

MOVE

We transformed an 1800s Limerick home that was ‘like a museum’ — and now we’re selling it

Three years after they met, this couple fell in love all over again — with an 1800s home in a posh part of Limerick. But it needed some TLC



Rachael Kealy and Anthony Gaffney at No 1 Carlisle Terrac

DON MOLONEY

Grainne Rothery

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As young and enthusiastic first-time buyers in 2011, Rachael Kealy and Anthony Gaffney instantly fell in love with the first and only house they looked at: No 1 Carlisle Terrace on O’Connell Avenue in Limerick. The end-of-terrace, 1870s-built property ticked a number of boxes for the couple, who had met three years earlier.

“O’Connell Avenue is a leafy, suburban address in the city that always had that bit of cachet,” says Gaffney, a company director. “I grew up in Limerick and Rachael went to university here. We’d always known that address as aspirational and never thought it would be something we could afford at that time. We started falling in love from the outside and it had a really nice feeling when we got inside.”

Owned by the same family for almost 100 years, the house was “like a living museum”, says Kealy, a food writer and copywriter, originally from

Dundalk. “We’re big fans of history and built heritage,” she says. “So many of the features were intact and it was such a unique opportunity to get a house that hadn’t been played with and damaged over the years. That’s really what propelled us into buying it — we had the opportunity to take something so intact from the past and turn it into a home.”



The sun-soaked side patio

KIRSTY LYONS

Although the house was in good condition, it was dated and needed a full renovation that took six months from when they got the keys in June 2011.

The biggest job involved modernising and rebuilding three connected extensions to the rear of the house. “We wanted to build on that footprint but also to modernise it for living the way we need to nowadays,” Gaffney says. “It had been ad hoc add-ons over the years and we just regularised it. We blasted through, exposed walls where we could and put in a new kitchen and dining room.”

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The advertisement features a photograph of a white Daikin Altherma 3 heat pump unit installed on a concrete pad in a grassy yard. In the background, there is a house with a blue roof and a child playing on a colorful playset. The Daikin logo is prominently displayed in the top left corner of the image. A blue circular callout box on the right side of the image contains the text: "Comfort all year round with a Daikin Altherma 3 Heat Pump". At the bottom right, there is a white button with the text "Find Out More". A small play button icon and a close 'X' icon are visible in the top right corner of the image frame.

Because of a shortage of labour at the time — “we were losing a lot of the people we needed to Australia” — the pair ended up having to project

manage the build themselves. “We worked side by side with a good pocket of local builders, craftspeople and designers,” Kealy says. “Everybody had their own contribution to the design of the house. It was almost built by committee.”

They also did various heating and insulation upgrades — including putting in double-glazed Georgian sash windows and an A-rated combi boiler with temperature control — with the result that the house now has a C3 energy rating.



The new kitchen

KIRSTY LYONS

Set back from the main road with a large front garden, the 181 sq m house has a porched entrance — with original decorative Victorian tiles and boot scraper — that opens into a bright entrance hall with the same tiles, along with cornicing, wainscotting and under-stairs storage.

On the left, the living room has original features — a white marble fireplace, plasterwork, wide planked wooden floor and shutters — mixed in with sympathetic additions such as the six-over-six tilting/sliding double-glazed sash windows, wainscotting and period-style cast iron radiator.

The room next door, which was recently done up with the help of the local design company Serpentine Interiors, is Kealy's study. "It was very dark and I wanted to create something feminine and welcoming and peaceful that I could retreat to," she says. The room has full-wall panelling, a Victorian fireplace and a new stove that has not yet been used. "We've never needed to," she says.

At the end of the hall is the new part of the house, a series of connected but defined spaces — dining area, fridge and wine store, and kitchen — with a smart and spacious guest WC at the back. First up is the dining room, which has a vaulted ceiling with skylights and French doors that open to a side patio. "That gets drenched in morning sun and is lovely for morning coffee," Gaffney says.



The white marble fireplace in the living room

KIRSTY LYONS

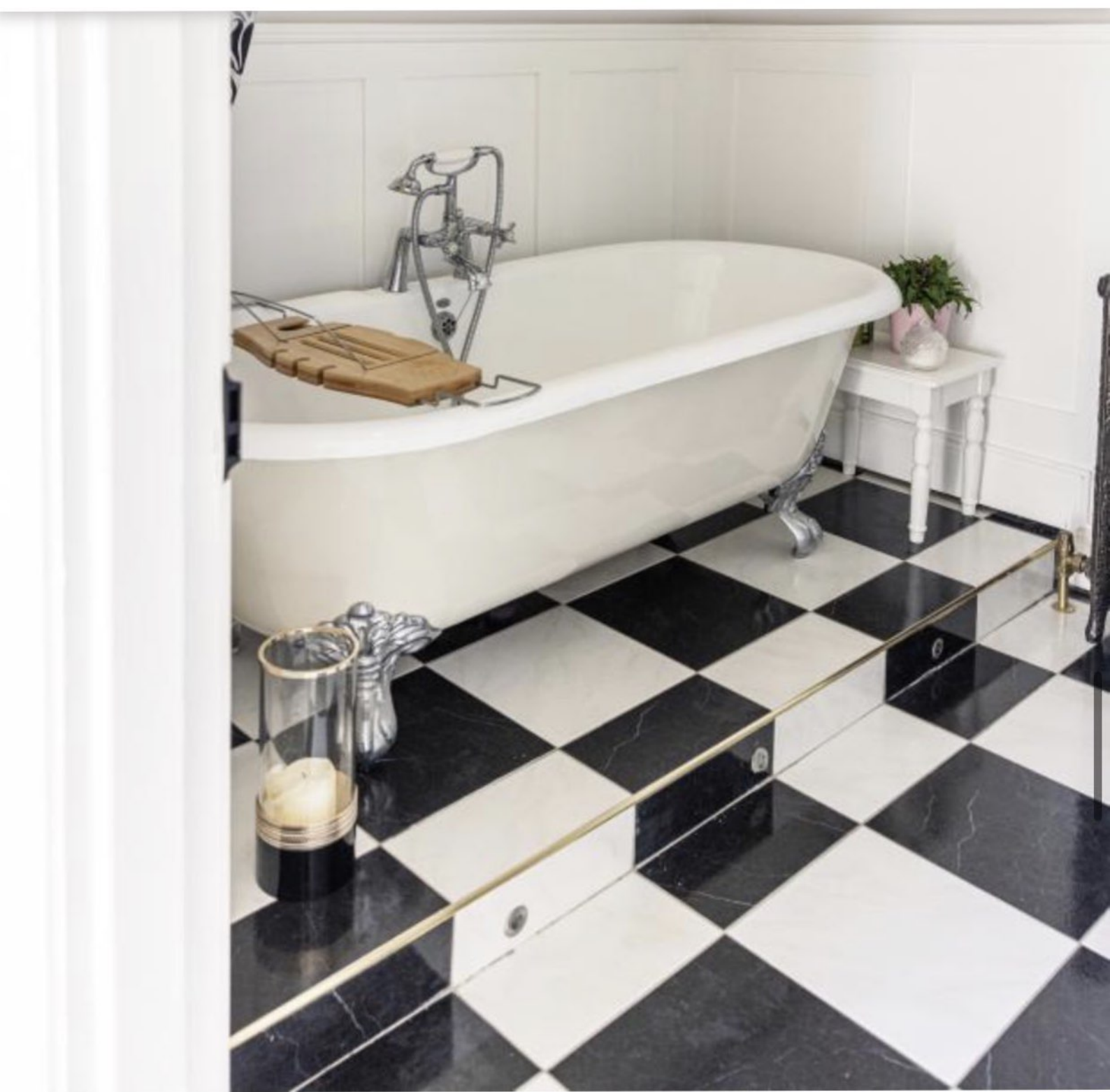
The flooring throughout this new space is French limestone, which continues out to the patio. A half wall with a double-sided 14 kW multifuel stove separates the dining area from the kitchen.

Behind this wall is an American fridge surrounded by cabinetry. Above is a handmade wine storage unit that's accessed by an antique ladder. The unit was added after the couple's wedding in Carcassonne in 2013. "We had a lot of wine left over," Gaffney says. "It was drink it or store it."

The kitchen has hand-painted units, a polished marble worktop with a Belfast sink, a six-ring gas range cooker, a larder unit and a wine fridge.

Upstairs, two double bedrooms are on the first floor, including the very large main at the front. Previously two separate rooms, it has two large windows overlooking the front garden, a walk-in closet and an en suite shower room.





The family bathroom, with chequered floor tiles

KIRSTY LYONS

On the second floor, the third bedroom — also a double — has exposed and sealed original stonework, wooden beams, a Velux rooflight and touch-spring panelling that opens to under-eaves storage. There's more clever storage under the windows in the main bedroom and in the living room.

Also on the top floor is the family bathroom with chequered floor tiles, more exposed beams and wainscoting, and a free-standing cast iron bath that needed six people to get it up the stairs.

The couple have been adding to and finessing the property since they moved in. Before the pandemic, for example, they redecorated the interior, replacing the magnolia colour scheme with a series of Farrow & Ball-inspired shades.

It hasn't just been about making the most of the inside. The property is wedge-shaped and is widest at the roadside before tapering in at the back. As a result, the only outside space to the rear is the patio next to the dining room and a side passageway used for bin storage.





All of the kitchen units are hand-painted

KIRSTY LYONS

To make that large space at the front more usable, they created a sunken garden in 2015. As well as digging down about a metre they planted heavily right at the front of the property to ensure more privacy.

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“It was a bit of a leap of faith but it’s paid off hugely,” Kealy says. “We work in the city and we love city life — the activity, the noise and the character. We love the fabric of all that. But it is nice to close the gate, walk down a couple of steps and to be in complete tranquillity, surrounded by roses and lavender; the sun spills in all evening long and it’s a sanctuary.”

The garden was designed by Catherine Gallagher and landscaped by Trevor O'Brien and, as well as being private, is very well built, according to Gaffney. "We've never had a puddle in it."

The couple say they didn't have a vision at the start of how the house would turn out. "We were just thrilled to be homeowners and excited to roll up our sleeves in the renovation," Kealy says. "We're not designers, architects or builders so there was no grand plan — we just slowly added on layers of comfort and elements of our own personalities over the years until we eventually created the home we have today."

And while the finished product may look beautiful, they are aware of and embrace its imperfections. "We love the idea of the passage of time and the patina on a house and we celebrate that rather than disguising or hiding it. It's very important for us to treasure that and build on it for the next owners and generation. We're not looking for something perfect."

The pair are now looking forward to a new chapter — they're expecting a baby in the autumn and are

The pair are now looking forward to a new chapter — they're expecting a baby in the autumn and are taking on the renovation of a four-storey Georgian property in the city — and No 1 Carlisle Terrace is on the market through Michael Roberts for €545,000.

“We’re going to be very sad leaving the house,” Kealy says. “It was a wonderful home that served us well over the past 12 years, adapting with us as we moved through our twenties and thirties. We’re so glad to have been able to leave a little footnote in this house’s long history, and are excited for the next owners to add their own unique story. Hopefully they’ll be just as happy here as we were.”

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