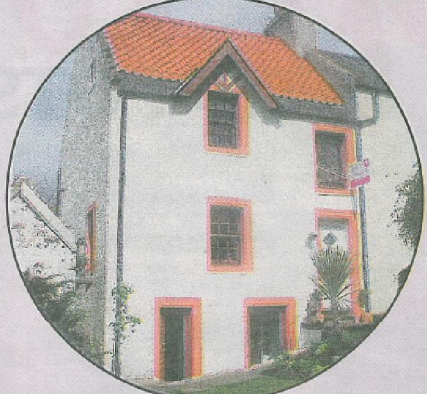


TV's COLIN & JUSTIN

PROPERTY OF THE WEEK

with Justin Ryan & Colin McAllister



2-BED HOUSE, NORTH QUEENSFERRY, FIFE, OFFERS OVER £210,000

THE AGENT SAYS: A charming traditional cottage in Main Street, North Queensferry, it sits in a unique location with gorgeous views and has direct access to the Forth from the garden. It has a spiral staircase linking the three floors, sitting room, dining kitchen, two bedrooms and gas central heating.

UPS: Terrific views of the Forth bridges, plus easy access to Edinburgh airport and the city.

DOWNS: The price may go much higher than the guide.

Details: Maloco & Associates, 01383 629720.

A stunner by the seaside

THE BOYS SAY: While some British seaside towns have taken an economic battering recently, others – such as North Queensferry – have positively blossomed.

No "kiss me quick" hats or dated mile-long pier for this quaint coastal destination. Quite the opposite – much sought-after and imbued with a relaxed atmosphere, it's a town where even Prime Minister Gordon Brown has a home.

And that alone gives SERIOUS market appeal... It's hard to describe just how magical North Queensferry is. Easily driveable from our Glasgow home, we regularly head over there to soak up a bit of sun when the Scots climate is playing ball.

There are several lovely cafes and restaurants and we often "dual centre excursion" with a drive to Edinburgh just half an hour away. With a mostly traditional property stock, North Queensferry has long been popular but its appeal has grown even further as people become keen to find areas with rural charm that are still commutable to major cities.

This week's deal is a wee beauty, as they say in Bonnie Scotland! Our best advice, however, is NOT to feel lulled into a false sense of security by the £210K asking price.

Scotland – and Edinburgh in particular – still has a confident property market and that guide price is only the beginning. You'll have to test your mettle, book a valuation, then offer as much OVER asking as you feel is realistic.

It's perfectly normal for quality homes to make 20 or 30 per cent over guide.

Which means this house could hit a cool quarter of a mil'. To complicate further, you'll be offering "blind" via sealed bids at a closing date.

A strong feature of this week's deal is location. Enjoying direct views of the Forth Road Bridge, it's crammed with traditional detail, such as a white painted spiral staircase, a maple dining kitchen, a huge 18ft master bedroom and a more modest, but still double, second bedroom.

Newly-decorated and rewired, this house is, we reckon, an utter gem. And the kind of property that simply doesn't grace the market that often.

TURF at

By JENNIFER MCBAIN

SIX years ago ex-punk rockers Christine and Pete Hope were looking for a way to break away from the urban grind in the heart of Sheffield.

Now they have found it on the remote island of Harris in the Scottish Hebrides... winning along the way the top prize in Channel 4's Grand Designs Home of The Year competition.

Through sheer hard work they turned a ruin used as a sheep pen into a stunning home which blends into the countryside so completely thanks to its turf roof that it doesn't even show up on aerial photographs...

SELLING UP

THE Hopes fell in love with the Isle of Harris during a chance trip in March 2002. And a crofter they met offered them a way out of Sheffield when he said they could use his caravan while they looked for a place of their own on the island.

The following year the couple – whose grown-up children Calli, now 27, and Jay, 25, have now left home – sold their terraced house in Sheffield and headed off with the proceeds to the Hebrides.

Even the harsh weather failed to dampen the enthusiasm of Christine, 54, a children's social worker and Pete, 49, a self-employed dry-stone waller. But they soon realised that their £55,000 nest egg would not be enough to buy the home of their dreams. Undeterred, they lowered their sights and started looking for a ruin to renovate.

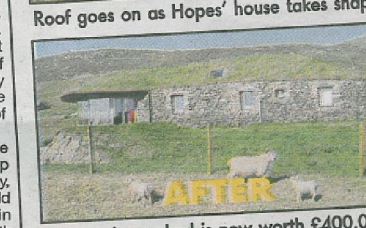
LOCATION, LOCATION THEIR crofter friend came to their rescue again, showing them a ruin – barely three walls with a tin roof used as a sheep shed – overlooking a rocky bay. He explained it was a former black house. These low, stone dwellings had a thatched roof with just a hole for the smoke from the fire.

Once they were found all over the Highlands but at the end of World War Two people demanded houses with a few more home comforts.

But the Hopes didn't care. They were blown away by the view across the Sound of Harris to The Uists, to the west towards Leverburgh and Northton Hill and to the east towards Skye.

They struck a deal with the crofter

Top TV home prize won by old sheep pen with grass roof



The ex-sheep shed is now worth £400,000

Living room windows make the most of the breathtaking views out over the bay



Whale-boned shaped bedroom above the kitchen



High ceilings in the double bedroom



Peter and Christine with their award

– the exact amount remains a secret – and got to work.

GRAND DESIGN FINDING an architect who shared their vision was not easy. "One advised us to build a completely modern house and turn the old black house into a bicycle shed," said Christine.

Then they met Stuart Bagshaw, an English architect based in Stornoway on Lewis, with a reputation for designing quirky buildings which blended into the

landscape. Because of their limited budget the Hopes did a lot of the hard graft themselves. The stone walls had to be rebuilt, which involved gathering tonnes of local stones from around the site.

Pete says: "If I had realised even half the amount of hard physical labour that lay ahead of me, I would have refused to start."

But building work did go ahead at the end of 2005, while Christine trawled the internet for suitable bargains. "However, getting anything delivered was a problem as so many drivers got lost," said Christine. "Eventually I hoisted a Jolly Roger flag on the site so they could find us."

A turf roof ensured Black Sheep House merged with its surroundings. Beams were cut from Scottish larch, laid over with double marine plywood.

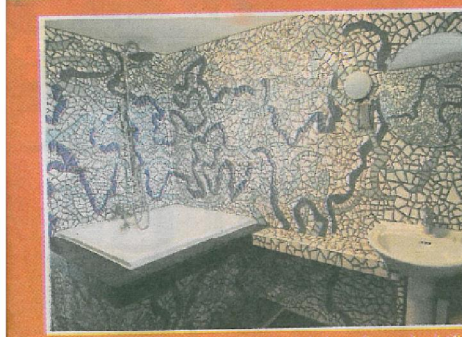
A waterproof membrane was then put on

the TOP

Top TV home prize won by old sheep pen with grass roof



'If I had realised even half of the hard physical work which lay ahead of me I would have refused to even start'



Abstract mosaic made out of a job lot of smashed tiles



Christine arranges flowers in the cream and black kitchen

top before the turfs were laid. Each sod had to be cut by hand, then carried up by ladder.

"By the time we finished my legs were really strong and Christine, who sat on the roof as I handed them to her, had overcome her fear of heights," says Pete.

"But it was worth the effort, it really blends into the hill behind."

Inside, the traditional stone wall exterior conceals a

noisy open plan which is almost church-like and far removed from the original cramped black house.

There is hardly a straight line anywhere

and the exposed beams resemble a whalebone corset.

'I hoisted a Jolly Roger above the building site because so many delivery lorries got lost on the way to us'

UNFORTUNATELY, costs escalated and by the time the house was completed the Hopes had spent £130,000.

On the plus side the two-bedroom house is now worth more than £400,000, but to make ends meet they have to rent it out to holiday-makers for £700 to £1,100 a week. Meanwhile, Christine and Pete rent it as well, moving back into the house when it is empty. The Hopes remain optimistic and

plan to convert another black house when they have the funds and then see which building will make the best home for them.

And neither Christine or Pete have fallen out of love with Harris despite their experience.

Pete says: "After living in a city for so long the remoteness and lack of people is inspiring. We wanted to find a place that was small enough to be familiar yet big enough to retain some mystery. I always wanted to be on the outside looking out."

But Christine does have one word of advice for anyone thinking of copying their Hebridean dream. "You need to have a very fit husband with a strong work ethic who is not going to give up," she says.

TO book a holiday contact: www.blacksheephouse.co.uk

The runners-up

HERE are the other prize winners in the Grand Designs Home Of The Year Competition...



Best Eco Home

DESCRIBED as a pink Hobbit House, Penwhlwr in South Wales, is a two-storey straw bale home completely powered by the sun and wind. The walls are rendered with lime and clay and the bathroom is in a stone turret. Volunteers travelled from far and near to help work on the house which took seven years to build and cost £70,000.



Best Redesign

HILL House in Lancashire has every luxury gadget imaginable from a sauna to a home cinema system. An outdoor pool has been enclosed in glass so you can enjoy swimming in the trees in the garden while being sheltered from the weather, bringing seamlessly the outdoors into the very heart of the family home.



Best New Home

TREES takes its name from its woodland setting in Somerset. It was designed by its owners, who are both architects, and their sense of design shines out from every gleaming surface. Their children enjoy the freedom of the massive open-plan living area on the ground floor, while the entire building benefits from full-height, wrap-around glazing.



Best Renovation

PAINSTAKINGLY, the owners of Bletchley Manor stripped away the softwood and cement render of their home to reveal its original oak frame. This small manor house which sits rather uncomfortably near a main road in Shropshire has been sympathetically restored to reflect its 17th Century origins without overlooking its 19th Century extension.

Picture: TALKBACK THAMES