



INTO THE WILDS

Step into Paula Asple's festive Wexford home, where modern rustic charm meets a seamless blend of mid-century, Scandinavian, and classical design – for the perfect festive vibe.

WORDS **ISABEL DEMPSEY** PHOTOGRAPHY **RUTH MARIA MURPHY**



HOMEOWNER

Paula Asple, co-founder and owner of The Wilds cafés and home stores in Wicklow and Wexford.

THE HOUSE

Extended 1930s cottage located in Gorey, County Wexford.



When most people think about extending their homes, they usually only want to squeeze in an extra room or two. Maybe they will extend by 15%? 20%? Increase it by half if they're feeling particularly bold. Now take a step back to stare at this formerly 700 square-foot, two-bedroom cottage and try 250% on for size. Standing at an impressive 2500 square feet, it's hard to imagine the humble abode that once stood in its place.

Looking to escape London and return to her hometown of Gorey in County Wexford, Paula and her husband Simon purchased this property (or rather its foundations) back in 2016. "It ticked all the boxes," Paula explains, and it was in the perfect location, close to the town centre but far enough to have a "lovely garden" in a private and quiet setting. They were in search of a renovation project, so the timing could not have been more perfect: "The economy wasn't the best, so things were a bit less expensive, especially when it came to building. We were advised to try and do everything." Drawing up a wish list of "everything that we could possibly want" (adjusted for the builders' quotes), they hired an architectural technician to bring their dreams to life.

Together with the construction crew, they gutted the entire interior. They removed the roof, transforming it into an apex-style construction, and extended it outwards to create a stunning open-plan living space. Paula explains that "we do everything in this space." Both despite and because of her love for this room, she has to admit that "instead of increasing the footprint and creating such a large space at the back, we could have just done it in the front" because "we hardly even use the original living room." She particularly enjoys how much light the southwest-facing room receives throughout the day and how everybody can congregate together in this space while doing different things.

Describing her style as a mixture of mid-century, Scandi, and modern, with a hint of classical, for this house, she particularly wanted a very modern, rustic feel. She was keen to "bring the character into the extension and for it not to look like a modern box extension." She left the beams and joists above the ceiling and added extra texture. Opting for a neutral colour palette across the house, with injected character bursts through an eclectic array of furniture. She explained that while she used to enjoy bright

colours, she doesn't feel they suit her style anymore: "I've moved into my neutral colour era. They help me to feel very calm." She appreciates that in this busy world where "our senses can be constantly bombarded" when she walks through the door, "nothing is vying for my attention" – decoratively, that is at least. Keeping her daughter's playroom hidden behind a secret door in the kitchen, she was able to keep that open plan space a mess-free zone.

Paula opted for large gold lights over the island to warm up and fill the space. She told me, "The lighting came from my shop. I am fortunate that I have access to those products." Joking about how tempting it would be to take from your own stock constantly, Paula confessed to me that the black metal cabinet was one of those pieces: "I bought it because I needed it for the shop, but when I was buying it, I actually measured it for that wall in the kitchen." She thought, "Well, if it doesn't sell in the shop..." and "It never sold. One day, I was just like, okay, it's time. It's coming." Looking around the room, she says the sofa, the sun chairs, the bar stools, and the lighting all come from her shop, too: "I suppose 50% of it." She tells me, "We also have a lot of vintage furniture," and "I love mixing old and new." One of her favourite items in the house, the coffee table in the living space, was from a secondhand website in Ireland but heralded initially from Scandinavia: "I just loved it. I loved the style and the look. I love Scandinavia. And it just fitted in perfectly."

While the build "went quite smoothly," Paula admits there are "still some things we haven't quite finished to this day." Renovating is quite an overwhelming process. I've yet to meet anybody who has managed a house from top to bottom." Having recently opened a new cafe in Wicklow, the long overdue front living room job came to a standstill. "That just completely took over our lives," she tells me. While this balancing act can be a struggle, she doesn't see it as a negative. Enjoying the process of "chipping away at it," she suggests, "it's essential to get a proper feel for it and live in a house before you make changes or start choosing paint colours. It's tough when you're not living in the house or experiencing the light throughout." Her main advice for other home renovators? "Take your time. I don't think having everything completely finished and done is important. I think it's okay to take things slowly, build on them over time, and wait for the right piece. Don't buy something just for the sake of buying it. Just have a bit more patience. The best things come to those who wait." **H**

THE LIVING ROOM Paula DIY-ed the living area's lime wash wall: "I just made up the paint myself, using plain, sort of lime wash paint, and added in the natural pigments until I achieved the desired colour. I really enjoyed the process"



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THE KITCHEN Paula designed the kitchen with local cabinet maker Stewart Noctor. Inspired by the Japanese cladding technique of shou sugi ban (a method that chars wood to preserve it and make it more durable), Paula was eager to make a feature of the natural ash wall behind the fridge. While it was "well beyond the budget", by happy accident, when they sprayed the timber with Farrow & Ball's Off-Black, it resembled the effect perfectly







“When I step in through the front door, I instantly feel calmer when I have all these neutral colours around me. Nothing is vying for my attention because life is so busy for everybody; our senses are constantly bombarded. A perfect or lovely interior is made up of very calming, neutral tones and layers of texture. Instead of using colour and bright patterns, I like to tone it all down”

PAULA'S TIPS FOR ENTERTAINING AT CHRISTMAS

1 Organisation is key, but remember that no matter how organised you feel in the days leading up to Christmas, the day is pretty intense in the kitchen.

2 Find out what your guests like at Christmas. If they have family traditions, try incorporating some to make them feel welcome.

3 It's nice to delegate. I discovered that the hard way. People want to help, and just giving them jobs makes it much easier. When everybody helps out, it's great, and when I say all of us, I mean my parents, my sister and her husband, my sister-in-law, my brother-in-law, and my mother-in-law.

4 Stop fussing about everything and stop worrying about trying to make everything perfect. Just relax and enjoy the moment.



THE BATHROOM The centrepiece of the bathroom is the wicker cabinet beneath the sink, sourced from Dutch brand HK Living. While this gorgeous mauve-taupe is discontinued, Paula believes it's still available in black. Having already bought the grey-green tiles from Best Tile, this was the perfect colour to complement. She explains that the tiles are handmade, so "each one is unique," adding much character to the space. Getting lucky twice as she found a sink to match as well: "I was delighted that they all went together"



BEDROOM 1 The heavy wooden bed came from their London home, sourced from eBay and originally from Indonesia. The real standout feature of the bedroom, however, is the stunning artwork by artist Nadia Corridan, which was "part of a body of work that she did on people with dementia." The artwork depicts a couple holding hands, but one is slowly disappearing





**BEDROOM (OPPOSITE)**

Over lockdown, Paula's husband, Simon, and her father were put to work adding panelling to the walls in the bedroom and hallway to add a sense of tactility and texture to the home



Want to see additional images from Paula's home? Head over to our Instagram page or Houseandhome.ie for more inspirational homes

PAULA'S TAKE ON GETTING CHRISTMAS-READY

1 DECOR When it comes to Christmas decor, Paula loves to use natural foliage, picking greenery from the garden and sourcing other plants like eucalyptus from a foliage farm in Wicklow. She aims to "keep the colours muted. I don't do anything too bright or plastic. There's nothing wrong with that; it's just not my style."

2 SMELL She loves incorporating the Christmas smell throughout the house, all mulled wine, oranges, and "cinnamon everything." She even uses the baked orange slices as decorations.

3 FOOD Following her recovery from cancer treatment, Paula developed a keen focus on her diet, following a programme of low-carb ketogenic eating with a heavy emphasis on plant-based and nutrient-dense foods. Her cafes, too, especially her new site in Wicklow, specialise in local and organic ingredients. Paula combines healthy eating with Christmassy goodness and offers a seasonal menu selection of gingerbread, mince pies, turkey, and ham.

4 TRADITION On her typical Christmas day, Paula and her family will get up and open presents, followed by breakfast and Mass - "that's an important part. It's just a family tradition." Once they return, it's time for more presents, plus champagne, then "it's all hands on deck to get dinner on the table." They typically eat late because it takes "quite a long time to prepare, and we are quite particular about everything, so we have the table setting just right."

5 FAMILY "Christmas is a time for family, for remembering family members who are no longer with us", and it's particularly a "very special time" for her daughter: "We only have one child, so we just try to make it very special for her."