



# ‘Why I made a shop my home’

Faced with crazy rents, student Stephen Kelly bought a former newsagent’s shop, writes **Mark Keenan**

**NO2 BIRD AVENUE**  
**Clonskeagh, Dublin 14**  
**Asking price: €775,000**  
**Agent: Owen Reilly (01) 6777100**

Architect student Stephen Kelly got so fed up with overpriced rubbish student accommodation when he started at UCD, he took out a mortgage in 2014 and bought himself a former newsagent’s shop to live in. Back then prices were still relatively affordable following the crash and shop properties in suburban areas were far cheaper than houses. Today our suburbs are filled with rows of jade local shops that long ago found themselves at sixes and sevens in the modern world of shopping centres, supermarkets and online retail.

“When I started in first year I was paying silly money for an absolute kip in Rathmines. I thought ‘there has to be a better way.’”

Moate man Stephen’s family operate a development business in the midlands and his Dad encouraged him to look around for an opportunity. “The former newsagents shop had been shuttered up for years and it was located at one end of Bird Avenue with the college at the other end. You couldn’t get closer.”

The terrace of shops at the Bird Avenue junction of Dublin’s Dundrum Road is typical of those built when developers routinely added a retail terrace to compliment their housing developments.

The shops came with a big family residence located behind and over them because shop owners mostly lived at their premises. An average building had its shop floor space, ground floor storage, a ground floor living room and kitchen and upstairs two to three bedrooms and a bathrooms, with period house proportions.

Back in the 1970s, the first shop at the Dundrum end of the terrace was occupied by silver haired Naughton the grocer, usually found behind his counter scales in a tan shop coat with a biro perched behind his ear.

Next along was the fragrant and elegant Ms Hunter the pharmacist, with a pristine white medical coat and glasses on a chain.

Then Mr Hickey the upbeat butcher in his striped apron, sharpening his knives and having the craic. Then the tiny boutique Freckles, run by the daughter of the owners of the next shop along and sliced out of it for her business.

Buckleys was the ‘mini market’ where Mr Buckley’s station was behind the cold meats counter in his delicatessen’s hat while Mrs Buckley worked the till in her blue and white check shop coat. Finally, at No2 Bird Avenue in the vaguely L-shaped terrace, was Fox the Newsagent and Tobacconist.



**Clockwise from top:** The new living room; Stephen Kelly; the kitchen; the bathroom; another view of the living room; a 1970s photo of the shop terrace; the exterior of No2; the original household entrance and stairs.



The deeds suggest Rose Fox (nee Hartford) had grown up in the 1934-built shop with her sisters Theresa (known as Flower) and Clare. The shop changed little from then until it closed half a century later.

It had a door-mounted bell, mahogany counters and drawers, big wooden racks for magazines and papers and smelled of furniture polish and chocolate.

There was a high wall of jars of loose boiled sweets, an ice cream cabinet and neat stacks of cigarettes on the wall behind the counter. Gerard Fox, who worked with his wife, was a soft spoken, dapper man in smart suit jacket and tie. He totted up your bill with a pencil and used an oak cash drawer rather than a modern register.

Bright-eyed Rose slipped free sweets

and comics into the pockets of children when their parents weren’t looking (causing her husband’s eyebrows to raise in comical faux disapproval). Chatty sisters Flower and Clare also mucked in.

Today, shops like this are let on low rents to accountants or solicitors, but the overhead spaces are often underutilised in times when people need homes.

Kelly for one saw the potential. “I got a mortgage with my Dad’s help and bought it. At that point the Foxs had passed on and the shutters were down.”

Sisters Flower and Clare (who was widowed) had moved in to share their childhood home again. By 2014 Flower had just passed on two years and Clare had moved into care. She died a year later. Both were in their eighties.

“They had converted the shop into

their living room. So the old shop front was still on it,” says Stephen. “I got in during the summer break and opened up the ground floor, added a modern living room extension at the back and converted the garage into a bedroom. We built a large modern kitchen and put a more modern look on the frontage.”

“I put in seven bedrooms because letting these to fellow students would pay the mortgage.”

Kelly loved his college years here and stayed afterwards. Two college-going siblings also got the benefit of it. Now he’s moved to Cork and is selling the B rated property on UCD’s doorstep for €775,000 through Owen Reilly.

It also includes two last vestiges of Fox’s: a newspaper rack and, aptly, Rose’s scales for measuring out loose sweeties.

## 4 On the Market

Period houses around the country



### Pembroke Terrace, Abbeyleix, Co Laois

**€475K** JORDAN TOWN AND COUNTRY (045) 433 550

Pembroke Terrace consists of four remarkable-looking Tudor Revival buildings dating from the early 19th century. They’re landmark buildings on the town’s main street and historically had commercial and official uses, although they’re all now privately owned. The terrace consists of a pair of three-storey buildings flanked by two-storey ones, one of which – the first house at the north end of the terrace – has been owned by the same family for 65 years. Inside, it’s 2,500 sq ft with three reception rooms and a kitchen on the ground floor, and five bedrooms upstairs. It’s a surprisingly big site (0.75 of an acre) with a walled garden and coach house. The house can be sold without that for €350k.



### 8 The Crescent, Cobh, Co Cork

**€530K** ENGLISH AUCTIONEERS (021) 481 1494

The main photos of The Crescent shows the houses from the northern side, as they faces Spy Hill. It’s from the other side, though, that these 13 Victorian houses really come into their own, standing on an eminence and facing southeast towards Cork Harbour.

Built about 1850, they’re split-level, with two storeys at the back. Although No8 needs renovation now, it has original features including fireplaces and shuttered sash windows. It’s 3,477 sq ft with two reception rooms and a kitchen at entrance level, the original kitchen and two bedrooms on the lower ground floor, and three more bedrooms upstairs. The houses share a little park at the back with pedestrian access to Cobh town centre.



### Old Parochial House, Kilmallock, Co Limerick

**€450K** RE/MAX PROFESSIONAL PARTNERS (091) 330 300

According to the National Inventory of Architectural Heritage, the Old Parochial House was built about 1875, and it was next to the Union Workhouse (since demolished in the main, although part of it became the town courthouse).

The house has now been restored, keeping its original features (Gothic here and there), although it’s likely a new owner will want to update the kitchen, which is at the back on the ground floor. Also at the back is a dining room, and there are two more reception rooms facing front. The first floor has five bedrooms in a total floor area of 3,500 sq ft.



### 27 Erskine Terrace, Farnham Street, Cavan

**AMVC400K** SMITH PROPERTY (049) 436 2244

It’s about time someone took No27 Erskine Terrace in hand, as it’s a fine example of 19th-century architecture (dating from 1860, according to the National Inventory of Architectural Heritage) in rather a dilapidated state. It’s part of a sandstone-built terrace that once housed the Cavan town gentry, and has its original carriage arch, fanlight, and cast-iron railings.

Inside, it’s 3,586 sq ft on three storeys over a basement. Out the back is a west-facing garden with a mews building. It will be auctioned online on Thursday 28 April unless sold beforehand.

## Kahansa House, Seamount, Salthill, Galway €1.75M



## Watch the sun go down on Galway Bay from a €1.75m Salthill trophy home

Kahansa House is one of a group of four detached trophy homes built facing south over Salthill promenade and Galway Bay, west of the Salthill Hotel.

On account of the view, and the southerly orientation, there’s a front-facing balcony on the first floor here.

You won’t be able to lounge out there in a grotty dressing gown though, as the prom is always busy with walkers and gawkers and their dogs.

This is the kind of balcony where, as long as you’re properly dressed and you’ve seen to your hair and make-up beforehand, you’ll be perfectly instagrammable, sipping a flat white from an expensive cup.

The balcony is not off a bedroom but a first-floor sunroom, which means the whole family can get to use it. There are five bedrooms on this floor too, with two shared en-suite showers.

The balcony is above a ground-floor sun room that forms a swanky sort of entrance

porch, 13ft wide and also with views south over Galway Bay.

On either side of the entrance hall is a reception room – living room and lounge – each with a marble fireplace, and the lounge has double doors to an open-plan dining room and kitchen at the back of the house.

The kitchen is fitted with granite countertops and the dining room has sliding doors to a west-facing side patio.

At the end of the hall is an office, and also at the back, accessed from the kitchen, are three service rooms – a utility room, laundry room and workshop. There’s plenty more storage upstairs as well, where there’s an attic with three skylights.

The site here is 0.2 of an acre with lawns, mature planting and a greenhouse. The parking is out the back, with vehicle access from Seamount.

Kahansa House is for sale for €1.75m with Sherry FitzGerald Galway (091) 569 123.



The view from one of the five bedrooms at the property in Salthill