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Making a house a home

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PICTURE/TALK

Making a house a home

RICHARD FITTON



Are you living comfortably? Photograph © McCoy Wynne, 2021. Commissioned for Energy House by Open Eye Gallery and University of Salford Art Collection.

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The University of Salford was approached to take part in a scheme whereby we would work with photographers-in-residence to capture our work on energy efficiency in homes.

The Energy House, at the University of Salford, is a globally unique testing facility. We have a 1900s brick-built terrace inside a large environmental chamber. The chamber allows us to carry out experiments, examining which energy savings measures perform, and how well. This facility has been running for 12 years and has provided research to governments, product manufacturers, not for profit schemes and academia.

Whilst publicity for the Energy House is generally good, with media and press being something we take seriously, we are always willing to try new methods of getting our work out to a broader audience, after all the idea of carrying out research and no one reading it is not a good situation. Hence, when the opportunity came to work with McCoy-Wynne, we were delighted to accept.

The project that McCoy-Wynne worked on was a complete retrofit of the Energy House, and they documented the process – from the walls being fitted with insulation, to the floors being removed and insulated right the way through to capturing our researchers studying the effect of these measures. This task was challenging with

photographers working on live construction sites, in quite poor conditions, but McCoy-Wynne were no strangers to this, having photographed building work as part of their practice for a number of years.

The photographs themselves captured the raw and sometimes untidy aspect of retrofit of homes and some of the disruption that can be brought about, this was great to see as it tells a story – the things worth doing in energy savings, can often be difficult and bothersome.

In my opinion, however, the real turning point in this project was when we started to see the processed images, this literally brought the Energy House to life: The Energy House as it stands is in quite a sterile environment with waterproof white walls surrounding the chamber, and the house itself, often completely full of sensors and monitoring equipment. It is safe to say that people who see the Energy House forget that it is there to help real people, in real homes. The final images present just that, an overlay of reality. Showing the home in this way, with trees outside, slippers on the stairs and luggage in the loft brings the project to life in a way that we have not seen before. Through these images, the Energy House is now a home. The project now forms part of the University of Salford Art Collection where it can continue to encourage audiences to engage with ideas through arts and visual culture.