

Architectural merger puts firm streets ahead of the competition

Helen Rogers

THE merger of two of the country's leading architectural firms will create a formidable new practice. Anthony Reddy Associates, the award winning architectural firm headed-up by current Royal Institute of Architects in Ireland president Anthony Reddy, and O'Riordan Staehli, a Cork firm which has won many awards for its specialism in hospitals and educational buildings, this week announced their decision to join forces, in doing so becoming one of the top five architectural practices in the country.

The hope is that the pooling of the experience within the two firms will leave them poised to tender for a far greater variety of business - especially in Cork, where the new urban regeneration plans and docklands development has just begun to take off.

The managing directors of

the two firms, Anthony Reddy and Donogh O'Riordan, have known each other for years and share a mutual passion for a modern, urban ethic that has seen them both scoop armfuls of awards.

And more importantly for the rest of us, the quality of our city streetscapes has vastly improved thanks to their modernist designs which, though on a large scale, are totally focused on the individual and the way the buildings in which we live, work and shop shape our lives. ARA are currently working on some of the largest urban renewal projects in the country.

They designed the huge €100m Kilkenny project, McDonagh Junction, which developers Chesterbridge secured planning permission for last week. They are also designing the OPW and Eircom joint venture at Westgate RHK, where offices, apartments and the new children's museum are being planned,

as well as the nearby Nestle site development.

The merger came about because ARA identified Cork as a major architectural opportunity and wanted a foothold there, preferably through a firm with an established track record and similarly "urban" ethos.

O'Riordan Staehli was earmarked because of their work on the Cliffs of Moher interpretative centre and the fact that they have long experience designing hospitals and health-care buildings - a scarce expertise in this country.

Donogh O'Riordan says both practices are thrilled with the merger.

"We are both committed urbanists and like very contemporary, exiting buildings for cities.

"Cork's urban regeneration and the new docklands development here are gaining huge momentum after a slow start in the past couple of decades and attracting a lot of interest



Anthony Reddy Associates and Cork firm O'Riordan Staehli this week announced their merger

hospital design.

And of course, the hospital environment itself is now regarded as central to patients' health and well being.

ARA currently has offices in Dublin, Kilkenny and Belfast and employs 80 staff and O'Riordan Staehli employs 40 people in Cork - and is in the process of recruiting more.

ARA has won awards for its Custom House Square apartments and social housing which have received both national and international acclaim.

Custom House Square and their designs at Temple Bar West have lifted the bar for architecture in Dublin. A distinctive "sense of place" is stamped through these developments, rather than just more concrete, glass and steel.

Following the merger, Dublin based Anthony Reddy Associates (ARA) will retain its name while O'Riordan Staehli, Cork, will become Reddy O'Riordan Staehli.

Donogh O'Riordan will remain as managing director for two years and subsequently will become chairman for three further years.

Directors Michael Regan and Tom Hegarty become managing directors designate.

ARA founder, Anthony Reddy, will remain managing director of Anthony Reddy Associates, supported by directors Ronan Smith and Brian O'Neill.

from all over the country. That's probably been a good thing for Cork because the country is now more prosperous and the demand for quality architecture among the public and developers themselves is much greater."

The merged firm will be one of the top five practices in the country with a huge pool of expertise.

"Cork's Strategic plan incorporates vast opportunities in the Docklands Regeneration, an area of Urban Planning

where ARA have considerable expertise," says O'Riordan. ARA will also bring retail and leisure expertise to the Cork practice and each practice will benefit from each others management structures and systems."

O'Riordan Staehli are one of the few architectural firms specialising in health care projects.

They are currently working on a new maternity hospital for Cork - at €75m, the largest health project currently being

undertaken in the south of the country. The firm's contemporary approach to design can be seen from its plans for the new residential development at Ballincollig and the new student centre at UCC.

The company has worked on hospital design since the mid-70s, a specialist area which has seen a sea change in approach in the past decade.

The huge emphasis now put on the rapidly changing medical technologies is now an integral and difficult part of