



ENTER THE TARDIS

A vivid imagination not only helped Dolores Rice turn her tiny cottage into the sprawling house pictured here, it also helped her find her dream husband in a very unusual way says **Mary O'Sullivan**. Photography by **Tony Gavin**

With this ongoing and seemingly endless downturn, it sometimes seems that people have completely stopped buying and selling houses. The whole notion of trading up has disappeared. But there is another option – building up, adding more space by adding another storey, as writer Dolores Rice has done with her house. Dolores has, with the help of her architects, created an amazing house out of a tiny, run-down cottage. Of course, it required a vivid imagination to visualise the result of a project such as this one, and the stylish thirty-something would be the first to admit she has just that quality.

Imagination is a basic requirement for someone in Dolores's profession, but even she never realised that an unlikely scenario she imagined at age nine would actually come to pass. She saw the film *Catholic Boys*, liked the look of one of the stars, and told herself that when she grew up she would go to the States and marry him. She and that actor, American Andrew McCarthy, now have a two-year-old daughter, Willow, and divide their time between Dublin and New York.

Dolores doesn't elaborate and say whether this childhood matrimonial intention was what led her into the world of film, but this is exactly where she has ended up – researching, writing and directing movies.

The daughter of hoteliers Colm and Margot Rice, Dolores graduated with a first-class degree in French and philosophy from UCD, then did an MA in London in theatre and philosophy. She then spent two years teaching – one at UCD teaching film, the other at the Sorbonne teaching theatre and English.

After her spell at the Sorbonne, she stayed on in Paris writing and researching stories that she was hoping to have made into films. To earn her keep, she did translations on the stock market there, getting up at impossible hours to be on hand when the different markets opened worldwide.

"It was the bane of my life," Dolores recalls. "I worked like a racehorse, but I made money which enabled me to write and direct short films of my own." Those two films, which are quite dark and gritty in subject matter and tone, were shot in Ireland and edited in France. They were completed four years ago, after which time she got a commission from the *Sunday*



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Independent to do some stories in Egypt.

"I was on Mount Sinai and I had to call in one of the stories when my phone died," Dolores says. "There were tourists around but no one would give me the loan of a mobile. Eventually, a Bedouin did – yes, he had a mobile – and I ended up living with a Bedouin tribe for two weeks."

That fascinating experience inspired Dolores to write a film script partly set in Egypt. She has the backing of the Irish Film Board and He'll's Kitchen International. Jim Sheridan and Arthur Lappin's film company, to make *The Whale of the Moon*, which is named after a Waterboys song. It will be shot in Oklahoma, Ireland and Egypt this year, after which time she got a commission from the *Sunday*

four years to get to this stage, and much else has also happened to Dolores during that period, including meeting Andrew and becoming a stepmother, a mother and a housewife.

Shortly after Dolores's first trip to Egypt, she went to the Galway Film Fleadh where one of her short films was showing. At the time, she had also started writing a novel. When she went to see another short film, *News for the Church*, she thought to herself that whoever had made it should direct the movie of her novel: it had exactly the same tone.

"Then, his name came up at the end and I thought, 'Whoa, is it that actor from *Catholic Boys*?' Dolores recalls. The next morning she saw Andrew McCarthy in the lobby, went up to him, and said: "My name is Dolores Rice. I loved your movie."

She continues: "I told him about how, when I was nine, I had seen *Catholic Boys* and I decided I was going to the States to marry that boy. We spoke for about 40 seconds and then he left." But that wasn't the last of Andrew. A few weeks later he emailed her, then

Left Dolores Rice outside her home, which was a terraced cottage built at the turn of the last century

Above Dolores in the kitchen with its concrete floor. The kitchen units are from Kube in Beacon South Quarter, Sandford. The Chinese chest is from Decor, Camden St

Top right The back of the house has a small courtyard with a barbecue and a hot outdoor shower.

The balcony was made by Brian Leamy of Interwood who did all the woodwork in the house

Middle right Willow's room, which has stairs to six-year-old Sam's loft space

Bottom right There isn't space in the upstairs bedroom for a full on suite, so there is a shower room and a hand basin in the corner of the bedroom. The hand basin was designed and made by Dolores's brother, well known potter Colin de Ris

they met again at the Cork Film Festival. Dolores moved to New York and they've been together ever since, dividing their time between New York and Dublin.

Andrew, who writes and directs as well as acts – he's currently in *Lipstick Jungle* – is divorced and has a six-year-old son, Sam, and he and Dolores now also have two-year-old Willow. The couple are engaged and plan to marry in the summer.

Andrew has been coming to Ireland for the past 20 years and was as keen as Dolores to have a base here, so they bought their little house in September, 2005. To Dolores, the state of the house didn't matter as much as the location, Dublin 6, which is where she grew up.

"We looked around but decided since we'd come back to Ireland mainly to see my parents, it would be silly not to be near them," she says. She eventually bought a 500sq ft, two-room cottage, one of a triangle of cottages built for train workers in 1900 in a secluded little laneway around a green. It was very basic, so the couple employed architects Joe Lawrence and Pierre Leong to completely redesign and renovate it.



"We met a few architects and went with Joe and Pierre because we wanted a few quirky things and they seemed the most adventurous," Dolores recalls. The result, as Dolores herself says, is a Tardis. The tiny cottage was originally on one level but Dolores wanted "to go down and go up"; Now, the house has several levels and the main room is double height, with huge expanses of glass affording enormous light. To the front is the kitchen/dining room, then there are steps down to the lounge. Off the kitchen, there is a TV area and a bedroom and bathroom. The bedroom contains Willow's cot and has stairs to a little loft, which houses Sam's bed and has its own skylight and a hatch that opens on to the kitchen/dining area.

Every inch of space is used. Between the bedroom and the TV area is a bathroom. Along the wall is a movable screen, which allows Dolores to close off the TV area and turn it into a guest bedroom when necessary. To the other side of the room there are stairs leading to the master bedroom, which has a shower room and a hand basin. The floors, stairs and walls are all