Golden couple
Riba medal given to Irish architects

Poets of concrete and magicians of brick, the Irish architects Sheila O’Donnell and John Tuomey have been named as the 2015 recipients of the Riba Royal Gold Medal, one of the world’s most prestigious architecture awards. Both in their early 60s, they are among the youngest architects to win the gong, joining an illustrious list that includes Frank Lloyd Wright and George Gilbert Scott, Norman Foster and Frank Gehry.

Premed in Dublin in 1988, their practice, O’Donnell and Tuomey, has worked over the past 30 years on schools and public housing, theatres and community centres, producing buildings that are characterised by their internal spatial power and an obsessive attention to the craft of making. From the Lyric Theatre in Belfast to London’s new LSE student centre, their projects often stand as monolithic, cloistered forms that contain an unfolding sequence of spaces.

Trained at University College Dublin, where they met, O’Donnell and Tuomey worked in the London offices of James Stirling and Colin St John Wilson before returning to Dublin in the early 80s, where they declared an intention to forge a new Irish architectural identity. It is a language that has continually evolved over the decades, drawing on sources from the ancient vernacular forms of Irish tower houses to classical villas, inflected with their interest in sharp, tortured geometries. O’Donnell and Tuomey’s approach is refreshingly medieval, using materials that are cast and moulded, baked and ground.

As part of Group 91 Architects, they helped to spearhead the regeneration of the city’s neglected Temple Bar and built the acclaimed Irish Film Centre there in 1992. Since then, they have been shortlisted for the Stirling prize a record five times.

Their LSE building in Aldwych, central London (pictured) is the favourite to win the Stirling prize this year. “They have at no point rested on their laurels - nor are they likely to do 50,” said juror Joseph Rykwert.

Olive Wainwright
Main photograph: Nigel Stad

Statins benefits outweigh risks, say experts

Press Association

Cholesterol-lowering statins can directly increase the risk of diabetes, according to research published today. Statins have previously been associated with higher rates of type 2 diabetes, but it was not clear whether the drugs were responsible. Now a study has produced strong evidence that the drugs’ basic mechanism can lead to weight gain and a modest increase in diabetes risk.

However, experts said the benefits of taking statins still greatly outweigh the risks and advice on taking the drugs should not be changed.

Scientists analysed genetic data from up to 220,000 people and results from almost 130,000 patients who took part in earlier statin trials. They found patients taking statins experienced a 12% increased risk of developing type 2 diabetes over a four-year period, and gained around eight ounces (240 grams) in weight on average.

Lead researcher Dr Daniel Swerdlow, from University College London’s Institute of Cardiovascular Science, said the “findings indicate that the weight gain and diabetes risk observed in the analysis from trials are related to the known mechanism of action of statins”. The findings are published in the latest online edition of the Lancet medical journal.

Current clinical guidelines suggest that statins should be offered to people with a 10% or higher risk of developing heart disease in the next 10 years.

Professor Jeremy Pearson, associate medical director of the British Heart Foundation, which co-funded the study, said: “This study should reassure people that the benefits of taking statins far outweigh the small effect on diabetes risk. But the results also reinforce that, alongside prescribed medication, taking steps to maintain a healthy weight is essential to stay healthy.”