



McGann Scahill Architects

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**Cuala McGann,  
McGann Scahill  
Architects**

McGann Scahill Architects in Westport, Co Mayo, is another two-person architecture practice that uses BIM. "We use it full-time," says Cuala McGann. "Straight away we are drawing in 3D - which is how it should be, because we are designing for a 3D environment. We find it particularly useful for our fit-out work - one of our long-standing corporate clients is Carraig Donn and we are regularly producing 3D designs for them."

McCann first started using Autodesk Revit in her practice in 2011 and she is currently using Building Design Suite Premium 2015, where she finds the suite's Revit Architecture, Showcase and Navisworks products particularly useful.

"It was always an investment in the future," she says. "Initially, there was a significant cost, but it results in a significant improvement in the service we provide because our clients can interact better with the dynamic 3D images that we create for them. We initially did the three-day introductory course, then we did a two-day course in Revit Families [components such as walls, windows, stairs, doors, etc used when building a 3D model], and we have done two more advanced courses since then. In all, eight days over four years, that is not a lot of time really when you consider how much you should be investing overall in CPD [continuing professional development]."

McGerr says that he too consciously decided to start using BIM when he was establishing his practice, cofounded with Patrick Murphy in 2007. He adds: "We initially saw it as simply a software to help improve efficiencies. We soon came to understand that BIM was a way of thinking and a means to greatly improve the way we work. It gives you time to examine more design options, to look at different ways of doing things and see how they work. However, it wasn't until 2009, when I undertook a Masters in Design Management that my eyes were truly opened to the potential of BIM, such as integrated project delivery and lean construction.

"When we invested in BIM, I self-trained on the very basics at first and then I undertook a one-to-one three-day basic training course, followed by further training in Revit Families and then I passed on much of what I learned to my colleague Patrick. We both then undertook a three-day advanced course and subsequently we have been using online resources to improve

our software skills. We bounce a lot of ideas off each other and show each other different features that we learn or discover as we go forward."

The subscription model of paying for Autodesk Revit is a very cost-effective way of accessing the latest BIM tools, customer support and other services hosted in the cloud. It also allows for flexible licensing in cases where practices are hiring people on short-term contracts.

"In terms of return on investment, we have reduced the time required on some work phases by at least 30%," says McGerr. "On our most streamlined projects we have seen time reductions of nearly 50% without reduction in quality - indeed BIM has probably improved the quality of information being distributed. "We have created templates, containing standard information that can be used in different designs, so there is a real saving in avoiding duplication. We've also increased coordination within the practice and there are far less mistakes in the co-ordination of detailed construction drawings going to site - BIM allows you to catch mistakes or complications very early in the design process."

McGann says half-ruefully that BIM hasn't actually reduced the time she spends on individual projects: "What has happened is that I do more in the time available," she says. "I give clients a much better quality project. The real benefit of BIM in our practice is the quality of the information that we produce. In addition, time is saved in repetitive tasks and communication exchange which allows more time for design.

"We have used it to collaborate with engineers on an OPW project, but a lot of our work is to do with one-off houses and extensions and most of the contractors involved in that work aren't fully aware of the potential of BIM. I would love to get them accessing 3D drawings as a matter of course, but there are very few contractors who bring a laptop on site! I think that we will see greater adoption as the years progress, but greater education is needed. Within the profession of architecture, BIM user groups are a real help.

"To any other small architecture practice considering adopting BIM, I would say 'Don't be afraid to embrace it'. From the design point of view, it's allowing you to do a better job. When you start using new software, you have to be patient - it's a bit like learning to drive! But if you keep putting it off, you will never to it!" □

