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Shade panels like the oval vitrines complement the strong lines of the custom-built L-shaped island. High-back chairs, sofas and settees feature clean lines and attention to the natural materials. Rather than use antique art frames, mirrors made to size complement the painted and polished



The light fixtures from a complete remodeling job, carefully coordinated to maintain the height. The chandelier is Waterford



Although based in the US, the owners of this Dublin townhouse return frequently to see family and friends. On a visit a couple of years ago, they decided to invest in a city centre period house they could call home on future trips. Used to living in big spaces, they were confident that with the help of an interior designer, they could adjust to the narrowly proportioned layout of this classic Victorian two-storey over basement. The brief: retain the interior's period character while addressing the needs of a family used to smart-casual American-style family living. When the services of Helen Roden and Joe Ensko of Merrion Square Interiors were engaged, plans to extend the basement level to accommodate a kitchen/living/dining area and redevelop a one-bed nook in the garden were already underway with the architect Daniel Coyle. "It was the ideal point to implement the plans already agreed with the client," according to Helen Roden. "The architect tweaked the layout to dovetail with the interior plans - where to create storage, how the seating arrangements would work, the positioning of electrics, plumbing and other services." The challenge to create a contemporary family living space downstairs and a more traditional arrangement upstairs which would work well for entertaining is familiar to Roden and Ensko. "So many families live in period houses in Ireland - the trick is to be able to combine day-to-day living with the classic layouts that to this day represent the best configuration for entertaining."

The outcome - a series of beautifully furnished interconnecting rooms at hall floor level, three comfortable bedrooms upstairs and a smart and practical living space at basement level - is a perfect example of an effective professional collaboration. Detailed mood boards and floor plans left nothing to chance - sample finishes were made up, fabric and flooring swatches and paint shades specified. "It helped that our clients were so decisive," says Roden. "Having been through this process before with an

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Elements in the living/dining area include lighting, which adds and lifts her dining chair, sleek dining chairs, and a triple-height island, which serves as a focal point of the space. A wall of vitrines links the modern family space to the naturally modern details of the park.



The sliding opening with oak, pine and white ash is part of the concealed storage wall. The shadow gap at the top is mirrored and oak.

Opposite top: One of the interconnecting reception rooms on the hall level with channel upholstered modular seating, ottoman by Collection Pierre and chandelier by Louis Kennedy for Tipperary Crystal. The painted wooden cabinet conceals a television. Opposite bottom: The hall, the most improved space in the house, according to the designers, is painted in Colorbond 8221W, a neutral shade used on woodwork throughout the house.

This page, clockwise from top: Elegant sliding doors in the family living space are identical to those of the news across the courtyard; the dry bar with fridge below; in the family sitting room, curtains are ceiling-mounted and the shadow-gap mirrored - both details enhance the illusion of height. The sofa and chairs are by Truque Bobois, cushions covered in fabric by Bouzillac and Pierre Frey add bright accents to the white modular seating.

Note: All joinery was commissioned from Irish suppliers by Merrion Square Interiors. Floors throughout the house are travertine by M&G and wide plank walnut by Ebony & Co. Merrion Square Interiors, 62 Merrion Square, Dublin 2, 01 676 1925. www.merrionsquareinteriors.com

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The guest bedroom has a French feel with its arched mirrors and pretty Pavilion. Research the wallpaper by Colefax and Fowler.

The gilded bed, the chairs, the spin bedcovers are from Laura Ashley.



A walnut bed in the master bedroom conceals a television in the base. The Jersey wallpaper is by Colefax and Fowler.



Top: The Italian-style mirror was designed to fit. Inset: The bedside lamps and tables are Italian. Left: Embroidered silk floral curtains are by Fadini Borghi. Above right: The bathroom is travertine with Durax fittings; the window blind is fine white linen.

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American interior designer, they knew how to make the relationship work for everyone's benefit. Like any relationship, it is important for the client to be able to relinquish some control and for the designer to be able to compromise. "The key is not to get bogged down and to make the process a pleasant one. There should be no nasty surprises," says Ensko. "It's crucial that the client enjoys the experience. We see our role as supportive while taking over the burden of the nuts and bolts." Essentially problem-solvers, interior designers can often arrive at solutions faster and cheaper - where to find space for the three golf bags,

grand piano and a suite of luggage; how to fit wardrobes into impossibly small bedrooms; ways to work a utility room into an already spatially-compromised ground floor. Merriem Square Interiors charge an initial design fee which includes the proposed scheme, detailed budget and mood boards. Once the client decides to proceed, there is no further charge - all joinery, furniture and fabric includes the interior design charge, making it a very transparent process. "This house is the result of just two meetings," says Roden. It just goes to show, success is all in the planning. ■