

Water colours

A restored mill in Co Carlow tells the story of two creative minds working together to balance character and contemporary living

Mark O'Neill's riverside home complete with restored waterwheel has become a retreat of light and space (below). Stepping down into the living room, white paint lifts the relatively low ceiling. Natural linen on the sofa works in harmony with elements such as the walnut unit, fulfilling Maria's aim "to create calm, light-filled interior spaces".



Amanda Cochrane



There is a romance attached to old buildings, but their undeniable charm and beauty do not always mean that they are suited to modern lifestyles.

Georgian townhouses enjoy perfect proportions and are famous for their light, but the configuration of rooms doesn't always work with contemporary family life.

Meanwhile, with the exception of Ireland's Great Houses, country homes from the past were built for warmth and shelter, which in turn led to dark rooms and low ceilings.

Updating old houses is a chal-

lenging balancing act to preserve the atmosphere of the building and maintain the sense of history but also give it a renewed future. When artist Mark O'Neill bought his 18th-century thatched home, a former mill house with water mill intact on the banks of the River Slaney, it was technically ready to move into.

However, it is his collaboration with interior designer Maria Fenlon that has turned this charming but dark house into a stunning place of light and water that opens itself up to the landscape, providing a peaceful retreat.

When two creative talents work together there can be clashes. Each has their own strong aesthetic

sense, and both artists and interior designers are hyper-sensitive to the influence of colour and light. Fenlon had described the collaboration as a process.

"People have this idea that interior designers will come in all Laurence Llewelyn-Bowen and paint the walls pink and purple. But, in reality, it's completely different. It's talking, listening, looking at the things people have, what they're

KITCHEN (above right) Through the kitchen window, the locally made balcony is visible. The kitchen units are by Maise Interiors; (right) This 18th-century thatched mill has had rooms opened up to the garden, with high windows for privacy