

Awards galore as Stuart pursues his vision for architecture

By Taylor Edgar

Stornoway-based architect, Stuart Bagshaw has every reason to look pleased - the recently completed development at Borge in Harris is another flagship project that has necessitated finding space for yet another award, this time for their work on the twin structures of the Rock Cottage and The Broch which stand on low hills beside the road to Leverburgh.

With over 20 awards vying for wall space, the entrance area of Stuart Bagshaw Associates at Marybank Lodge on the outskirts of Stornoway is starting to look like a rather cluttered art gallery. Evidence, if evidence is needed, of the company's visionary and innovative design is there for all to see.

Theirs is a reputation that is truly global in scale and scope. They have designed many of the foremost buildings in the islands, but their client base stretches across Scotland and the UK to Europe and further afield. Currently they are working on a design for a hotel in Majorca and are garnering interest half way round the world in New Zealand.

But it is perhaps those design projects closer to home that gives Stuart the most satisfaction

and pride. And Borge with its twin challenges of a house and broch is the latest project to put a smile on Stuart's face.

"Borge was an interesting one as there was the opportunity to do some of the interior as well as the exterior. Initially we are asked to do three cottages but after studying the site and some long discussions we finished up with one house and a broch, each of which were bespoke to the site," Stuart recalls.

The key phrase in his comment is "bespoke to the site", for his ethos of any new build project is to consider not only the internal space but the external space, the landscape in which the building is set and how best this can be utilised sympathetically. This sensitive approach is one that is holistic and envisions the landscape as 'external rooms' that are integral to the overall design.

It was from this standpoint that Stuart tackled the Borge developments, using materials found in the immediate area to ensure that the buildings looked part of the landscape from the outset, and not something new that had been imposed there. In time, says Stuart, Rock House and the Broch will assimilate into their backgrounds and appear as if they have always been there. To help in this endeavour, large boulders were sourced on the estate and erected vertically to harmonise with

the monolithic rock terracing on the site. Much of what he has learnt about architectural design, Stuart points out, was extracted from many years of involvement in the conservation of blackhouses, the technology of which never failed to impress him. This influence can be seen in many of his designs including Borge.

"In a blackhouse it is silent even when there is a howling gale outside. This is the effect I have gone for with the Borge development. What we have achieved there is a sense of peace and quiet; it's almost cave-like in its quality," he remarks.

Emphasis has also been placed on making the most of the dramatic views; the broch's third floor bedroom in particular enjoys spectacular views, with three different settings, a loch and woodland view to the east, a view of Harris' wilderness to the south, the beach and Atlantic Ocean to the west, and a skylight giving a dramatic sight line to the skies.

The design philosophy and vision behind the project has been quickly recognised with Borge being shortlisted in the 2012 Inverness Architectural Association awards and winning the Western Isles heat for new build and placemaking.

The adjudication said: "All the judges were highly impressed with this development - it is considered to be not only strong enough nationally but also internationally - it is a world class design. The setting in the landscape is superb, the tower acting as an indicator that reveals the second house next to it amongst the natural rock terraces; the internal details, wooden

doors and stone shelving etc. are in themselves very inspirational."

If Stuart and clients, Adam and Cathra Kelliher were going for spectacular, then it seems they have succeeded on that count.

But the project was not without its challenges - it has been a while since anyone has built a broch, so finding a suitable stonemason was no mean feat in itself. Then there was the building regulations to negotiate as well and the process of arriving at some necessary compromise that satisfied the officials and which also remained true to the design concept.

This concept embraced not only the landscape and the materials, but the prevailing wind and the light to infuse the tower and house with drama and ambience.

Looking back on the three year build programme, Stuart pays tribute to the building contractors for all their hard work in translating the design into tangible reality and providing insight, ingenuity and creativity in what was a groundbreaking and challenging build for all concerned.

Comments Stuart: "I have nothing but praise for the individual tradesmen, they did a fantastic job."

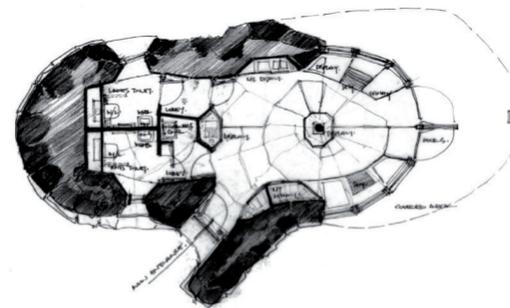
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A view of the new Broch

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