



HEBRIDEAN HAVEN

A stunning longhouse on the island of Lewis is the perfect retreat for **Linda and Paul Brown**, their family and guests

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When picturing a holiday home, many would visualise a far-flung place near sun-drenched shores – but not Scot Linda Brown. Having settled in Ringwood, Hampshire, Linda's dream holiday idyll for her and her husband Paul was not on foreign land. Instead, she had more of a homecoming in mind, a 'wee but n' ben' (Scottish for 'little holiday home') on Lewis, the Scottish island where she was born. Somewhere she could step outside to inhale the clean, bracing air and gaze up at the big skies and out at the sea and calming landscape of this Outer Hebridean island where generations of her family had lived.

Starting with her great, great, great grandfather, Linda's ancestors were crofters, who over a hundred years lived in a traditional thatched longhouse (also known as a blackhouse), tending livestock and growing vegetables on the same croft on Lewis. When Linda's father gave her a half-acre share of the croft back in 2010, there was only one thing she wanted to do with the land.

AT HOME WITH...

WHO LIVES HERE

Linda and Paul Brown

THE HOUSE

This luxurious home has a huge open-plan living/kitchen area, two large bedrooms, two bathrooms, a quiet relaxing area upstairs and an office zone with wi-fi.

OUR FAVOURITE THINGS

Wander around Stornoway harbour and say "hi" to the seals... stock up with fresh shellfish ... shop for Harris Tweed and watch the weavers... picnic on an empty beach.

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"My father was born on that croft, so it's been in my father's side of the family for umpteen generations, a hundred years, so I'd always had an idea that when it came to me I'd want to build something on it. It just so happened that a few years ago Paul and I were in the situation where we could do that."

Although it was 700 miles from their Hampshire home, the desire to build a house on land with such strong family ties – her cousin still owns the main house on the family croft – was overwhelming.

"As a holiday place it doesn't make any kind of financial sense at all. It was a decision made with the heart," says Linda, who runs her own business, an internal communications consultancy, while Paul works for a petrochemical company. The plan was to build a holiday home that the couple and their families could enjoy, and to rent it out when they weren't using it.

In early 2011, the couple appointed a local architect to create a design for their dream holiday retreat. >>





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“I knew the way I wanted the house to point – because the views at the front are what makes it really, really special,” says Linda, talking about the views of Broadbay and the moors which are now framed by huge full-length windows. “In terms of the house we wanted something really modern, with contemporary, clean lines.”

They also wanted a design that took inspiration from the old thatched stone longhouses that once stood on the croft. This inspired the house’s long, slimline shape, and the stone wall outside the house. “The idea was that this looks almost like a tumbledown wall from an original blackhouse, so it links our house back into the original style of the island,” says Linda.

Creating a home that was in harmony with its surroundings was also important. “It’s got quite a low profile to the landscape,” says Linda. “We also went for timber cladding as that softens in colour over time and blends in with the earthy colours of the landscape.”

After getting planning permission in July 2011, the earth was first broken in January 2012 – but as they were hundreds of miles away in Hampshire, Linda and Paul put their faith in their architect, Gordon Anderson, to project-manage the build for them. From that first spade in the ground to the house’s completion just before Christmas that year, Linda admits to being “desperately nosy!”

“If we’d lived closer I would have been there all

the time because it was a big deal for us to build it,” she says. Luckily, they were well informed. “My uncle went round on a regular basis taking photographs, and we’d get updates from the architect and the builders. Also we got up there ourselves probably every couple of months.”

Handy flight connections from Southampton to Glasgow or Edinburgh with Flybe meant that the couple could be at the site within just five hours of leaving their Hampshire home.

Aside from being so far from where their holiday home was taking shape, Linda admits that one of the hardest things was making lots of decisions very quickly. “The detail they have to go into very early on is remarkable: ‘Where do you want the socket to go?’, ‘Where’s this plug going to go?’ I found that a struggle because I like to visualise things, and until the walls were up it was impossible to say, ‘We want the socket there.’”

By August 2012, the roof was on and 16 photovoltaic panels were fitted – a decision Linda and Paul had struggled with for a while, due to concerns over there being enough light to generate power. “It wasn’t going eco for the sake of it,” says Linda. “It was looking at how we could generate electricity, and get some benefit from the house in terms of the feed-in tariff payback.”

It was the right decision – this and the house’s bespoke design, high-level insulation and underfloor heating, meant that it was the first in the Outer Hebrides to be given a double ‘A’ rating

for environmental impact and energy efficiency. From the beginning, Paul and Linda had a vision of a light, bright space that showed off the landscape to its best advantage. “We’ve got lots of glass and big windows to make the most of the views and the light up there because the light’s quite special.”

A double-height ceiling over the kitchen/dining area combined with two skylights and two further skylights over the living area more than deliver that airy feel Linda and Paul were after, while a muted decor helps to lend an air of relaxation and calm.

For her colour scheme, Linda took inspiration from the outdoors, using seaside colours of subtle yellows and blues against a neutral background.

“We kept everything very neutral because we wanted to have accents of colour in the soft furnishings, and to be able to chop and change when the mood took us.”

In the living room, there’s a pale leather suite, while a rug in blue, beige and yellow stripes and brightly-coloured cushions provide flashes of colour that are bathed in the light that floods in through the patio doors opening onto the deck outside. On the floor, pale, engineered oak provides continuity throughout the ground floor as well as practical comfort in the form of underfloor heating. In the living space, a multi-fuel stove delivers extra warmth.

Moving through to the double-height dining and kitchen area, a glass-topped dining table keeps the light flowing, while four statement light fittings draw the eye without overwhelming the space. The main attraction of this area is the full-length windows that wrap around the corner to give near-uninterrupted views. They are just one of the house’s features that guests have praised, so Linda has held back from fitting blinds or curtains here. “We’ve fought against putting >>

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: Underfloor heating keeps the oak floors warm; a multi-fuel stove keeps the couple cosy; the longhouse has a low profile, in harmony with the landscape; the house is full of detailed touches, such as on this door handle; the Velux windows upstairs transform into balconies; outside, there’s a decked area for watching the world go by; the bedrooms face south to make the most of the views; the kitchen/dining area has a unique worktop hewn from fallen beech trees from Lewis Castle.

OPPOSITE, LEFT TO RIGHT: The window in the master bedroom frames the landscape; the living area has huge windows, bringing the outside in.





CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE The Longhouse has two bathrooms – this one and the wet-room style en-suite shower room to the master bedroom; Linda and Paul relaxing outside their island home; the Longhouse was designed to be in keeping with the local environment and was built to the highest environmental standards possible

anything on these two big windows for now; it's not overlooked and everyone comments so much on just being able to sit and look out."

While the dining area lets the views take centre stage, Linda went all out in the kitchen. "I love cooking, so I specified the kitchen really high – to my husband's horror! We've got top-end Neff ovens, two wine chillers and all sorts of hidden appliances," she says.

The couple bought the blue-green units from Wren Kitchens after a lot of deliberation. "Because it was in that open-plan room, it had to blend in and not look too much like 'the kitchen'. We spotted these after months and months of looking around and the colour caught my eye because of the link with the sea outside."

Another eye-catching feature of the kitchen is the island worktop, which was made from felled beech trees from nearby Lews Castle, where industrialist Lord Leverhulme (of Port Sunlight fame) lived after buying the Isle of Lewis in the early 20th century.

Continuing the theme of using local materials, the stairs were hewn from ash trees. Also sourced from the castle grounds, they make a pleasing counterpoint against the glass balustrade, which was sourced from a local company after the original supplier went out of business.

Some of the furnishings have come from further afield, bought by Linda while travelling on business. The brightly-coloured glass wall lights

above the stairs and in the hallway are from a South African vineyard, and some of the basketwork, linens and throws were also found in South Africa.

Moving back towards the front door, you'll find the two bedrooms. The master bedroom features a double-height ceiling, a full-length window overlooking the bay, and a wide slot window, which initially made Linda and Paul pause for breath when they saw how low it was. "We wanted it to sit low and I think probably my husband and I had different views of where low was, but seeing it finished, having it anywhere else just wouldn't have worked," she says.

In here, the decor is mainly soft blues and mustard tones, and the blue curtains with a yellow hue running through them are Harris Tweed, which is a signature feature throughout the house. "We've used a lot of it in the curtains and cushions and soft furnishings, which obviously is local to the island," says Linda.

Next door, the second bedroom has a cosy feel, with a deep red used for the bedding, while a stylish light fitting casts patterned shadows over the ceiling and walls when switched on.

Moving upstairs, there's an office area and chill-out space with an imposing pitched window that overlooks the ground floor. It's furnished with a neutral-coloured sofa and carpet, and steps lead up to two Velux windows with a hidden surprise. "When you push them, the bottom half opens up with a rail on either side creating a balcony space," says Linda. "There's plenty of room for sitting or standing with a glass of wine. We saw the feature at one of those house-building shows and we thought, 'Wow, that would be amazing.'"

They're just one of the many highlights that make The Longhouse – Paul and Linda's working title for it during the build stuck – a premium home. Something Visit Scotland confirmed when it awarded The Longhouse a five-star self-catering rating in April 2013. And Linda and Paul's guests seem to agree, with plenty of bookings throughout the year.

But for Paul and Linda this is secondary to the Longhouse's role as their retreat. "It's a place to relax, for us to unwind, and it's different from our regular daily lives," says Linda. And the fact that their 'but n' ben' is on Linda's family's land truly makes it a home from home.



FLY Flybe's franchise partner Loganair flies to Stornoway from Benbecula, Edinburgh, Glasgow and Inverness