

Ancient and modern ... brought together on the coast of West Harris

Report by Fred Silver

A unique combination of ancient and modern skills and visionary ideas, blended to fit modern building regulations and honed to serve up an astonishing vision of handcrafted accommodation for visitors to the Isle of Harris, was previewed by a launch party in late August for local people and those involved in the three-year scheme.

The twin structures of the Rock Cottage and The Broch stand unobtrusively, yet proudly, on low hills beside the road to Leverburgh and overlooking Borve Lodge, home of Adam and Cathra Kelliher.

Interpreted by Stornoway-based architect Stuart Bagshaw and Lewis Builders, as main contractors, the original idea for the buildings came from Adam, who is originally from an entirely different set of islands, those of New Zealand.

Adam and Cathra, the daughter of the late David Horrobin, were able to buy Borve Lodge from a family trust in 2008 and then set about making it sustainable and viable in its own right. It covers a few hundred acres along with several thousands of acres of shooting rights.

The inspiration for the design of the buildings comes from the ancient structures of the islands, like the Broch at Carloway and various standing stones. Originally, they were intended to have been far more traditional in construction but the impact of modern building regulations means that, in effect, they have twin core structures of polystyrene insulation and cement blockwork, surrounded by stonework which has been designed to blend into the landscape, indeed to literally grow back into it as lichen, grasses and other plants root themselves in the crevices and ridges left in the stonework.

The aim of the structures is to provide very high quality accommodation for a limited number of guests throughout the year, enticed by the location and by the views, which by stunning use of floor to ceiling windows, simply become part of every room.

Although the furniture and fittings make extensive use of driftwood from local beaches, greenheart wood from the former Scalpay ferry pier, along with Caithness stone (to provide flat surfaces for the kitchens and in the showers) and selected stones moved from the surrounding landscape, there is a solid core of modernity. They have full telephone, internet and TV connections along with heating provided by air-source heat pumps which provide year-round constant hot water and underfloor heating.

Adam praised the work of Stuart Bagshaw, of Lewis Builders, and of the estate staff, led by Gordon Cumming, the estate manager, in getting the project through the various challenges of the past three years. Because of the unique nature of the project, it had taken a lot longer than he had originally imagined, he said.

The new accommodation - likely to cost between £1500 and £2500 a week to rent - is basically aimed at couples, although additional people could be accommodated. However, there are two other estate houses which can accommodate family groups and these will also be upgraded soon.

One impact of regulations was that it was impossible to have a rock right through from one side to another of any of the walls as that would be seen as allowing heat to escape. "We have been completely compliant with all the regulations. We always tried to turn them to our advantage." For instance, he had originally wanted to avoid having bannisters on the broch stair cases but since these were mandatory, they had managed to get a wonderful interpretation of metal and fishing net images.

Another intention had to be provide whatever was possible from the estate itself, including rocks, stone and wood. For the level surfaces needed for the kitchen tops and such like, Gordon Cumming had visited quarries in Caithness and brought back offcuts which had then been cut to shape on site. Beech

wood has also come from the Castle Grounds in Stornoway and the fireplace surrounds used greenheart wood from a pier in Scalpay.

"There is nothing prefabricated about the structures. It all had to be made on site."

And Adam points out that by using as much weathered rock from around the estate as possible, the structures already look well established. "They do fulfil my initial vision, and over time the houses are going to become even more attractive, as they recede back into the landscape," he said.

www.borvelodge.com



BORVE LODGE ESTATE



Below, the road up to the Broch and the Rock Cottage, with views of the Broch above and left — and views of the Rock Cottage right. One of the two air source heat pumps is seen left.



Borve Lodge Estate would like to thank all those who helped fulfil our vision in the newly completed Broch and Rock House, notably:

- SBA Architects of Stornoway, especially for the unremitting creative work of Stuart Bagshaw, and the technical support of Alistair McElhatton
- Lewis Builders of Stornoway, for implementing the vision
- MPM - North West Ltd, Maryport, Cumbria for the elegant iron bannisters in The Broch
- Landoch Traditional Stonemasonry of Inverness, for the extensive dry-stone wall work
- Gray & Dick Ltd, of Glasgow for specialised glass work
- Matthew Homer, Finlay MacKinnon, of Borve Lodge Estate, for their versatility in numerous tasks
- Alan McDougal, of Harris, for his wood fitting work
- Joel Franklyn, of Skye, for his specialised stone work
- Angus Williams, of Harris, for his dry-stone wall work
- Reuben Miles, of Harris, for the fireplaces
- The Scottish Rural Development Fund, for financial assistance
- And Gordon Cumming, manager of Borve Lodge Estate, Harris, for his overall project management and taking such a demanding plan through to completion

Thank You!
Adam and Cathra Kelliher