

RPP ARCHITECTS



Staff at RPP Architects outside the practice's office on Donegall Pass

When it comes to taking time out to reflect on a landmark birthday, most companies revel in the opportunity to celebrate. In the local construction industry, however, despite the fact that things are finally looking up, there is still some hesitancy about 'blowing your own trumpet'.

Given the journey that RPP Architects has been on in recent years, riding out the recession with the same 'survival of the fittest' resilience shown by many local businesses, the firm has tentatively decided to take a breath and reflect on its 40 years in business in Belfast, before looking forward to the exciting new projects that lie ahead in 2017.

In 1989. A rebrand and change of name to RPP Architects followed in 2006 when the current directors, Harry McConnell, Peter McGirr, Alan Shields and Simon Robinson took the helm.

The firm also moved from Clarence Gallery to its current offices, a striking four-storey red-brick building, situated on the doorstep of Belfast's historic Gasworks district, on Donegall Pass.

RPP Architects today employs 38 people and has offices in Belfast and Derry.

A dynamic approach looking beyond the local market

The leadership of four distinctly individual directors, each with their own experience, skills, specialist interests and personal

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approach to the business, has undoubtedly benefited the firm, allowing RPP Architects to continue growing its portfolio of work across diverse industry sectors: from commercial to education, retail, healthcare, transport, leisure and tourism, as well as designing beautiful, one-off bespoke homes.

Commercial fit-outs, particularly hotels, retail and office accommodation, have also proved to be an important area of business for the practice, with many projects coming from the UK and from US-backed firms locating



The directors of RPP Architects mark its 40th anniversary outside the new Belfast Harbour Film Studios, one of its recent projects. From left, Harry McConnell, Simon Robinson, Peter McGirr and Alan Shields

It's secured landmark deals including the new Grand Central Hotel in Belfast and the city's latest films studios but there's a long and distinguished history to remember

In Northern Ireland. As with all local businesses, the firm has had to respond quickly and be able to adapt to market pressures, especially through the recession.

In recent years, the practice's business has spread far beyond

the Northern Ireland market to projects in Saudi Arabia, the UK and the Republic of Ireland.

Understanding the industry and embracing BIM

When asked his view on this mile-

stone birthday, RPP Architects Director, Alan Shields, said: "We try our best to keep abreast, if not ahead, of developments in our industry. I am proud to say that we are now one of the first firms in Northern Ireland to offer a dedi-

cated in-house Principal Designer, who is capable of overseeing all areas of health and safety.

"This is a massive advantage for our clients in large-scale construction projects.

"RPP is also in the process of



City Quays One as part of the new waterfront regeneration at City Quays Belfast



RPP Architects won a RIBA Award for their work on the Old See House mental health facility in north Belfast and (below) the firm also works on private homes, like this one in Cultra, Co Down



a positive impact on our city and community, transforming the space they occupy.

"There are 'landmark' buildings, such as the McClay Library at Queen's University, the Bank of Ireland Headquarters on Donegall Square and the Europa Hotel, which are easily recognisable and certainly form part of the Belfast cityscape," Mr McGirr said.

"Then there are projects such as the 2015 RIBA National Award-winning Old See House, a community Mental Health Resource Centre in North Belfast that continues to break new ground in mental health in its support of those with mental health issues.

"As a practice, RPP Architects is also immensely proud to have provided in the region of £100m of social housing and community regeneration schemes across Northern Ireland."

embracing the challenge of what is possibly the biggest change to come to the construction industry since CAD (Computer Aided Design), namely BIM (Building Information Modelling).

"We see this new and exciting way of working as a real positive and we are confident that our current investment in hardware and training will bring great benefit to our clients across all sectors."

Projects to be proud of

On the topic of significant past projects, Director Peter McGirr said: "Looking back, it is hard to choose one project that defines RPP Architects' work over four decades.

"Projects that stand out for me though are ones that have made

Attention to the finer detail

When asked what he believes has contributed to the longevity of RPP Architects, Director Simon Robinson, said: "RPP Architects has always been passionate about the finer details and we always try to go that extra step for our clients. This is especially true for

the private homes we design.

"Our Bespoke Homes section is all about taking a thoughtful approach to each and every private home, extension, refurbishment or interior that we design.

"Unlike other architects, the firm offers a dedicated Interior Design team who can really help our clients with all the choices they make throughout the design process: from selecting a site, to landscaping, choosing paint colours, lighting layouts, fabric choices and designing furniture, staircases and bookshelves.

"Building relationships and working collaboratively with our clients throughout the design process is core to the success of every project we do and I think it is this fundamental ethos that has carried RPP Architects through the last 40 years and will hopefully take us through the next 40," Mr Robinson added.

“As a Belfast-based firm, we are proud to be involved in the redevelopment of the waterfront area”

Exciting times ahead for Belfast and RPP Architects

Director Harry McConnell said: "2017 is shaping up to be a very interesting year for RPP Architects. We will be continuing our work at City Quays, providing hotel and high-grade office accommodation. This will include the opening, in early 2018, of a brand new waterside Marriott hotel housing top chef, Jean-Christophe Novelli's first restaurant in Ireland.

"Another significant project that will be delivered later in 2017 is Belfast Harbour Film Studios.



RPP Architects has also worked on the plans for the Grand Central Hotel, in Belfast city centre, Hastings Hotels' latest project

The 120,000 sq ft film studio is situated on a former 340-acre reclaimed site, known as Giants Park, and will certainly enhance Belfast's credentials as a film and television production destination.

"As a Belfast-based firm, we are extremely proud to be involved in the redevelopment of the waterfront, which will undoubtedly breathe new life into this area of the city bringing jobs and visitors to Belfast."

Film studios, hotels and hospitals for 2017

With 40 years under its belt, RPP Architects moves forward in 2017 with a diverse list of projects on its

books. Work began in December 2016, at Belfast City Hospital, on the new 80-bed mental health inpatient unit.

This facility will see the transformation of services for acutely mentally ill adults in Belfast and the surrounding area and is a true first-of-its-kind facility for the UK.

RPP Architects continues to dominate as a leading force for design in the hotel sector this year. Projects include the Grand Central, a brand new hotel for the Hastings Group at Windsor House in Belfast; a luxury four-star boutique hotel, as part of the redevelopment of the waterside in Derry; and finally, the £5m expansion to include

a boutique tree-top spa at Co Antrim's Tullyglass House Hotel, in Ballymena.

Bright things on the horizon

RPP Architects has much to reflect on, and be proud of, from its last 40 years in business in Northern Ireland.

Whilst the journey in business, and particularly in construction, is never smooth, and changes within the industry twinned with political uncertainty both in Northern Ireland and nationally certainly present challenges, this firm, like the city of Belfast, can be confident and proud and look forward to bright things on the horizon.