

Why we all need secret storage at home

Jacqui Corcoran

Interior designer Maria Felon, who works in Dublin and Brussels, finds inspiration in the everyday

Interior designer Maria Felon divides her time between interiors projects in Dublin and Brussels. Her work has won a number of awards, including Project of the Year at the 2017 Fitout Awards, for a remodelling of a house in Ranelagh.

What projects are you working on right now?

I'm working on a few, including a room for the Ideal Home Show and a the conversion of a former Methodist church/meeting hall in Blackrock, which is going to be a rental property. The client was brave in buying the building, given the restrictions around it being a protected structure. I wanted to reflect and preserve the spirit and essence of the building, while bringing in a contemporary feel. We did quite a lot with lighting to highlight the simple elegance of the building which was a dance hall at one stage. I met a couple who told me they had their first kiss there when it was a dance hall. It's nice to work on a building that has been a part of the lives of people in the community.

What's the most frequent dilemma you hear about from clients?

The first thing most people say when they come to me is that they know what they like, but can't bring it all together. What we do is essentially help to simplify decision-making. They might bring lots of pho-

tos of the things they like, but they're often not blended. You can see beauty in all of the ideas. So it's about discussion, about simplifying, about agreeing on maybe a mood board. That's a process; getting to understand the style the client likes. It gives us a focus then, when we go to select materials.

Which part of a design project that excite you most?

I'm a bit obsessed with storage. I'm the eldest of eight and so grew up in a house of 10 people. I have three daughters with all the fake tan and what have you. I like discreetly hiding things, so that the focus is on a beautiful piece of furniture or a lovely painting. I love trying to find clever ways to hide storage, but yet provide it at the same time.

I have a bit of a thing for mirrors too. I live between Brussels, where we have a house, and Dublin where we have a small apartment, which is also a work space. In my own homes, I've done so many things with mirrors. Mirrors can appear to double the size of a room. They bring light in and can really create a sense of space.

Reuse or lose... what's your advice?

If it has sentimental value or has been handed down or whatever, I would never say lose and I would always try to reuse. Occasionally though, items do have to go. I'm working on a house in Skerries, for example, and they have a very big couch that's taking up too much room.

We need to change that because it's too big a block and we're trying to create a sense of roominess. You hate doing it, but to get the space modified, sometimes you have to do it.

Of course, every project is personal, and you don't want to make a home look like a showroom. It should be about you and who you are. Bits and pieces that are important to you are a part of that.



Interiors by Maria Felon: "The first thing most people say when they come to me is that they know what they like, but can't bring it all together. What we do is essentially help to simplify decision-making"



Are your clients more eco-aware and, if so, how are you responding?

Yes, people care about where materials and products come from. They want to know that they're coming from sustainable sources. Sometimes people feel bad about getting rid of things, and if you suggest, for example, that they reupholster something they tend to feel good about that. Also, people are becoming more concerned around lighting and energy efficiency in the home. It's something I'd be conscious of myself too, whether or not it's led by the client. I like to work from sustainable sources when possible. It's important

to know your products and know where they're coming from.

Where do you get your inspiration?

I taught art design and history of art for a number of years before studying interior design and interior architecture. That's all been an inspiration that I've carried with me. I loved teaching and love the art world. Inspiration is something that's ongoing. You never stop looking and learning. Only yesterday I was in Kildare, wandering around browsing, when I went into a shop and saw a poster on the wall which made me think about the direction I'm taking on

the room exhibit I'm working on for Meadows & Byrne for the Ideal Home Show.

The poster was an autumnal image which reminded me of growing up and the woods beside our home. I was an outdoor girl and I remember as a child going out in my wellie boots and going into the woods and just kicking the autumn leaves. The poster featured beautiful oranges and warm autumn colours that reminded me of the woods and just triggered that visual and sensory memory. The feeling is the starting point. That sense of colour and autumn and the cosy feel of it will all play a part in the design.

Is there a house you wish you'd designed?

I have a friend who has a house in Belgium I particularly love. It's a villa in Tervuren on the outskirts of Brussels. It's incredibly simple. Like a sculpture.

She has a love of fine art. One really interesting thing I have noticed, living in Belgium, is that the Belgians are very much into quality not quantity.

They don't buy five pairs of gloves, they buy one beautiful pair.

That idea is really reflected in her home, with elegant touches—like one or two beautiful pieces left on their own on a shelf. I love that.