

Glencullen House, Ireland

Fitzpatrick & Mays

A new certified passive house in the Wicklow Mountains sets a striking example for passive buildings in Ireland. Shunning conventional passive design in favour of a modernism-inspired approach, the house fits neatly into its mountain landscape.



The setting, high in the Dublin mountains, certainly posed some unique challenges: frequently knocked-out telephone and electricity lines, low water pressure, and long periods of inaccessibility in winter. Nevertheless, the client Peter wouldn't live anywhere else.

"It is a bit like being in love with a person," he says. "You go for it with your heart and use your head to sort out possible obstacles."

Peter commissioned Sam Mays of architects Fitzpatrick & Mays for the project. In terms of design, the house is a striking example of contemporary modernist-inspired architecture, but one that remains visually hidden. "I didn't want it to stick out a mile," he says.

Contractor Ballyview constructed the house with single-leaf, externally insulated walls. Upstairs, Ballyview built the walls with masonry blocks and externally insulated them with a 200mm EPS system from Sto.

"There was a massive, massive amount of care and attention," says Ballyview's Barry Minnock.

Minnock partially attributes the success of the job to the slowdown in the construction industry. The readily available skilled workforce allowed him to select his own team. He says the whole team understood the importance of getting to grips with passive house design. "All the guys appreciated there could be a future in it," he says.



Architectural Statement **Sam Mays, Fitzpatrick & Mays** **Architects**

The client had been living in a bungalow on this wonderful site in the mountains for 15 years. He came to us to see if it could be upgraded and extended. All our schemes, however, rapidly ran into the stumbling block of the old bungalow itself. It was poorly positioned, poorly oriented and poorly built. Despite its beautiful location on a south-facing slope it managed to be cold, dark and ignore the view. We all agreed that it made sense to start again and design a new house.

The client's brief was for a "conversation with the mountain". We let the landscape itself dictate the terms of this conversation – almost as if the site itself was designing the building that it wanted to harbour. The result was a two-storey house facing south across the valley to the sun and the views.

I told the client that it would be mad to build a new house that wasn't a passive house. What convinced him was the fact that a passive house has to be thought through thoroughly. The result is a better designed and built house as well as one whose running costs are next to nothing.

Having decided to make this a passive house, we were determined that the design shouldn't be compromised. This is easier said than done, as the technical aspects of passive house design are demanding. We wanted the classic virtues of space, proportion, light and views to remain paramount. We felt that a house has to be more than a (thermally efficient) machine. It has to be a beautiful place to live, above all. The house as built is actually very close to our original pre-passive house design sketches.

The whole process was deeply absorbing and the experience has changed the way I think about buildings. The success of the project was helped enormously by the commitment and cooperation of both the client and contractor.

Project Name:

Glencullen House, Wicklow Mountains, Ireland

Architect:

Fitzpatrick & Mays

Main Contractor:

Ballyview

System Installer:

Ballyview

Sto Products:

StoTherm Classic external wall insulation system

Photography by Bnew Photography