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post
OifiganPhois

A woman with short blonde hair, wearing a black fur coat, sunglasses, and high heels, stands in front of a shop window. She is holding a small white card in her right hand. The shop window behind her has a sign that says "CUSTOMER" and displays various items. The background is a green wall with a white sign that says "post" and "OifiganPhois".

LABOUR PAINS

**STOBHAN O'CONNOR'S
LIFE AS A CELEBRITY
ON THE DOLE**



THE EUROPEANS

Achim Gottstein and Catriona Duggan are talented architects who've shown they can tackle any project from a multi-million euro luxury hotel to a falling-down house. Edited by **Mary O'Sullivan**. Photography by **Tony Gavin**

People don't have many positive things to say about our boom years, but there's no doubt that there was one definite upside — the way our hotels changed, and for the better.

It was as if hoteliers finally took on board our weather, realized that wishful thinking was never going to make it tropical, and instead they embraced the whole notion of providing relaxation that was not weather dependant, in the form of the spa break. One of the best, most state-of-the-art spas is at the Europe Hotel and Resort, and it consistently wins industry awards worldwide. It's a stunning addition to the Killarney hotel's offering, a wonderful contemporary mix of stone and glass, yet completely in sympathy with the landscape in which it's set — on the edge of Lough Leane, in full view of the spectacular McGillicuddy's Reeks.

It's such a grown-up creation — which has won many architectural awards too — that it's hard to believe that its design is that of two architects who were still in their 20s when they began work on the project — Achim Gottstein and Catriona Duggan, now married. It helped, of course, that Achim, despite his name, was steeped in the psyche of Killarney, having grown up just a stone's

throw from the hotel, in Fossa. Achim is the son of a German couple who came here in the 60s; his dad came to work with Liebherr, a German company which had set up in the area. "My dad arrived in '62, my mum in '65, they met in Ireland. There was a German school in Killarney as there were a lot of Germans in the area, and my mum came to teach there," Achim recalls.

Five years after arriving here, Achim's father set up a building contracting business. Growing up around building sites, Achim became fascinated by the process — how a set of drawings led to the finished building. "I was exposed to the assembly of buildings from a young age. I was more fascinated by the design aspect, and from about 10, I decided I wanted to become an architect — it was a natural progression for me," he says.

Catriona, who was born in Belfast, opted for architecture because she loved art and design, but she also became passionate about the work. She studied in Queens, but spent her year out in Dublin, and on graduation she came south to live.

The couple met in a practice in which they both worked; Achim set up on his own and a year later, he asked Catriona to join him. They won the Europe commission in 2005, and it was



'It was in very poor repair when I bought it, Everything was lopsided, everything had to be straightened'

while working on the spa that romance blossomed. "Our practice hadn't started that long when we were asked to submit a design brief. Two 20-something architects — we didn't think we were in the running at all," Catriona says, while Achim adds with a laugh, "trusting us to dig a three-storey hole in front of a five-storey hotel."

Three architectural practices were invited to submit designs and Gottsteins were, according to Achim, the smallest company by 'a country mile'. Liebherr, the company that owns the hotel, is enormous — they have 30,000 employees worldwide. They took a huge risk entrusting their multi-million-euro budget to the couple, but they obviously loved the design Achim and Catriona and their team of talented architects submitted, which was informed by the imagery, colours and forms of the surrounding landscape. Since then,

the couple have continued to work extensively with Liebherr, while also working on a diverse range of projects. These include schools and residential projects — both new builds and remodelling and extending protected structures. And in sharp contrast to the five-star hotel that is the Europe, they recently completely work on a new hostel, also in Killarney. It's called the Haven at Neptune, and it too is state-of-the-art and contemporary, yet in keeping with its more industrial location in the centre of Killarney.

While Achim speaks like a Kerryman, it's obvious that his German heritage informs the bilingual 30-something's approach to his work. "I do feel German in a certain sense. There's probably a German-ness in how we go about some aspects of our practice — the rigorous approach to our design process, our detailing and craftsmanship; we try to achieve standards that are synonymous with German design," Achim notes.

In Germany, 90pc of buildings are designed by architects; astonishingly, here in Ireland, it's only about 10pc and there's no doubt that a good architect can revolutionise a building — especially a home — with the creative ability to solve light, space and storage problems. RIAI Simon Open Door is a brilliant

Left Lotte Gottstein in the courtyard, which is full of interesting plants, many added to mark special occasions

Above Achim and Catriona Gottstein with their adorable daughters, in the front reception room. The Carrara marble mantelpiece is original, while the windows and shutters were completely restored. The walls are painted grey. 'We had a lighter colour on the walls but it felt dark and dreary, the dark walls feel richer, and more cosy,' Achim notes

Top right The dining room has double doors to the courtyard. The floor is German oak and the furniture is mid-century, which the couple love

Middle right The kitchen units are by German company Alno, while the table and bench were designed by the Gottsteins and made in Killarney by Omega Furniture

Bottom right The couple had to knock down the return area and had it completely rebuilt. They added a sliding door to enable Achim to store his classic car

way of checking out just how valuable an architect can be. Both Achim and Catriona, who are based at 42 Dawson Street, are taking part this year.

This is a project in which architects offer their services free on Saturday, May 9, and Sunday, May 10. For €55 — which is donated to the Simon Community — people with design dilemmas can have an hour-long consultation. "People present their situation; it's not about giving them a design solution in an hour, it's about giving them meaningful direction, and guidance," Achim says.

And, of course, it wasn't so long ago that Achim and Catriona were coming up with design solutions for themselves. The year 2005 was a big one for the couple; quite apart from the Europe contract and the romance, it was also the year Achim bought their house in Dublin 3; he chose it because it's within walking distance of town and the office, and it was within his budget. He bought it before they became an item, and now not only are he and Catriona a couple, but they have two delightful little girls, Lotte, three and a half, and Lucia, 11 months. "It was going to be a stopgap, but circumstances changed, the market changed, it became more permanent and we've adapted over the years, rather than relocate," Catriona



says. Fortunately, it's quite a substantial house, but they had to do a huge amount of work to make it comfortable. "The house, which dates from 1905, was in very poor repair when I bought it," Achim says. "Everything was lopsided, everything had to be straightened. We rebuilt the house, fixed the subsidence, and underpinned the whole house." The rebuilding was comprehensive. "We had to take off the roof, take off the return, take out all the floors and put it all back together again," Achim explains.

They kept the original structure and the configuration of the rooms remains as it was. However, while keeping features like the lofty reception rooms, and the lovely mantelpieces, they've given the house a contemporary edge.

Needless to mention, given both Achim and Catriona's recognition of German quality, a lot of the features are from Germany, including the Dura limestone on some of the floors and the Alno kitchen units. However, the kitchen table and bench were made by Omega Furniture in Killarney; the old Kerry character is never far away in this householder. ■

See gottsteinarchitects.com To register for Simon Open Door, see simonopendoor.ie