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A lack of running water didn’t deter the owners of this crumbling cottage – they harnessed its special energy to create a harmonious home, says Grainne Rothery.

Transforming Shaolin Cottage from near dereliction into a charming home with a curved, zinc-clad extension and a beautiful, rambling garden has been a labour of love for Nigel O’Brien and Sarah Codd for the past 24 years – and their work is not over yet.

The pair, who are both artists, were living in a quiet cul-de-sac backing onto Dun Laoghaire golf course when they started looking for their house in the country in the late 1990s. O’Brien grew up in Cabra in Dublin but Codd is from Enniscorthy in Co Wexford and missed countryside living. “I grew up on the banks of the River Slaney and I just wanted to come back to the peace and quiet,” she says.

O’Brien, who was working for Dun Laoghaire-Rathdown county council’s parks department in Cabinteely, had visited a medium, Paddy McMahon, a few years earlier. “I was thinking of giving up my job because I’d got so tired of it. He told me to stay but to paint and that I’d been an artist in a past life in France. He also said our souls would develop better in the country.”

After looking at a couple of properties in Wexford, they were brought to see a two-storey cottage near New Ross that they thought was “the most beautiful place on the planet”.

“Even with the house derelict and the grounds overgrown and cattle everywhere, it was amazing,” O’Brien says. “It had been untouched for years so we felt the presence of nature spirits,” Codd adds. “There was a very special energy and it was so beautiful and we fell in love with it instantly.”

After buying the property, which was down a quiet lane, very private and included three quarters of an acre of land, they started wondering what to do with what was essentially a shell of a house. “I took the ivy off the wall and the chimney fell down a week later,” O’Brien says. “The plan

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The couple had always planned to build an extension and had started their research the day they moved into the cottage. However, the pandemic put a hold on their plans, and it was not until 2019 that they finally decided to start the project. They hired an architect who designed the extension to be a two-storey rectangular building with stone walls and a glass roof. The extension was built in the style of the original cottage and was intended to complement the existing structure. The couple was pleased with the final result, and they were able to move into their new home in time for Christmas.

The kitchen in the new extension is a focal point of the cottage, and it is designed to be both functional and beautiful. The couple have added a large island in the centre of the kitchen, which provides plenty of storage space and a place to work. They have also added a new set of cabinets and a new range, which is an Aga that was given to them by Codd's father. The couple have also added new flooring and new windows, which have improved the natural light in the space.

The couple have also added a new porch to the front of the cottage, which has been designed in the style of the original cottage. The porch provides a welcoming entrance to the cottage and is a place where the couple can sit and enjoy the view.

The couple have also added a new bathroom to the cottage, which is located on the first floor. The bathroom is designed to be both functional and beautiful, with a large walk-in shower and a modern sink.

The couple have also added a new bedroom to the cottage, which is located on the second floor. The bedroom is designed to be both functional and beautiful, with plenty of storage space and a large window that provides plenty of natural light.

The couple have also added a new garden room to the cottage, which is located at the back of the property. The garden room is designed to be both functional and beautiful, with a large window that provides plenty of natural light. The couple have added a new set of doors to the garden room, which provides access to the rear garden.

The couple have also added a new garage to the cottage, which is located at the front of the property. The garage is designed to be both functional and beautiful, with plenty of storage space and a large door that provides access to the rear garden.

The couple have also added a new parking area to the cottage, which is located at the front of the property. The parking area is designed to be both functional and beautiful, with plenty of space for the couple's car and a new set of gates.

The couple have also added a new driveway to the cottage, which is located at the front of the property. The driveway is designed to be both functional and beautiful, with a new set of gates and a new set of doors.

The couple have also added a new set of stairs to the cottage, which is located at the front of the property. The stairs are designed to be both functional and beautiful, with a new set of handrails and a new set of doors.