



IKON, an extension to Kingspan's Innovation Centre, was built to the highest standards of sustainable design

ANOTHER MAJOR NATIONAL AWARD FOR NIAL SMITH ARCHITECTS

Located conveniently in the historic and thriving town of Kingscourt, County Cavan, Niall Smith Architects is a young, design-orientated practice with an inherent award-winning tradition. We touched base with the eponymous Niall after his team struck gold in the prestigious Single House Building of the Year category at the 2022 Building & Architect of the Year Awards.

Synonymous with delivering breath-taking, project-specific design that invariably exceeds client expectation, Niall Smith Architects create quality buildings and spaces which are well detailed, energy efficient, accessible and cost effective, formulated by optimising light, space, views and



materials.

The dynamic young practice has a stellar track record for gleaning coveted industry awards in the decade-and-a-half since its inception and was in the spotlight once more at this year's Building & Architect of the Year Awards (BAYA) in Dublin's Mansion House on Thursday, June 16th, taking the Single House Building of the Year award home



"We have an outstanding team of ten here, who can take on a wide variety of work."



Niall Smith Architects have done a lot of conservation work at the iconic Cabra Castle

to Kingscourt for stunningly elegant local home Cabra House – a striking building which blends seamlessly into the flowing, animated topography that sustains it – whilst also finishing runner-up in the Building of the Year – Commercial category for another magnificent local project, namely Kingspan Light & Air.

For Kingspan IKON, meanwhile, Niall Smith Architects was also shortlisted for a BAYA award last year. This building is an extension to Kingspan's Innovation Centre on Kingscourt's Dublin Road. IKON was built to the highest standards of sustainable design and is a showcase for Kingspan products and systems, contains state-of-the-art laboratory and research facilities. The top floor boasts panoramic views over the surrounding countryside and contains a Future Space meeting and events area.

In 2018, meanwhile, Niall and his team picked up the Conservation Award for a Single Building / Development for the restoration of Gartlan's Pub in the town, which was built around 1780 and was

returned to its former glory from a state of considerable dilapidation.

"It's great just to get to the final alone, never mind win an award," says Niall, whose own family home on Dún na Rí Lane was also shortlisted. "It's a team effort that puts us in contention for these awards. We have an outstanding team of ten here, who can take on a wide variety of work and picking up recognition like this from our peers is obviously good for team morale."

Is it a form of vindication, confirming that Niall Smith Architects – a member of The Royal Institute of Architects of Ireland - is operating at the highest level? "It's quite challenging when you are located in a rural setting, but we have a passion for design and people have more appreciation than ever for good design."

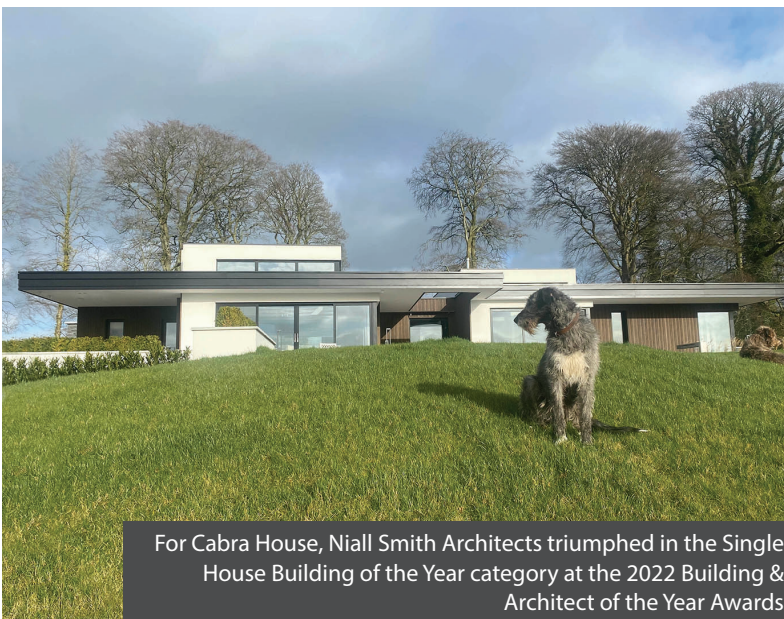
Boasting panoramic views of the mature trees of the estate, and the rolling hills of Meath to the West, the elevated site of Cabra House is located within the grounds of the iconic Cabra Castle, which is a protected structure. Nestling organically within these trees, the linear

CONTACT DETAILS

Niall Smith Architects,
Hall Street,
Kingscourt,
County Cavan.
Tel: 042 9693700
Email: info@niallsmitharchitects.ie
Web: niallsmitharchitects.ie

house is positioned along the eastern boundary, with a direct line of vision down to the majestic Cabra Castle.

The brief for project architects Niall Smith, Agata Kasprzak, and Vincent Galligan was to maximise and frame the views of the castle to the South while maximising the afternoon and evening light, mature trees, private gardens and orientating the living space around this. The building design is influenced by its location within the curtilage of the protected structure, its single storey, linear layout ensuring that it was low impact within the estate. Landscaping was also key, with raised banks and



For Cabra House, Niall Smith Architects triumphed in the Single House Building of the Year category at the 2022 Building & Architect of the Year Awards



Niall and his team picked up the Conservation Award for a Single Building / Development for the restoration of Gartlan's Pub in 2018



The Courtyard House



Kingspan Light + Air

planting to minimise the house's visibility when approaching the castle. The backdrop of mature trees and the low linear nature of the building and its stepped roof planes allow Cabra House to sit into the landscape and respond

to its surrounding topography, with the overhanging canopy providing sheltered outdoor spaces.

The house consists of a series of blocks which create various internal and

external spaces capped with floating canopies / roofs. Materials used include stone and millboard cladding with plastered areas.

The open-plan living area boasts a double-height ceiling, with high level glazing, capturing views of the tree tops. The contemporary kitchen, with its generous island and neutral palette has wonderful views of the landscape. The outdoor terrace flanks the living spaces. The bedrooms are in a separate zone for greater privacy, but are also faced with full-height glazing, with the master suite enjoying a South West facing window, overlooking the castle.

The clients wanted a home with spaces that flowed from the inside out and that would engage with the site and surroundings. The large sliding glazed panels facing onto the garden blur the boundary between indoors and outdoors. Outdoor spaces extend out from the footprint of the house, increasing square footage, while large, overhanging, crisp white soffits frame the views, with crisp edges. The interior has a neutral colour palette paired with white walls and ceilings. Natural stone walls run through the house.

Needless to say, the client, Howard Corscadden, was thrilled with the final outcome and also to learn that his home had scooped a Building & Architect of the Year award. "The family were delighted and they were on the phone to us that night," Niall confirms. "They were delighted with the design of the house and they are wonderful clients. The Corscaddens have a castle in every province [the others being Ballyseede



Kingspan's Innovation Centre is a showcase for Kingspan products and systems



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Castle in Kerry, Bellingham Castle in Louth and Markree Castle in Sligo] and we are honoured to work with them regularly on their properties.”

Indeed, repeat work for satisfied clients is one of the key foundation stones underpinning the success of Niall Smith Architects. Niall cut his architectural teeth with Gilroy McMahon in Dublin, where he had the distinction of working extensively on many prestigious commercial and residential sites, including the Farnham Estate, before opting to set up his own practice in his home town in 2007.

“The first big local project that got us up and running was the restoration of the of the Church of the Immaculate Conception, Kingscourt and the construction of a new bell tower and spire there,” Niall recalls. “That was in 2010 and we’ve also done quite a bit of conservation work at Cabra Castle and its sister castles in Castlebellingham and Sligo.

“We also take on a good mix of contemporary projects. For Kingspan, for example, the projects – which use all their own products – are very innovative and tend to really push the

boundaries and embrace contemporary design. We use the latest 3D modelling / visualisation technology, which gives us a really accurate realisation of each project.”

Located on the site of the Kingspan Group headquarters on the Carrickmacross Road, the brief facing project architects Niall Smith, Agata Kasprzak and Colin Duffy for Kingspan Light & Air was to design a new manufacturing facility for the Light & Air division of the company, using its own products, which in essence would be a living product display. This division specialises in maximising natural light, bringing fresh air into the building, reducing energy consumption with natural light and effective smoke management.

The building design utilised all Kingspan Light & Air products that were to be manufactured within, so that when lit up at night, its translucent panels shine against a backdrop of mature trees. These materials included Kingspan Day-Lite Architectural Wall Light KS1000, which is a versatile single component wall daylighting solution, UniQuad Translucent wall system, integrated rooflights, ridge rooflight and AOVs.

The use of these materials allowed for a continuous, flush and clean aesthetic. The building possesses the ability to have a bright and airy interior in a manufacturing facility (which are often dark, with limited daylight). The main space is mostly manufacturing, with some offices, canteen, laboratory and services. On the mezzanine level, there is an open plan meeting area and product display space.

“We also work for the ETBs [Education & Training Boards] in Cavan, Monaghan, Louth and Meath,” Niall adds. “Indeed, those four counties would generally comprise our catchment area, with all four being within a close radius of Kingscourt.”

The historic town provides Niall Smith Architects with a perfect location and the award-winning local architect is particularly proud not just of his own Kingscourt roots but also of the immeasurable success of the area in giving rise to companies that have played major roles in the global construction industry. “When you look at Kingspan, Gypsum, Kingscourt Brick, O’Reilly Concrete, Paramount Doors - all of which literally came out

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of the ground – it's quite incredible how successful Kingscourt companies have been," he enthuses. "There are great businesses and business people here and it's a great town. It's a fantastic town in terms of its people, its industry and its sport.

"We're very excited about the prospect of a new town centre for Kingscourt, having done a public consultation for a new town plan with new library and digital hub – this proposed new civic building is an exciting development for the town. We were involved in the all-new secondary school in the town and have worked quite regularly on the church. There's also a new greenway into the town from Navan due to be opened soon. That will help make Kingscourt a destination town, which will be great."

Niall Smith Architects pride themselves on the quality of their architectural design and client service at all stages from initial brief definition, conceptual design, planning and tender processes, to the delivery of completed building projects. Working closely with clients, they develop a clear understanding of their demands and aspirations. Through creative and exciting architectural solutions, they deliver these solutions within the timescale agreed.

"Design is obviously very important to us and we focus on providing clients with optimal solutions to get the best out of their site," Niall reveals. "The principle is to maximise the use of views, light and design whilst listening closely to client's needs and preferences.

"We want to be award-winning – that's very important to us and it helps us to stand out as a business. We have a great team here who can take on a variety of work and see projects through from conception through design to delivery, including the construction and contracting phase, which is challenging in the current environment with the price of materials. There are a lot of stages involved and we are the client's representative on all of these, delivering projects along with the contractor, design team, engineers and QS's.

"It's a compete design-team effort, which can vary considerably depending on the type of project, the budget and the scale of the project," the in-demand Kingscourt architect concludes. "You are forever trying to find viable solutions which maintain the integrity of design and are affordable without compromising on quality."



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