Fact Sheet:

10 Questions to evaluate your architect’s rural design

So you’ve commissioned your architect and he/she’s gone off and come back with his/her first sketch design. Below are a few pointers concerning how you should evaluate his/her design:

1. Does it answer the brief?

The design needs to have all the accommodation you require in a format that would work the way you live. It’s important to remember that the ‘Plan is the generator’, each room needs to be the right size and in the right place for you and your site.

2. Does it have a big idea?

Every project needs a good idea that everything else hangs from. Without a ‘big idea’ the house is just a collection of rooms. Treated correctly the ‘big idea’ can influence all design decisions you make throughout the house both inside and out.

3. Is it an appropriate scale?

Contemporary will work in rural settings (Mayo in fact encourages this) but the design will still need to be sensitively scaled.

4. Is it appropriately detailed?

When using traditional windows they should follow ‘Golden-section’ proportions of being taller rather than wider. Larger glazing to the south is however encouraged in tune with Passivhaus principles. Also, larger glazed ‘separations’ between forms also works well.

5. Does it respond to the site?

The design needs to take account of the sun’s path throughout the day, wind directions and topography.

6. Does it have a strong form?

Rural Irish architecture is very straightforward; the forms are simple and strong.

7. Are you using the right materials?

Indigenous materials could be simple white painted plaster, natural local stone, metal roofs, blue/black/grey slate, timber possibly in wooded areas.

8. Does it take account of my budget?

The proposed design should take account of your budget. As a rough cost allow €100 per square foot; therefore a 2000 square foot house would cost €200k.

9. Has the architect captured the ‘essence’ of what I was looking for?

It’s important that your architect designs something you would like to live in.

10. Am I prepared to reevaluate my preconceptions in what I’m looking for?

The architect’s job is to challenge and push the boundaries; are you prepared to take on board his/her ideas to achieve a better design?