we'd asked for and produced a carefully thought-out design.

Everything had to be chosen in the eight weeks before filming started and then all the fitting and furnishing would be done during the five days of filming. We'd had a small headstart as we'd already decided on the kitchen before Linda came on board. But we still had to rush about looking in showrooms and making non-stop decisions. For each item we needed, Linda would pick out two or three options and then give us the name and location of the showrooms she'd seen them in. We would take a look and decide which option we were going to go with. It was wonderful to have Linda as a constant guide – I don't know how we would have finished the house without her.

The week of filming was really intense. It felt as if it would never end and the crews worked until midnight every night. The big surprise was the mural in the kitchen. It was Linda's idea and it was lovely to have something extra that we hadn't planned and designed ourselves. A group of people were then brought into the house to do a critique for the programme while we sat outside in the broadcasting van and listened in – a very strange experience!

We moved in just a few weeks after the filming finished. All in all it was quite a journey. But the end result is fantastic. We love the sense of



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### BATHROOM

Toning neutrals make for a restful scheme. The large mirror over the bath is from We Do Art. The walls are painted in Sandstone Palette by Colortrend

## OUR CHRISTMAS TRADITIONS

Both our families have the same tradition of buying a new board game every year; our parents would buy a game like Cluedo or Monopoly, and we would spend time together as a family playing it. We both love this custom and would like to keep it going in our own family but with a three year old and two-year-old twins, it's not so easy to keep their attention as yet!

space – the windows bring in so much light and the open-plan layout is calm and peaceful, even with three young children haring about!

This year on Christmas Day there will be lots of lounging about in pyjamas. We usually open our presents first thing and then Dermot spends the rest of the morning figuring out how to put the toys together! My family will come over for lunch and Mum is on standby with her expertise on preparing red cabbage and brandy butter, both of which she does better than anyone else I know. I think it's going to be our best Christmas yet. 

FOR STORE DETAILS SEE 'WHERE TO BUY'  
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