

Simon Says 'Charity begins in your home'

Expert architectural advice offered in return for donation to the homelessness charity

9th March 2010- The Royal Institute of the Architects of Ireland (RIAI) and the Simon Communities of Ireland today launched the sixth annual **RIAI Simon Open Door Weekend** campaign. From today, the public 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.

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 the public 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.

Commenting on the launch, Dermot Bannon, RTE presenter and RIAI registered architect, said, "The RIAI Simon Open Door Weekend gives the public a chance to improve their own home while also helping those who are experiencing homelessness. Some people might think that architects only deal with big public works or designer buildings but they can also help you with simple issues such as storage, lighting and heating which can make a big difference to your life, and your bills! Architects can help you get better value for money, more space, and layouts that will work just as well in ten years time as they do today. There are architects participating in almost every county so I would urge people to go online and book an appointment today. "

Also speaking at the launch was Patrick Burke, CEO of the Simon Communities of Ireland. He said, "We are delighted to partner with the RIAI on Open Door for the sixth year running, and on behalf of everyone at the Simon Communities of Ireland I want to sincerely thank all the architects who have signed up to give their services free of charge again this year.

"The current downturn means more people than before are at risk of homelessness. As increasing numbers of people are impacted by the recession, it's inevitable that more people will be seeking help. Now, more than ever, we need the support of the public to ensure that we can continue to advocate on behalf of some of the most vulnerable people in our society."

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

1. 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.
2. **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.
3. **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.
4. **Insulate your attic**- This can reduce bills and make your home more comfortable to live in. It pays for itself within two years.
5. **Fit another lagging jacket over your hot water cylinder** to half the heat loss for minimal expense.
6. **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.
7. **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.
8. **Use up-lighters and floor lights** in preference to traditional down-lighters, and reduce wattage to create a more pleasant ambience.
9. **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.
10. **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.

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Notes to the editor:

Simon Communities of Ireland

The *Simon Communities of Ireland* is an affiliation of local Communities in Cork, Dublin, Dundalk, Galway, the Midlands, the Mid West, the North West and the South East. In addition, the National Office performs a coordinating role in terms of campaigning in the areas of

housing/homeless policy and the wider poverty and social inclusion agenda; best practice in service delivery and working with people who are homeless; and in the area of full time volunteering promoting excellence and providing accredited training.

The Simon Communities throughout Ireland provide the best possible care, accommodation and support for people experiencing homelessness and those at risk. Together, with people who are homeless, we tackle the root causes, promote innovative responses and urge the government to fulfil their commitments. Simon delivers support and service to between 4,500 and 5,000 individuals and families who experience - or are at risk of - homelessness on an annual basis.