

Seaside living in a new Malahide development comes with some classy touches, writes Larissa Nolan

It feels as though you are stepping into an affluent seaside resort, when you visit Robswall in Malahide. Maybe that's why Hollybrook Homes, the developer of a new scheme of luxury homes by the sea in north Co Dublin claims it is not just selling a home, it is selling a dream.

Robswall is leading the march when it comes to high-quality new homes, driven by new building regulations that raised the bar in Irish living. The houses, here, though, go above and beyond a quality family home. According to Hollybrook Homes, they're "not built to stand out, but to be outstanding".

Jackie Horan, associate director of residential at Knight Frank estate agents, is excited about the three- and four-bedroom houses in the development on the Coast Road in Malahide.

"You have to see them to get just how luxurious they are," she says. "The level of thought and detail that has gone into them. You can see small extra attention from everything from the spindles on the stairs, to the art-deco light switches. It's like being in a hotel," she says.

"There are unusual American-style touches, such as, the utility room being upstairs in some of the homes, or a big bay window you can lounge in is a feature in others."

The setting is spectacular, with the drive out to Robswall taking us along the coast road, looking out to Lambay Island and beyond, where, as Horan says, the sea has a different picture for you every day.

Passing Portmarnock, and Robswall Castle, from which the development takes its name, it takes 30 minutes from Dublin city centre to the door.

Robswall was established in 2007 and the earlier stages of the development include a crescent of elegant, neo-Georgian, three-floor homes, reminiscent of those on Dun Laoghaire seafront.

Developer Gerry Gannon, of Gannon Homes, once owned the site, but nine acres and a portfolio of 85 properties were sold to London-based Development Securities in 2014. It went on to sell the development site to Hollybrook Homes, a UK company with Irish connections — two of its directors Malcolm Weston and Kenneth Birrane are from here.

Robswall was Hollybrook Homes' first foray into the Irish market, and the company set about building 155 homes in their section of the sprawling development.

Since the firm arrived here in 2014, 60 homes — worth more than €30m — have been sold, and the families who bought them have since settled in. Now



Malahide, in north Co Dublin, is 30 minutes' drive to the city centre and has good transport links

ALAN HOPPS

WE DO LIKE TO LIVE IN LUXURY BESIDE THE SEA

another 24 have been released, with a three- and a four-bedroom showhome open for viewing today.

Prices range from €450,000 to €660,000, and the two-storey homes are 1,119 sq ft to 1,216 sq ft for the three-bedroom houses, to from 1,474 sq ft to 1,959 sq ft for the four-bedroom ones.

So what's so different about Robswall? For starters, there's the individuality of every home, which takes away that Identikit feel that can come with buying a house in a new development in the suburbs, even one as affluent as Malahide.

All the homes have noticeably higher

ceilings and the extra, and unusual, rectangular window panelling near the roof adds a stylish touch and allows in significantly more light.

The side entrance to the three-bedroom showhouse in The Terrace has a sea-green wooden door, with a latticed window and more glass flanking either side.

Step inside and to your left is a bright, intelligently designed kitchen which includes room to dine as well as generous storage and high-spec appliances.

To the right is a storage room the size of a walk-in wardrobe, and then a bathroom, before you enter a living area which has a



EVERYTHING IS HERE. IT'S GOT A HARBOUR, A MARINA AND A BEAUTIFUL FIVE-MILE STRAND OF BEACH

relaxed, seaside feel, including a set of patio doors leading onto the cobbled patio and a small, walled garden.

Upstairs, the best feature is the main bedroom, which has an en suite bathroom hidden from view, down a small corridor and around a corner. So, instead of looking at a bathroom door, you look out at the Irish sea.

There's another bright, light-filled bedroom at the back, a smaller room that could be a study, nursery, or a guest bedroom, a third bathroom and the upstairs utility room.

These three-bedroom homes would be

perfect for a small family, or those who like to live in a cosier space.

For those who prefer more room, an extra €100,000 to €200,000 buys you the four-bedroom houses, which seem spacious in comparison, though the amount of additional room they offer is not that much more. They have large, open-plan living/dining rooms and some types have luxurious deep bay windows.

Many refined touches have been added to make sure the homes function well. Kitchens are individually designed to include soft-close doors and drawers, under-cabinet lighting and branded appliances.

Bathrooms have Villeroy & Boch baths and wash basins, Kludi polished chrome brassware, porcelain tiles on bath, floor and walls, chrome heated towel rails and large mirrors.

They are heated by gas-fired central heating, the homes are A-rated energy efficient, and there are pressurised hot and cold water supplies services to the bathrooms.

The exteriors have stylish mottled brown brick facades, paved front drives with planter beds and private rear gardens. This is all about suburban living. Victorian-style street lighting gives a romantic feel.

Completion dates range from summer to the end of 2016.

One sticking point for some might be the move out to Malahide, which, however picturesque, is 20km out of the city, in north Co Dublin. You will have to be a suburbanite rather than an urbanite at heart, but the chances are that you will be exchanging life in an old house for a brand new alternative.

"Some people will always prefer city living, but Malahide is a location in itself. Everything is here, great restaurants and pubs, specialist shops and boutiques, as well as industry.

"It's got a harbour and a marina and a beautiful five-mile strand of beach. It's a very relaxed way of life," says Horan.

Robswall is five minutes by car to Malahide, which despite having a range of boutiques and shops has retained a village feel. Among the businesses in town are delicatessen Donnybrook Fair, SuperValu, a Three mobile phone shop, and Marc Cain, an exclusive women's fashion store.

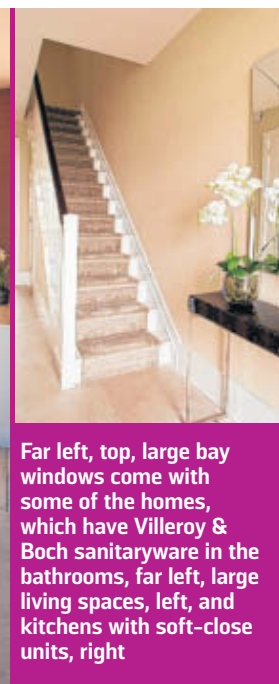
There are also plenty of eateries, including the Garden House, garden centre and cafe, the Greedy Goose restaurant and the Gourmet Food Parlour. If you want to go the health-food route, Ray Shah, former Big Brother contestant and DJ, has a Bodyfirst nutrition supplements and health food shop in town.

A move to Malahide means you will also be joining a growing list of celebs who have chosen the town as their home, including Robbie and Claudine Keane — when they aren't mixing it up with the rich and famous in LA — and 2fm DJ Nicky Byrne and wife, Georgina Ahern.

The town is on the M1, and is serviced by buses and the Dart. It is 10km from Dublin airport.

So who is buying the homes? "We have a lot of professionals, such as pilots working out of Dublin airport, who are raising their families here," says Horan.

Showhomes are available to view today, from 10.30am to 12.30pm; knightfrank.ie



Far left, top, large bay windows come with some of the homes, which have Villeroy & Boch sanitaryware in the bathrooms, far left, large living spaces, left, and kitchens with soft-close units, right

I'm happy to stick with traditional lime plaster, thank you

Here's the answer to the endless queries over why I've shunned modern dry lining on my walls

Throughout the restoration of my Georgian house in Dundalk, the interior walls have always been a hot topic of conversation by visitors, be they friends, family or members of various building trades.

As the work has been progressing, I've been asked countless times why I have chosen not to dry line the inside of all exterior walls, proceeding instead with a comparatively expensive and archaic lime plaster finish. There are several reasons.

Modern dry lining is a poor choice for a period home: it is not vapour permeable by design and as such will trap cold air between the lining board and the single leaf of exterior stone wall.

Lining the inside of a stone wall results in insulating the interior of the wall from the heat of the room, which can

cause condensation, mould and fungus to form, along with other serious problems.

The second reason is cost. There are numerous specialised, breathable, insulated boards available which maintain the breathability of the exterior walls. However, they are

several times more expensive than regular modern boards. Lining the interior walls of my house would become tremendously expensive.

Third, insulating board is available in various thicknesses, the thicker boards offering the best insulating properties.

However, because of the various pieces of joinery and plasterwork on the inside of the exterior walls, such as architraves, cornicing and window shutter boxes, dry lining of the walls is extremely intrusive and damaging to the fabric of the house.

For example, it would partially or completely cover the cornicing around the top of the walls, or reduce the depth by which the shutter boxes protruded from the wall considerably.

A further reason for not dry lining the interior is simply that my planning permission does not expressly allow it as I did not mention it in my initial application. The permission granted was for the "patch repair of plasterwork where required"; completely covering up original 200-year old plasterwork

would not have been acceptable.

One final reason is that I'm not entirely convinced that dry lining is worth doing from a cost/benefit point of view. All of my sash windows have been restored with original single-glazed panes of glass and many of these large windows make up a full third of a room's exterior wall space.

It's questionable as to how much effect dry-lining the remaining two-thirds of the wall space would have, especially considering that it is not possible to line the inside of the large window reveals, the spaces into which the window shutters retract.

With such large spans of non-insulated wall space, it seems somewhat counter-intuitive to slap some board up on the remaining wall spans, just because "it's the thing to do in a renovation".

As mentioned, covering the inside of exterior walls across three storeys with a breathable board would have become expensive quickly.

However, what does lend itself well to insulation, much like any other home, is the attic space. My roof was probably replaced within the past 30 or 40 years or so, and as such has a relatively modern construction with evenly spaced ceiling joists.

Instead of getting in an insulation firm to tackle the barren attic space, I spent a day myself laying fibreglass wool between the joists, which was a relatively straightforward task. A further 300mm layer will be laid perpendicular to the rafters once all plumbing is completed.

With my mind at rest regarding insulation, the lime plasterwork could begin on the interior walls.

STEPHEN HICKEY
RETURN TO
SPLENDOUR



Dry lining would reduce the depth by which the shutter boxes protruded