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A woman's touch shows at Glinbury

Developer Leona Melia's passion for design has brought extra comfort and luxury to this leafy river site by Marlay Park, writes *Linda Daly*



Leona Melia hates the word units – that term much loved by builders and hedge funds. “They are homes. It doesn't matter if it's an apartment or mansion; they are built for people to live in,” she says.

Melia is one of a rare breed in Ireland: a female developer. Glinbury, the latest project from her company Heatherbrook Homes, is even rarer: it has been developed and designed by women. Sandra O'Riordan, managing partner of O'Carroll O'Riordan Architects, and her associate Suzy Freney have designed the 11 homes on this three-acre site.

God must be a woman. Glinbury's setting is pretty spectacular. It sits off Whitechurch Road in Rathfarnham in south Co Dublin, beside Grange Golf Club and the 210-acre Marlay Park. The Glin river runs through the land.

Before Heatherbrook Homes bought the site in November 2014, it was home to a 19th-century house surrounded by woodland. “The house was the oldest continuously lived-in house in Rathfarnham. The three-acre site needed a lot of work,” says Melia while showing me around the development ahead of its launch.

“It's been a long process,” she adds. “This site had a listed building, so the planning process was lengthy and that's why it took time to get to this stage. Anything special takes time.”

The site, which is bordered by high walls, has so many trees that the selling agent Hooke & MacDonald has dedicated a whole page in the brochure to them. Among them are Monterey cypress, Irish yew, larch, elm, walnut and Corsica pine. Many of the trees had preservation orders but Ait, the landscape architect firm – which also has a woman at its helm – has added more to complement them, as well as a walkway to the river.

Six new double-fronted detached houses, with floor areas of 281 sq m, have been launched in the first phase of Glinbury. The original house, at more than 500 sq m, is being divided into two homes, to be sold at a later stage. Another two adjoining four-bedroom homes are being built beside it, and a large detached house will be built on the other side of the river.

The sisters aren't quite doing it for themselves – Melia's construction partner Eddie O'Connor is a civil engineer, the construction team is full of men, and David Lawlor of Hooke & MacDonald will sell the houses – but every aspect of this scheme is so well-considered, so beautiful, that one can't help wonder whether that is down to the feminine touch.

The houses are two-storey. The warm brick detailing seems to curve around the windows and hall door, and is complemented by granite window sills and plinths, a ribbed zinc feature window surround and acrylic render. Melia has also



Leona Melia has taken care of every aspect of the build and the interior design at the 11 new homes at Glinbury, with mature trees and the river Glin

opted for a natural slate roof. “I didn't want it to turn blue in the rain,” she says.

Large picture windows bring the sylvan setting in. The back gardens have granite patios, with steps leading up to a raised lawn. Mature trees have been retained to the back.

The front door opens into a double-height hall, with high ceilings and doors throughout the ground floor. Two sets of double doors in the living room had to be specially made due to their height. The doors between the hall and the living room are part-glazed; the doors into the kitchen/living/dining space are soft-sliding pocket doors.

Melia has put huge effort into creating a home that is comfortable. The large room to the back of the ground floor has three defined areas – the kitchen, dining room and lounge. A limestone and granite fireplace with a wood-burning stove adds a touch of luxury. There are kitchen presses to store enough to feed an army. The American-style fridge is flanked by wine racks and display cabinets. The utility room has undercounter and overcounter presses. Understair storage is accessible from the downstairs lavatory.

Melia is passionate about every aspect of the design. She points out the moulded window surrounds. She waxes lyrical about the stairs and balustrades – there is a curved step at the end. She points out the block-built shed in the back garden, which has a keycode entry door, a light and socket. In the playroom/study, she

shows off the smart-home system that lets you tell Alexa, Google or Apple assistants to close the blinds, adjust the heating or dim the lights. I'm led up a ladder to see how the attic is part-floored and could easily be converted.

In the bathroom, she removes a handle from one of the presses to allow me to feel the weight – each handle costs €25. All five bedrooms are good doubles. Three have en suite shower rooms, with under-lit mirrored cabinets, double basins and under-sink presses.

Every room has zoned heating, with underfloor heating on both floors.

Just round the corner from Marlay Park, these homes will be in high demand. Not all will be able to afford them – they start at €1.295m – but those who can will be attracted to the park, good schools, and easy access to the M50 and cycling and bus routes.

This will be Heatherbrook Homes' flagship development. Since being set up nine years ago, the firm has worked on a scheme in Cabra and another in Bray. A site in Castleknock is at the planning stage, and there are others in the pipeline.

The show house is open from 11am until 1pm today.

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