

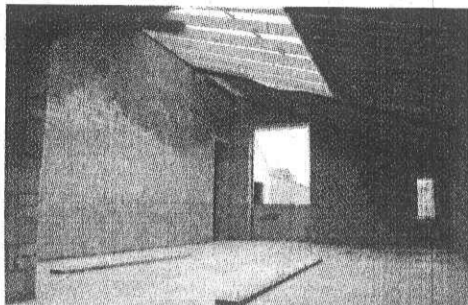
STUDIOS

In the Studio

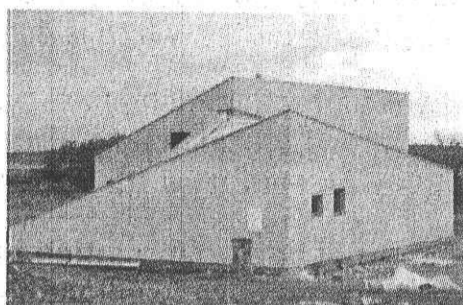
ARTISTS DISCUSS THEIR STUDIO FACILITIES

VISUAL Artists Ireland has used the Visual Artists News Sheet to look at and consider the different ways in which artists use the studio, the type of studios they use and what they use them for. We have also been interested in the problems and difficulties artists experience in relation to their studios. Access and availability, resources, security, health and safety, insurance, expense, location, tenure, these are all familiar concerns in relation to the studio. For this edition, the focus is on artists who have sought to address these issues by designing and building their own studio spaces.

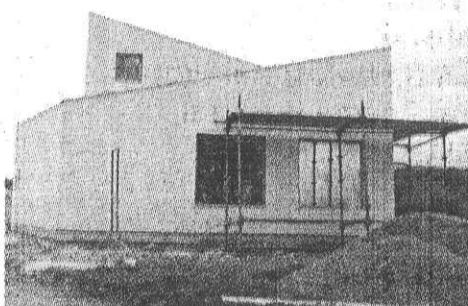
Chris Doris



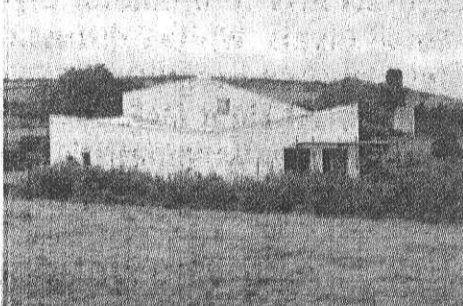
Chris Doris's studio under construction. Interior view.



Chris Doris's studio under construction. Architect: Dominic Stevens.



Chris Doris's studio under construction. Architect: Dominic Stevens.



Chris Doris's studio under construction. Architect: Dominic Stevens.

HAVING lived and worked in the Parochial house in Lacken North Mayo for 10 years, we sold up four years ago, bought a two acre site nearby and started the design and planning for a new house and studio.

Since 1986, I had worked in three other studios in Dublin, all of which had spatial or light limitations and/or security and conservation problems for the work and myself. I've lost quite a bit of work over the years to damp mould, to rats and to vandals.

Brian Maguire and myself worked in the spacious squalor of Padraig O'Faolain's Georgian hulk on Mountjoy Square in the late 80s. Hurricane Charlie blew in the windows. Later a gang thrashed the place, the work, tools etc. The building was condemned thereafter.

While building I've worked in a large tin roofed structure, baking in summer, frigid in winter. It's beautifully lit and spacious, however when I was in India during the winter the spores from a virulent fungus penetrated the packaging on stored paintings and ate the paint. A year's work edited!

Dominic Stevens designed the home and studio. Our first design, on another site was refused permission. Continual hitches such as this have arisen throughout the project, but every crisis was eventually resolved with a superior solution. Designing the studio again for a new site – 100 metres from the house, produced a leaner more elegant building than the first.

You can expect to pay 12%-15% of the budget to the architect, if he / she does the design, the planning process and managing the build, each of which is a third of his / her fee.

We've met the architect for the design and planning. As the building is unusual and he's familiar with the particular preferences and linguistic requirements of the local planning authorities, he can articulate the package sensitively. With a more conventional building we

would have done it ourselves. The architect's understanding of space and utility and materials was invaluable.

The initial application was for a hobby room, avoiding the commercial planning implications. With permission granted for the structure, I applied to Leader for grant aid on the basis of commercial viability and social impact. They went for a mix of artistic record, highlighting the area through media coverage, bringing other artists into the area and proposed workshops and public interventions. Then we applied for change of use to a commercial building.

The €28,000 capital grant is retrospective and subject to higher level requirements for electrics and fire safety than a normal building. It's supposed to be a 50% grant but as seems inevitable both budgets and time frames are well over the projections.

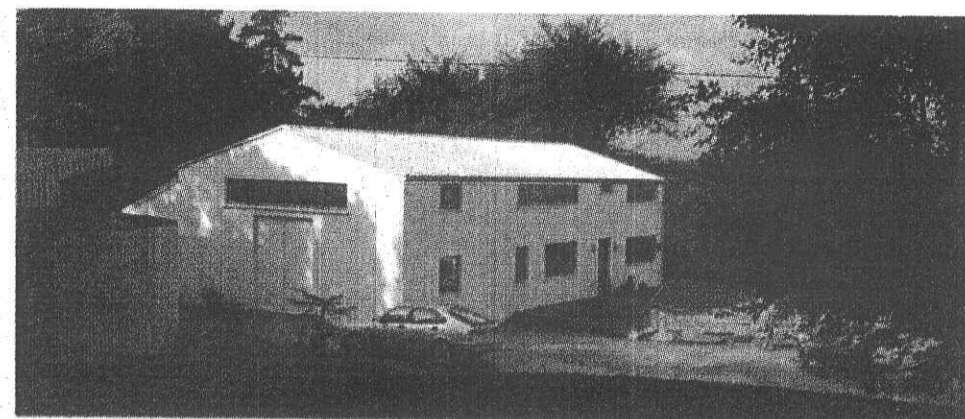
With a good contractor architectural supervision isn't necessary, although the local contractor has bridled at the novelty and "impracticality" of some of the architects ideas.

Within a few weeks there should be a beautiful grass or heather roofed building with large north facing roof light. It's an angular tilting spiral, echoing the famous churches of McCormack, Islamic citadels and Irish agricultural buildings! It's parapetted, with internal drains. It has doorways but no doors and is well insulated so that a woodpellet space heater will keep it all warm. A split level separates the office/clean work area from the 'dirty work' zone. The storage area is behind the main working wall. We've located and designed the building so that it could be converted as a residence in the future without impinging on the house – a class of pension fund if ever required.

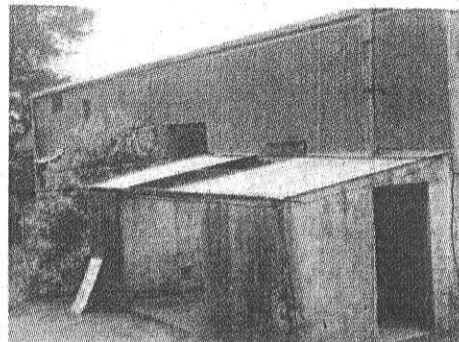
They say 'you can't jump off a moving boat'. The stability and security of the new studio will conserve energy for risk taking and artmaking.

Chris Doris

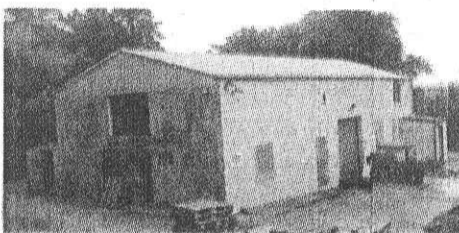
The Creamery: Eilis O'Connell



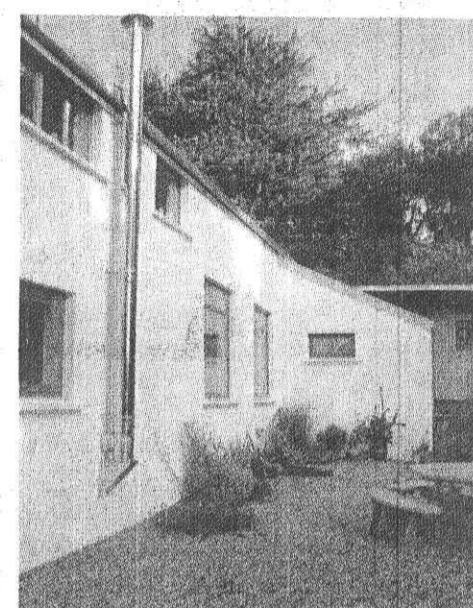
Eilis O'Connell's studio.



The creamery before conversion



The creamery before conversion



Eilis O'Connell's studio.

BEING a sculptor I have very specific studio requirements – I need to be on the ground floor and I need good access. Over the years I have moved studios 12 times, when I live in cities I usually end up in the most down and out places and I always end up with no daylight. You can't have everything, but the lack of daylight always really bothered me.

My most secure space was my Acme studio in London where I worked for 12 years. I had a huge space but again no daylight or ventilation, Acme is a great organisation, I had a 25 year lease on my studio in a huge building with 50 other artists. In 2002 I left London for personal reasons and returned to Ireland to find myself in the middle of the property boom, which made finding a studio very difficult.

I tried to work with Tom De Paor to design a studio for a site at Long Strand in West Cork, but that became very difficult as I just didn't have enough money. It was a difficult time in my life as I was coping with bereavement and I was not optimistic about my future. It took two years to get back to normal.

In 2004 I began looking for a building that could function as a studio, I combed the newspapers and estate agents and had great help from friends and family. Eventually I found a derelict creamery building on a really beautiful site north west of Cork city. To buy it, I first had to apply for change of use. I hired an engineer to do a survey to find out what the structural limitations would be in terms of demolition or rebuilding. They were particularly helpful when it came to costings – although I totally ignored the quantity surveyor.

I was very glad that I had initially gone through that first attempt with Tom because now I really knew what I wanted, this was renovation project, the shape of the building was already there, in many ways, that made it so much easier for me. It was always going to be a glorified shed and architects hate sheds. I used the engineers survey to create the drawings for the planners; this took a lot of time.

I needed to demolish most of the building; the biggest problem was getting the enormous fridges out. I divided the building into four spaces, a double height space of about 1,200 sq. feet with huge doors that you can drive up to, an office, drawing room, store room, kitchen, wet room for washing moulds etc. I kept it all very simple and that kept costs down. The drawings were submitted to the planners. Those plans were not accepted, but I persisted by answering pages and pages of questions regarding my proposal – some of the questions seemed absolutely ridiculous.

In the end I got agreement, I sold everything I owned to buy the place. Then the task of finding a local builder. I asked everyone that I came across did they know any builders and it was my car mechanic who gave me the name Gerry O'Donovan. We got on really well, it was great fun, I loved watching the demolition and the building emerged bit by bit. In order to keep costs down I hired the builders, plumbers, electricians, carpenters, painters, all separately and that did make life quite stressful at times. I worked in a second-hand portacabin on the site before and during the building, this was very handy as I knew what was going on at all times and felt that I was in control.

Managing the project was very time consuming, but it was important for me to get as much space as I could for as little money as possible. It took a while to adjust to the cleanliness and newness of it all, it was too perfect in the beginning. But that was a year ago, now it's really messy and productive again.

The best part is having an acre of land around me and being able to grow things, I am developing small areas outside now to show the sculptures that are too big for galleries.

Creating your workspace is very inspiring, I have light, windows facing in every direction, running water, heating and best of all I can see the mountains 70 miles away.

Eilis O'Connell