



Get expert advice on your home and help Simon at the same time

The Royal Institute of the Architects of Ireland (RIAI) and the Simon Communities of Ireland recently launched the sixth annual RIAI Simon Open Door Weekend campaign.

People in Sligo can log on to www.simonopendoor.ie to book a one-hour consultation with the RIAI architect of their choice in return for a €50 donation to the Simon Communities of Ireland. All architects give their time for free and every cent raised goes directly to the charity. Due to the phenomenal nationwide success of the campaign since it was launched in 2004, for the first time ever the Simon Open Door initiative will now span an entire weekend, taking place on Saturday and Sunday, 24th and 25th April 2010. Trevor McDaid from Hamilton Young Architects is one of the architects participating in Sligo. This is the fourth year that he has taken part in the Simon Open Door initiative.

"The RIAI Simon Open Door Day gives architects a chance to help an extremely worthy cause while also meeting with homeowners who might not otherwise have considered meeting with an architect. It is a lovely, informal way to meet local people and talk about their homes and simultaneously raising money for some of the most vulnerable people in our community," he said.

The theme of this year's campaign is low cost interventions which help families create a home that helps them cope with their changing needs, as well as their bills. Architects call this process 'future-proofing.' The Simon Open Door Weekend provides people in Sligo with an opportunity to change the way they look at their home and make more of what they have by evaluating the way the space is used in relation to their needs. Architects from all over the county have come together to contribute to a list of Top Tips for future-proofing homes, which include assessing furniture lay-outs and colour schemes, installing insulation and finding ways to maximise storage. All are available from the Simon Open Door website.

The following are some of the top tips on how to get the most out of your home with simple, low-cost interventions:

● Look to rearrange your entire ground floor- if you extend, you might just end up with dark, unusable rooms in the centre of your home.

- Do not assume that first floor rooms can only function as bedrooms. Using a bright upstairs room in winter might be just the thing to help you through dark days.
- Get extra high kitchen wall cabinets, wardrobes and shelves that extend up to your ceiling. You gain additional shelving, it looks impressive and you reduce visible clutter.
- Insulate your attic- This can reduce bills and make your home more comfortable to live in. It pays for itself within two years.
- Fit another lagging jacket over your hot water cylinder to half the heat loss for minimal expense.
- Be selective in your use of colour- lighter, unified colour schemes maximise the sense of space as well as light. The floor and furnishings can be a good source of colour.
- Now is a good time to get planning permission. It lasts for five years, and means that you will not get lost in the glut of applications that will swamp the planning system when the upturn takes place.
- Use up-lighters and floor lights in preference to traditional down-lighters, and reduce wattage to create a more pleasant ambience.
- Reduce the noise in your house by fitting insulation in stud partitions and between floor boards. Soft finishes such as large rugs, throws and cushions will also help.
- There has never been a better time to build from a cost perspective. From builders to decorators to materials, there is great value out there.