



# SHAPING THE FUTURE

Irish women architects are having a moment, with four elected presidents of architectural organisations in Ireland, Europe, Britain and Canada. So what are their aims, asks **Emma Cullinan**

## ANGELA BRADY

President of the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA). She runs Brady Mallalieu Architects with her husband, Robin Mallalieu.

**What do you hope to achieve in the job?** I hope to bring the value of good design to government and the public.

**Favourite and least favourite building?** Sydney Opera House for its organic beauty and clever design. The Chrysler Building in New York has a great art deco silhouette on the skyline. My Brady Mallalieu favourite is our Cor-ten steel Barra Park open-air theatre, in London, which is sculptural and functional and serves the artists in the community well. My least favourite is One New Change near St Paul's Cathedral by Jean Nouvel. This new shopping centre is hardly complementary to Wren in any shape or form.

**What's your favourite design object?** The iPhone. I wish I had had one when I was working and travelling around Europe as a young one.

**Who do you admire?** People who stand up for what they believe in, including the late Wangari Maathai, a Kenyan woman who won the Nobel

Peace Prize for her contribution to sustainable development, democracy and peace.

**What do you like and dislike about being an architect?** I like to solve problems and create solutions. I like having a client who appreciates your contribution to their quality of life. What I dislike is how difficult it is to get a new project today, such as a local school that would normally come your way. The procurement method used by government is a long and arduous process of elimination that favours large practices with higher turnover and PII insurance over the quality, design-led smaller practices.

**What new trends are coming through?** Retrofitting, alternative ways of living and community experimentation. We have a huge energy crisis ahead: people ignore it at their peril.

## GERRIE DOYLE

Immediate past president (and still on the council) of the Ontario Association of Architects. Doyle studied at DIT.

**What did you hope to achieve in the job?** To work towards a better appreciation of what architects bring. Our profession has lost a lot of

ground over the past two decades: we've lost to intermediaries such as project managers and to low fees, and it's ruining our industry. The whole procurement situation is pretty bad right now. When a project is awarded to the lowest bidder we are not getting the best design.

**Favourite and least favourite building?** One of my favourites is the National Gallery of Canada in Ottawa by Moshe Safdie. When you walk in there's this glass entrance canopy and amazing atrium: arriving in the centre of this is incredible. One of the worst I've seen is the expansion of the Royal Ontario Museum by Libeskind.

**Who do you admire?** While studying, it was Frank Lloyd Wright, particularly Fallingwater. I admire Moshe Safdie.

**Why did you choose to be an architect?** I loved art in school. Before college I spent a year working in an architect's office: Burke Kennedy Doyle. Ruairi Quinn hired me. I discovered there was a subject I loved and it wasn't a chore to study.

**What do you like and dislike about it?** I like the client interaction and my biggest love is being on site, which is one of the pluses of being a project







**GRAND DESIGNS**  
From left,  
Selma  
Harrington,  
Michelle Fagan,  
Angela Brady  
and  
Gerrie Doyle.  
PHOTOGRAPHS:  
BRENDA FITZSIMONS  
AND ROBIN MALLALEU

manager. I like the trend for sustainable design.

**New trends are coming through?** Sustainable design is one and BIM (building information modelling) is becoming huge over here. Architects no longer design with 2D AutoCAD, they design everything in 3D.

**Advice for current students?** Travel and study abroad to broaden your horizons. Schools of architecture need to ensure students are taught skills to compete in the current market place, such as BIM (see above), project management skills (such as scheduling, project controlling tools) and skills for running their own business.

**Where should architecture go now?** We need to have better procurement methods: public bodies always award a contract to the lowest price. If you are throwing out the highest bid, then you should also throw out the lowest fee because if you are known to do this it will stop the bottom feeders from bidding low and everyone will want to be in the right spot in the middle.

#### SELMA HARRINGTON

President of the Architects Council of Europe, a gathering of European architectural institutes.

**What do you hope achieve in the role?** A high visibility of architectural issues among the European public and officials. We don't get consulted enough and aren't fully seen as problem solvers.

**Favourite and worst buildings?** In general, I like buildings with lots of light and adequate space that contribute to people who use the buildings. I like roof terraces like the one at the Chester Beatty Library. My worst building isn't the house but a space within it. The basement of the King House in Boyle [Co Roscommon] is an enclosed space that used to house prisoners. It is a stark example of how a building can make you feel. I'm also a bit allergic to the so-called "wow-effect" in architecture.

**What is your favourite design object?** Scissors by Fiskars of Finland because they are very ergonomic, very well made yet mundane in a sense. I

love chairs by Peter Opsvik from Oslo – any of his designs. They are poetry – fabulous and fun.

**Who do you admire? Influences?** I admire the architect Zlatko Ugljen who successfully draws upon traditional cultural heritage while being modern.

**What do you like and dislike about your career?** I like the fact that you are always faced with a new challenge. I dislike overregulation.

**New trends?** In the last few decades architecture has been seen through signature buildings that are often disconnected to their context. It doesn't serve architecture well to be compared with fashion. We can't be trendy because architecture lasts so much longer than clothes. I predict neo-regionalism: rediscovering our local cultures using new materials.

#### MICHELLE FAGAN

New president of the RIAI (Royal Institute of the Architects of Ireland). She runs FKL Architects with Gary Lysaght and Paul Kelly.

**What do you hope to achieve in the role?** To connect with members and the public. Architects are good at identifying what the real problems are in buildings and the built environment. I want to get architects to engage actively with their communities.

**Favourite and least favourite building?** I don't have a favourite, although the Pantheon in Rome made an impression on me when I went there as a student. It is a dramatic and intimate space at the same time. The Bank of Ireland building on Baginboda Street is a really polite intervention and doesn't take away from its context. My worst buildings are wasted opportunities: not necessarily bad, but mediocre buildings.

**Your favourite design object?** When I went through that phase of nesting in my late 20s and early 30s, I bought an Arne Jacobsen teapot which is well used. The iPhone is a beautiful object with a fantastic interface that you can make your own and which reflects how I live my life.



**Who do you admire?** The people I admire are contemporaries: people I know and have an interaction with. You can admire people from afar, as heroes, but it is not the same. Gary and Paul, who I work with, surprise me all the time with their ideas and interest. Boyd Cody Architects and Dominic Stevens too. I really admire Dominic for stepping slightly out of the expected route for architects, looking at issues such as rural living.

**Why did you choose to be an architect?** I didn't choose it, I just always thought I would be one.

**Was it what you thought it would be?** I thought it would be designing buildings but it is much more. It is not about me designing some beautiful object and clients being ever so grateful, but more about the creative process, absorbing as much information as I can from a client and re-presenting it: that is more satisfying than just creating something by myself.

**What do you like and dislike about the role?** I like the day to day work but it can be quite slow and that can take the joy out of it.

**Current trends?** The time of the iconic building is probably fading. The trend is for more familiar, low-key buildings; making every moment special rather than having a one big moment.

**Where should architecture go now?** The community has to take control of the environment, and architects can help. They can help with the re-use of NAMA projects. The mistake made in the built environment was in going for financial reward rather than quality of life. Happiness should be the goal and architects can help.

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