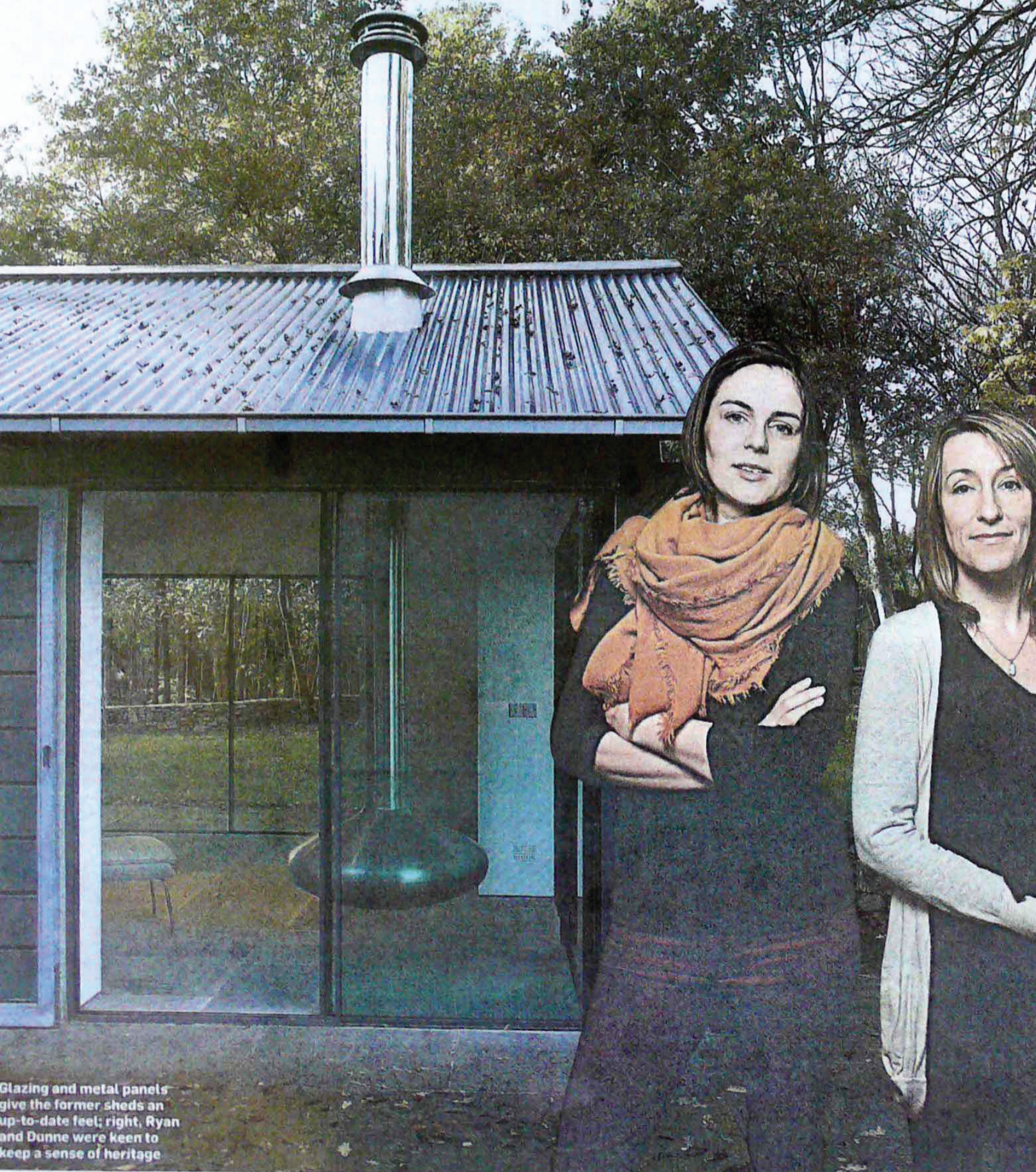




SHACK TO THE FUTURE

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When is a shed not a shed? When its rotting ruins are turned into a sleek modern living space, writes **Dara Flynn**

The humble farm shed isn't usually associated with forward-thinking, contemporary architecture. Rotting agricultural buildings — sheds, outhouses and lean-tos — tend to be the first thing to feel the force of the wrecking ball whenever the rural period home they adjoin is selected for renovation.

This wasn't an option for Grainne Dunne and Nicola Ryan, of Dublin-based Studio Red Architects, when they tackled their latest project: a Victorian lakeside farmhouse in a wooded setting in Co Clare.

To a passer-by, the rusting, boxy, green-tinged corrugated sheds leaning to the gable of this 19th-century farmhouse would have gone unnoticed, or even been considered an eyesore, but to the client and homeowner they held significant importance.

"They had sentimental value for her. Her father had used them as a workshop when she was a little girl and she had fond memories of playing in the sheds and spending time with her dad," Dunne says.

"They were very old and had fallen into disrepair, so the client knew they would have to do something about them."

The sheds didn't have to stay, but an echo of their presence would have to be retained or recreated. The solution was to design a clever, functional space that would serve as a modern addition to the farmhouse.

"The challenge was to create a structure simple in form, modern in function and imbued with a sense of heritage that respected the farmhouse and the client's childhood memories.

"The new living space is a contrast to the original part of the
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Glazing and metal panels give the former sheds an up-to-date feel; right, Ryan and Dunne were keen to keep a sense of heritage



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house, open to the garden and with a view to the lake," Ryan says. "But the most important aspect was to respect the fact that the sheds had been there. We came up with a new build to echo them in some way, like a new chapter."

Having studied at Dublin Institute of Technology's Bolton Street campus, and after living abroad, Dunne and Ryan set up Studio Red in 2008 with an emphasis on quality detailing and constant reference to buildings' environments. When it comes to modern updates to buildings in pastoral settings, they have form.

"A lot of our work is in rural areas, and we have explored the language of agricultural buildings in quite a few projects. This was one that really lent itself to the use of agricultural materials," Dunne says.

Modern additions to period homes can be awkward housemates when badly juxtaposed. To avoid creating an oppressively brash extension, Dunne and Ryan include materials that create a utilitarian feel and recall the past.

The materials were inspired by the farmhouse sheds and those on local agricultural buildings. A corrugated roof is the strongest reminder of the past, but well-considered contemporary interventions ground it in the modern day.

The old sheds were solid, but the new building has high-spec glazing, providing views of the woodland and lake. Sliding metal panels can be pulled back and forth to change the views, the lighting levels and the sense of enclosure. The system is modular. Underfloor oil-fired heating was installed and there is a simple new bathroom.

One of the sheds had a single corner open to the elements, so Studio Red echoed this with a corner-to-corner glass detail, connected by a barely perceptible metal frame.

The clients were as passionate as their architects about this type of obsessive attention to detail. "They are the sort of people who value that level of detail and they grasped the concept really well. They knew high-quality materials were crucial for tying it all together," Dunne says.

The same level of precision was required of the main contractor, Co Tipperary-based Fergus Collins. "We were lucky to have a contractor who worked with us, not against us," Ryan says.

"Things were a challenge rather than a problem for them. We were asking for a high level of precision and we were communicating that. We feel they really achieved it."

The clients were keen that the materials and labour used reflected the locality. Doolin stone from Co Clare was chosen for its warmth and colour tone, and was seamlessly carried out on to the



PHILIP LAUTERBACK



A suspended woodburner was installed to make a statement of modernity

terrace beyond, as well as inside to the farmhouse.

A local stonemason was hired to build a wall. "This lovely, elderly man was on the site every day for months, laying one stone on top of the next," Ryan says. External walls are clad in sand cement render — another nod to the vernacular technique — and inside a special effort was made with the interior finish "to make up for the fact

that the old sheds were disappearing", Dunne says.

Sections of timber panelling, seating and storage in beautiful iroko wood are the architects' modern response to the tongue-and-groove timber that lined the old buildings.

The strongest statement of modernity is the Fireorb, a suspended wood-burning fire in the corner of the living space. "It was made-to-measure and

imported from Chicago fabricator," Ryan says. The clients chose a brushed stainless-steel finish that suits the metal detailing in the building. Covered outdoor log storage was required, so a recess on the end gable closest to the Fireorb was integrated into the design and acts a rustic motif.

To ensure maximum success of the design, Studio Red was asked to partially refit the kitchen — the first room in the

farmhouse where guests are greeted as they leave the "shed" space.

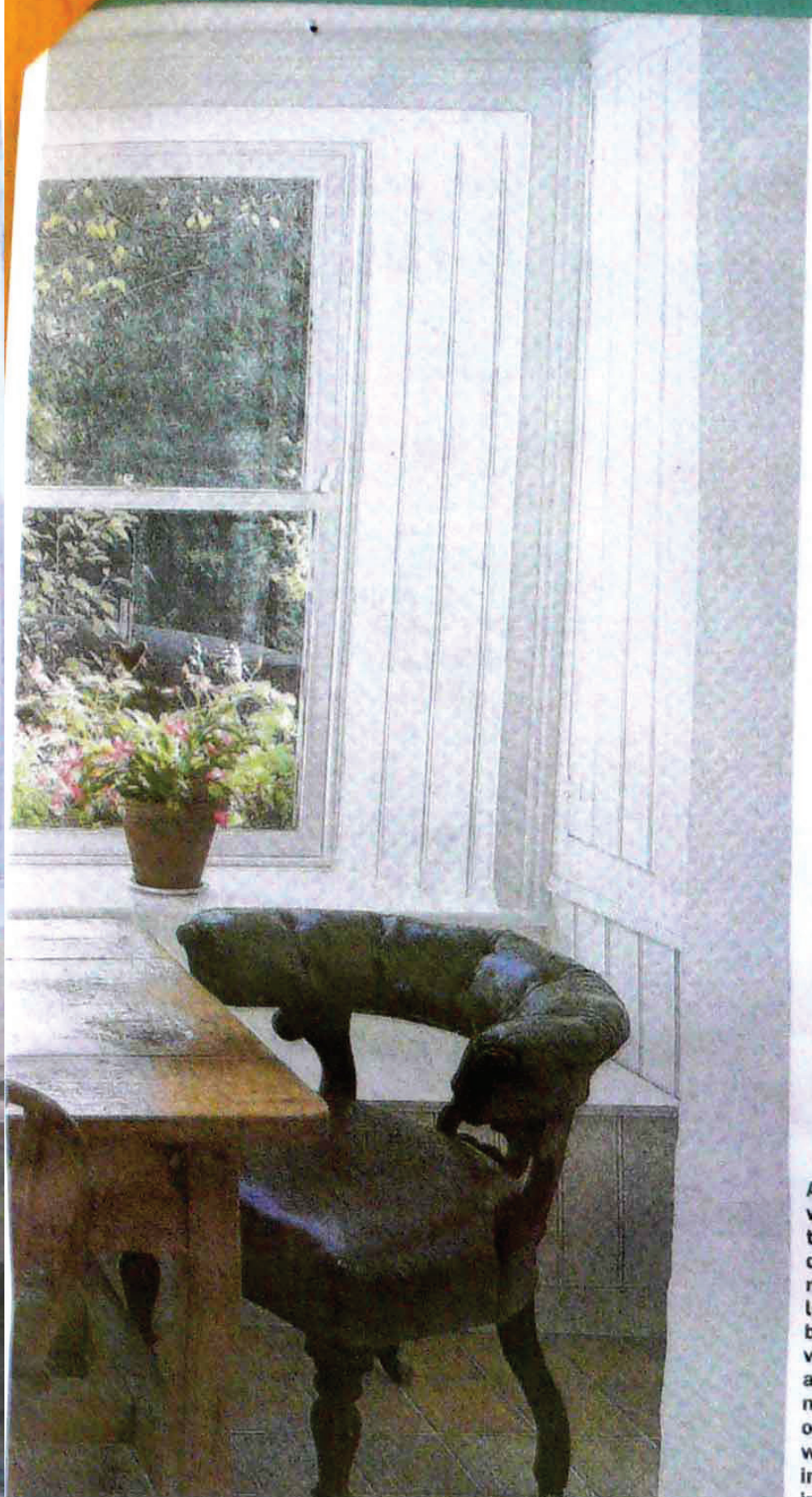
A utility room was removed to provide visual links between the kitchen and new building and a dining area with views to the lake was inserted. Units were added to the kitchen, as were storage seating and joinery. The old and the new elements were linked with glazing.

"It had to be a delicate connection, nothing too clashing," Dunne says. "We wanted whoever uses the space to understand the journey from old to new as they move from the kitchen to the new building."

The key to the farmhouse, completed in May, is the correct balance of contrast and unity between the old and the new. The new building makes enough hat tips to history for it to be a friendly ghost of its former self, yet it's obvious that the "shed" addition is by 21st-century hands.

"It was always going to be sharp and modern, but echoing what was there originally. We hope it sits into the landscape and alongside the house, and looks as though it has always belonged there," Dunne says.

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A dining area was created in the farmhouse during the revamp; inset, left, the sheds before the work began and, below, now, with an outdoor woodstore incorporated into them

