



# Domestic bliss



Architect Anthony Rochmankowski has turned his back on banks and office blocks to focus on creating made-to-measure family homes – starting with his own

BY FIONA REID, PHOTOGRAPHS BY ANGUS BREMNER

**W**HEN ANTHONY and Jackie Rochmankowski first viewed their terraced house in Portobello four years ago, they weren't exactly feeling hopeful. "It looked tiny on the outside," recalls Anthony. The couple had decided to move from their flat in Marchmont to acquire a house with a garden. They thought of Portobello, "because we used to come here and rollerblade along the prom and we've always liked it," he says.

Of course, first impressions can often be misleading. Even today, pulling up outside in this quiet residential street with the promenade and a view across the Forth at its far end, the façade is quietly unassuming.

Once inside however, preconceptions are blown away by the surprise of the oak and glass extension at the rear of the property. The brightness of the space draws you along the hallway and through the house into the informal sitting area that in turn opens onto the contemporary kitchen and dining space. Sun streams in from the rooflights above, and with the glazed doors open to the patio, all you can hear is the sound of the grasses rustling in the pebble garden outside.

Rochmankowski, an architect who set up the Edinburgh-based Rochmankowski Associates three years ago, had this extension in mind even as he and his wife, a physiotherapist, bought the house. The previous owners had been working through the interior room-by-room and still had the kitchen to tackle. Tucked into a 1950s extension, the space was in a sorry state with the units falling off the walls and with only one tiny window over the sink offering a garden view.

The idea of designing the extension as a prototype for the practice's ethos and style came down to timing, as Rochmankowski was in the throes of setting up in business when the building work was about to kick off.

"I realised the practice was going to be tackling domestic work and that this could be an image that we could hang

our hat on, if you like," he explains. "Edinburgh is renowned for having Georgian and Victorian properties that have little or no relationship with their gardens, so it was a good prototype to start with as it's an idea that can be evolved to suit the needs of specific properties."

Rochmankowski hasn't always been wearing a domestic hat in architecture; his first project after graduating in 1991 was working on Saltire Court in Edinburgh with the practice Campbell & Arnott. He has since been involved in industrial, banking, commercial, retail and residential projects.

"Every architect has this idea of striking out on their own," he says, but for Rochmankowski the crux came when his father-in-law, a farmer, wanted to build an extension and inquired how to fit a window into the wall. "I could have explained how to fit a 10m sheet of glass into a steel wall, but the most basic thing had me flummoxed," Rochmankowski admits. "I realised something was missing."

This story bears a relationship to the architect's ethos today as his approach blends an organic sensibility with a strong appreciation of craftsmanship. Indeed, this extension was built by one man, Gordon Graham (of Gordon Graham Design & Build in Broughton), over a period of 16 weeks.

Alongside the steel roof and the large glazed panels, oak features extensively in all its raw, untreated glory, including internally where the beams (sourced from Carpenter Oak & Woodland Ltd in Loch of Lintrathlen) have been left exposed within the kitchen and dining area contrasting with the streamlined Ikea units and glass table.

"It's almost like a tree-hugging thing," Rochmankowski jokes, "especially when using timbers of this size. But if you look at the oak, it's cut in a modernistic fashion; it's all straight lines and squared off edges."

Using oak also allows Rochmankowski to keep the costs as low as possible, "which was always a consideration here, because you don't

**'Oak works with stone; it ages gracefully'**



**Previous page: Anthony and Jackie Rochmankowski in their kitchen with Molly, and Daisy outside; the glass and oak extension from the garden, above; the view through the kitchen to the garden, below left**

need to insulate it or treat it in any way. And oak works alongside stone; it ages gracefully. I love modernism, but there's no reason why you can't combine old and new. It was about bringing a touch of the countryside into the town and finding a way of relating nature to the manmade."

Although the building is B-listed and within a conservation area, the design for the extension met no resistance from the local planning department. "The ground floor is very linear and as a result it was about connecting a series of boxes, from the sitting room to the kitchen and dining space, and out to the patio and garden areas," says Rochmankowski. "The oak beams are designed to define these areas."

In the same way, the pebble garden and the Japanese garden to the side are integral elements, designed almost as stepping stones into the main garden, where the extending spars and posts that frame the patio further enhance the relationship between the internal and external spaces.

Crucially – and perhaps this is the key reason why clients would want to

come here to see how this kind of space would work for their own needs – Rochmankowski designed the extension with his family in mind. One of the external timber spars, for example, supports two swings, for Daisy, 5, and Molly, 4. The kitchen, meanwhile, is a relaxed working space where the cool blue of the units ties in with the denim blue of the sitting area, which is arranged snugly around a contemporary open fireplace.

Similarly, rather than slate or limestone flooring, Rochmankowski chose reclaimed oak sourced from an office in London, combined with underfloor heating for a tactile yet softer surface should anyone take a tumble. This extension may be a marketing tool, but it's also a home. "It has to work," Rochmankowski says, "and bringing clients here shows that it does work. Moving here, we wanted to enjoy a living relationship with the garden and this extension has given us that." **SM**

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