

# new horizons

THE ROBB FAMILY find it hard to stay away from the *holiday home* they built on the Antrim coast. And with a VIEW like this, and a glorious *stretch of coastline* on their doorstep, who could blame them?

WORDS **Janet McMeekin** PHOTOGRAPHS **Dan Duchars**



OPPOSITE The Robb family enjoy a spectacular panorama CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT Gary, Charlie and George have a barbecue on the balcony; two dogs from Alessi survey the landscape; Caroline's love of the sea has inspired her to set up a business selling coastal-influenced gifts and homewares; binoculars allow close-ups of the view; spending the summer at the property makes it an ideal retreat for the Robbs

*I*'ll never forget the moment, halfway through the build of our holiday home, that Gary and I donned yellow hard hats and clambered up a ladder,' says Caroline Robb. 'It was a bitterly cold winter's day but suddenly we were confronted with the most spectacular coastal views.' As the pair stood spellbound, looking across the sea towards Donegal's mist-shrouded headland and over the waves to the seaside town of Portrush, it dawned on them that they'd be drinking in this breathtaking panorama regularly once their home was completed. 'At that point we knew we'd made a good decision,' Caroline says.

Before building their striking contemporary home on Northern Ireland's Antrim coast, the Robbs had been unsure about what to do with the cramped and basic holiday bungalow that Gary had inherited. 'I love this part of the world,' he says. 'It holds so many special childhood memories of carefree days spent fishing off the rocks, playing golf and having all kinds of adventures. Caroline grew up in this area, too, and has a wealth of similar tales to tell.' Keen to re-create the freedom enjoyed during these halcyon days for their own sons, Charlie and George, the couple decided to knock down the bungalow and

replace it with a house specifically tailored to their active family's needs.

'We toyed briefly with the idea of gutting the property, which dated from 1910, and extending it,' Caroline says. 'However, we knew that the only way to take advantage of the views would be to build up. It made sense to start from scratch.'

## FROM TIRED BUNGALOW TO FABULOUS RETREAT

To bring their ideas to fruition, the Robbs enlisted the help of designer Stephen McMonagle of Studiorogers Architects Ltd, based in nearby Coleraine. They gave



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT Coastal-themed objects bring the outdoors in; seafood caught locally; Gary in the kitchen; Alphie, the family's Golden Retriever; a snug area for relaxing; preparing supper OPPOSITE Bright touches, such as this Orla Kiely cushion, dot the white interior

him a very clear brief. 'The light in this part of the world is so special we hoped to bring as much of it into our new home as possible,' Caroline says. 'We also wanted the house to be practical and cosy enough for us to stay at any time of the year. The old property had no mod cons and we became reluctant to leave our comfortable main home to visit the coast.'

'The site called for something simple, with white rendering and weatherboarding and plenty of glass to let in that wonderful light,' says Stephen. 'I felt that the site explained how the house would work.' Inverting the living accommodation

seemed obvious, as was creating two large balconies at the front and rear of the home where the family could have barbecues and a grandstand view as the motorbikes whizz past during the famous North West 200 road race. A lantern in the hallway allows a tunnel of light to filter right through the house, while a slender horizontal window in the living room leads the eye out over Portrush.

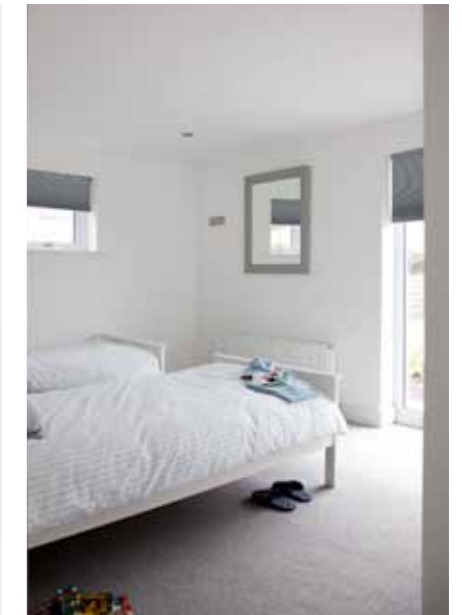
Once planning permission was approved, Kevin Mullan of Springhill Construction took over the reins as project manager and the house was completed in April 2010.

'Instead of just being a holiday home, the house became a fabulous retreat where we spend as much time as possible,' Caroline says. 'When the children break up from school in June, we head up to Portrush immediately and don't come back until September. Thankfully, Gary can commute to his family business in Belfast from here, so, when he returns in the evening, we can all share the fun.'

#### AN UPSIDE-DOWN HOUSE

When it came to decorating, Caroline and Gary agreed that they wanted a clean, white palette with subtle accents of pale





OPPOSITE To maximise the light, Caroline chose blinds instead of curtains ABOVE, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT The muted shades of the throw and bed linen create a beachy feel; a minimalist style works well in this property; the home's upside-down design means that the family has magnificent views of the coastline; local wild flowers are displayed in a vase; Gary and the two boys can indulge their love of golf on the nearby Ballyreagh Golf Course

blues and greens to reflect the spectrum of the coastal surroundings.

'We were conscious of keeping it light, bright and uncluttered and we really wanted a minimalist feel,' she says. 'Although I couldn't resist including a few surprise splashes of bold colour from my favourite designer Orla Kiely.'

'At the time I found it very difficult to source stylish and contemporary accessories with a coastal theme. In fact, I found it so frustrating that I decided to take matters into my own hands and I've just launched a new online business selling coastal-influenced gifts and homewares so that I can share my

passion for this area and love of interior design with others.'

The upside-down layout has also worked out well. 'The downstairs shower room is handy when the boys stroll in covered in sand from a day at the beach,' Caroline says. 'There's plenty of space for guests, which is handy since we get a lot more visitors than we did when we stayed at the little bungalow.'

The new house reignited the couple's passion for the Antrim Coast. 'It's such a relaxed way of living here that we're out and about all the time,' Caroline says. Ballyreagh Golf Course is right on their doorstep, and so Gary often takes his

sons out for a quick round. Occasionally, Caroline joins them, as she has recently taken up the sport.

'Watching Gary out there with the boys or seeing them all fishing off the rocks is so lovely and reinforces the reasons why we've built here,' she says. 'This house has really enhanced our family life. The minute we walk through the front door, we unwind and start planning the next adventure.'

For information about Caroline's online shop, visit [causewaycoastlifestyle.com](http://causewaycoastlifestyle.com).

For more on Studiorogers Architects Ltd, see [studiorogers.com](http://studiorogers.com).

For more coastal houses, see [coastmagazine.co.uk](http://coastmagazine.co.uk)



## *Caroline's* PERFECT DAY

'I'd take our Golden Retriever Alpie for a relaxing walk along the **Causeway Coast Way**, ending up in Portstewart for a refreshing latte at **Coffee on The Coast** (028 7083 1717) and then treat myself to a spot of shopping. Gary, meanwhile, would nip out with the boys for nine holes of golf at **Ballyreagh Golf Course** ([colerainebc.gov.uk](http://colerainebc.gov.uk)). After a light lunch, we'd all drive over to see my parents who live at Colebreene Farm near Coleraine right on the picturesque River Bann. There's a fabulous watersports centre there ([hannaboats.co.uk](http://hannaboats.co.uk)), so the boys would spend a few hours brushing up on their waterskiing and wakeboarding skills. Gary and I would catch up with my folks and watch the boys messing about on the river. Afterwards we'd drive home, before setting out for a leisurely stroll into Portrush via the golden sands of West Strand beach for a tasty family supper at the **Ramore Wine Bar** (028 7082 4314, [ramorerestaurant.com](http://ramorerestaurant.com)). Finally, we'd watch the sun sinking slowly over Donegal to round off another action-packed day.'