

Inspirational Homes

Green-Door Leitrim opens its doors for the first time

Jo Lewis

OVER 600 PEOPLE descended on Leitrim during the weekend of 9-11th September for the first ever Green-Door Leitrim Weekend. On one of the wettest weekends of the year the county was opened up to people looking for examples of sustainable building and living. The hugely popular weekend proved that Leitrim has a great amount to offer in terms of exceptional architecture and design, and examples of alternative and future-proof ways of building.

Inspirational Homes Leitrim was set up in 2010 to research and document the existing alternative and sustainable buildings in Leitrim. The aim was to find good examples of designs, materials, and technologies being used in the county, examples that could inspire builders, designers, and planners interested in future-proof building and living.

The research found that Leitrim has a wealth of homes tucked away in its landscape. Some are modest extensions and renovations of old cottages, while others are ambitious modern buildings. However, the one thing they have in common, is that all of the buildings' owners share a desire to live and build in harmony with the landscape and



the rural way of life around them.

www.inspirationalhomes.ie, the website, was set up to share the information gathered. Its aim is to show real examples of homes and buildings and to document the owners' honest feelings about the alternative ways of living, new and old materials, and the technology that they have. This includes information about problematic issues as well as successes.

The project *Inspirational Homes Leitrim* is endorsed by Duncan Stewart who launched the website in Dublin in June 2011: 'There should be an Inspirational Homes in each county'.

The event 'Green-Door Leitrim' was created to showcase to the public some of the varied and alternative ways of building and

living on the website. Over thirty home and building owners generously allowed public access for one day. The variety of structures was huge, from temporary yurts to modern office buildings.

The emphasis was on giving examples of sustainability and future-proofing for existing homes and for any future builds in Leitrim; to show and to encourage people to look at the alternatives in terms of design, materials and technology as well as different lifestyles. Just as important as that was the fact





that all the buildings chosen had creative elements, and personal journeys and stories, attached to them. Thus we knew that meeting with the owners would be very much a part of the weekend.

The two days saw 34 homes and buildings open to the public. People were free to visit and look around the homes, meet the owners and also, in some cases, the architect and the builders involved.

To complement the Green-Door weekend there were exhibitions, a debate, organised tours, a film evening, and a children's workshop, all especially curated for the weekend.

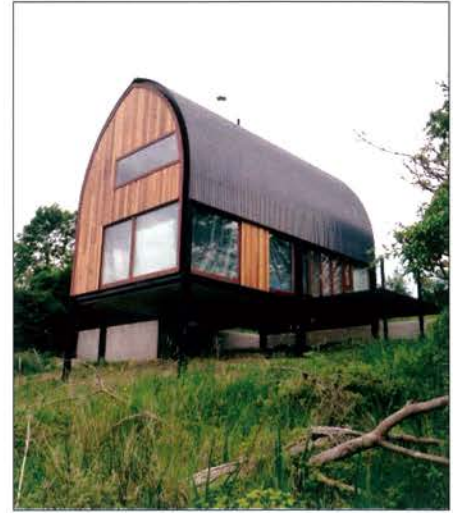
The opening debate at the Dock set the scene for the issues that were to be raised over the weekend, with a distinguished panel set to discuss the topic: 'How can architects help to make rural living more sustainable?' Writer and art critic, Gemma Tipton chaired the evening, allowing the speakers to develop their ideas and then bringing in questions

from the floor. Architect and designers Gordon Ryan, Christoph Walter and Colin Bell, and Leitrim's Chief Planning officer Ciarán Tracy, made up the panel. Each gave a presentation touching on issues such as the importance of planning for sustainability in any future rural developments, the importance of the use of local materials and skills, as well as more specific issues such as compost toilets and planning regulations.

One of the highlights of the weekend was the unique opportunity to get an architect's tour of a public building. Eamon McCarney gave two tours of the Manorhamilton North West Health Board building, Sean Moylan from the Office of Public Works gave tours of the Agriculture, Food, and Fisheries Building, and Louise Volschenk took people through the conservation and renovation of the Dock. Architects also gave tours of private buildings and homes: Colin Bell took people through the design of Gabriel Toolan's offices; Dominic Stevens and Thomas Flynn gave tours of their own homes; and Ghislain Luthers and Dougal McMenamin were at homes they had designed.

The Dock featured photographs of Leitrim architecture by Paul O'Connor and an Alice Lyons' poem about the renovation of the Dock.

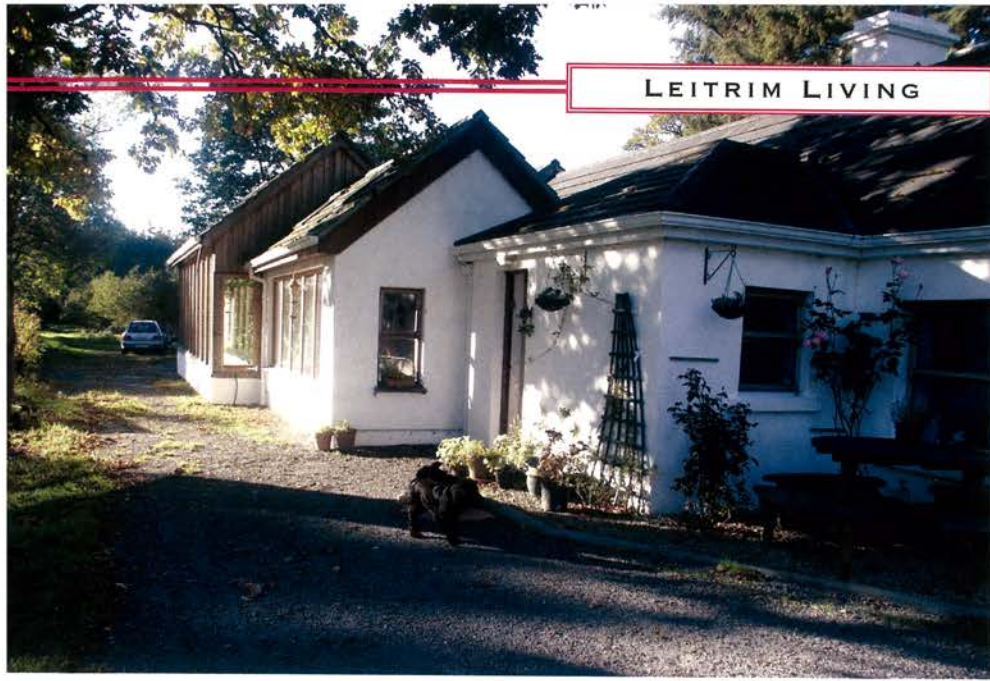
The artist James Kinsella was at the Dock on the Saturday and the Leitrim Sculpture Centre on the Sunday. His work 'The Way



that we Live' was an interactive project building a house made from books. Visitors were asked to select a book to be a part of the structure and were also asked to reflect and then illustrate their idea of their perfect 'home'. These musings will be collated and used by James to further his project.

Saturday evenings' film night in the cinemobile was very popular. Dominic Stevens showed a selection of fantastic buildings in films: 'At Home In The Movies' was curated especially for Green-Door. Garbage Warrior was then screened, a movie about a renegade architect in America battling to get permission to build unconventional homes from recycled materials.

The Leitrim Sculpture Centre saw James Kinsella's 'home' completed and the tin-roof put on erected at the end of the weekend. Also, sections of the exhibition, 'Architecture at the Edge', which was originally created for the Venice Biennale 2010, was brought from Galway



and displayed here. These were photographic and physical examples of Taylor Architects' recent work which brought the themes of the weekend together.

Kevin Callaghan and Natalia Beylis organised two workshops for children based on the traditional building material of Leitrim: MUD! The mudslinging workshop was very popular and of course messy...but it was great to find out about the properties of mud.

Over 2500 visits to homes and exhibitions were made over the weekend. An estimated 600 people took part altogether, which bears testament to the fact that there is a demand for more information about alternative

technology, materials, ways of building and living. This weekend offered many examples, however, most crucially; it offered people the opportunity to meet, network, and chat and to get genuine inspiration from each other.

The IHL website is by no means comprehensive...there are many, many more inspirational homes in Leitrim and the website will carry on expanding and developing to reflect that. The site allows for people to continue to look at the featured homes and also to contact the owners with questions. It is also now hosting a number of forums for people to develop ideas together on-line.



Inspirational Homes was funded by Leitrim Development Company and Leitrim County Council. We would like to thank all the homeowners for their generosity in opening their homes, the volunteers including the builders and architects who gave up their time to help make the weekend run smoothly.

Thanks also to the website and design team of in-Tandem and Double Dutch, John Map for all the mapping, photographers Susan Gadsby and Tommy Weir, Mike Harris for all his encouragement and all in the IHL steering group.



Jamie Murray & Martin Raftery of Fenagh Handball Club, winners of the Junior B All-Ireland Final 2011



Country Markets Mohill celebrating 25th anniversary Pat Morrow, Petra Gaffey, Peggy McGuinness, Mary Higgins, Maura Faughnan, Bridget Canning & Rose Keegan

**PHOTOS:
THÉRÈSE FOY**

...snippets...snippets...



Left: Anna May Dinneny who retired after 50 years as a sacristan in Drumreilly Church

Right: Staff of Gannons celebrating Bridie Duignan's employment for 60 years. Noeleen Casey, Barbara Niblock, proprietor, Bridie Duignan & Angela McWeeny

