"My dad was born on this croft," Linda MacLeod Brown says of the land that is now home to her contemporary, light-filled Lewis house.

The croft has been in Linda’s family for decades, but Linda and husband Paul Brown’s home is a new addition, built on land once used for growing potatoes and grazing sheep.

The house is five miles north of Stornoway, around 100m from Coll Beach. The view from the windows looks out to Broad Bay, allowing anyone inside to enjoy the island’s ever-changing big skies.

Born in Stornoway, Linda was a baby when her parents left Lewis, but long summer holidays spent visiting her grandparents here instilled a lifelong love of the island and its peaceful charm.

Now based near Southampton, where Paul works for a petrochemical company, and Linda is a communications consultant with her own business, Cardar, working with oil, gas and mining companies, Linda admits: “We couldn’t be further away if we tried.” But the couple kept returning to the island and eventually decided to build a holiday home, which they let out when they are not using.

“The project had been in my head for years, however Paul and I started thinking about it just before Christmas 2010 and said, ‘let’s just do it’”

The couple brought on board Stornoway-based architect Gordon Anderson of Anderson Associates, who also project managed the build.

“I would love to have managed the project myself,” explains Linda, “but because we live so far away I couldn’t. We were involved in a lot of the decision making, and we used a local building company, Alex Murray Construction.”

Work started in January 2012 and took 12 months, but building on Lewis brings its own challenges as Gordon Anderson explains, “Designing and constructing buildings in the Western Isles is never straightforward, due to factors such as additional transport and fuel costs in obtaining goods from across the Minch, deep peat or rock on site, and a challenging climate.

Whilst the building was positioned to maximise views to the south, this also exposes it to strong winds, therefore the design and detail had to be carefully considered and executed.

The design was a collaboration of ideas. “We wanted a modern interpretation of the traditional island design that would blend into the landscape as blackhouses used to for protection from the elements,” Linda says. “They were single storey and, through using natural materials and topography, they tended to fit rather than fight with the landscape. Whilst we have a second level upstairs, it is built into the rockspace to keep lines low”

Gordon adds, “The design features the ‘long house’ footprint, utilising, where possible, natural materials, with high levels of insulation integrated into the frame.”
SERENE SPACE
Clockwise from main: the light-filled living area; Linda MacLeod brown; the exterior of the Longhouse; views looking out to Broad Bay
The couple wanted the house to be environmentally efficient – it has been awarded a double A rating – not just for the sake of it, but to be cost effective to run.

“We wanted it to be a cosy place to be in, because first and foremost this is a place for us, for holidays and whatever happens in the future,” Linda says.

Stepping inside the stone and timber-clad house, there is a real sense of this being a home. The first thing you notice is the expansive glazing that allows you to see straight through the house to that view, successfully drawing the outside in. The kitchen and dining areas are double-height, which further enhances the sense of light and space, and are open plan to the bright living area with its dramatic sea views. A handcrafted ash staircase – made from storm-felled trees from Lewa Castle grounds – is a real focal point, and leads to an expansive mezzanine area and two bedrooms, again with sea views.

When it comes to the interior, Linda made some savvy choices mixing high street and bespoke pieces, such as the carved beech kitchen island worktop. Linda sourced the kitchen from Wren Living and whereas white may have felt stark, the light blue units make the kitchen feel like an extension of the dining furniture, while the statement lights above were a find in John Lewis. A multi-fuel stove, from Bunk in Inverness, heats the living area, which is a serene space with an engineered-wood floor, to accommodate underfloor heating, and coastal colours picked up in the rug and cushions.

“‘The first time I saw Gordon’s drawing I cried because it was so perfect’

Upstairs, the bathroom fittings and rainfall shower came from William Wilson in Stornoway. “We brought the tiles up ourselves as a lot of things don’t get delivered to Lewis,” Linda explains. The couple also used Simon Dunne, of Dunne’s Removals, originally from Stornoway and now based in Inverness. “People say they deliver anywhere in mainland UK, but that doesn’t get across on the ferry. So we delivered to Simon and he would transport it up here.”

Light walls enhance the sense of calm with subtle colours added through tartan and Harris tweed accessories. “I bought stacks of Harris tweed and my mum made all the cushions, while the bedroom curtains were made up by a local lady,” Linda says.
The master bedroom is a double-height space and features two Velux Cabrio balcony windows, which open fully to make the most of those views.

Back outside, a timber deck runs along the front and round one corner, creating a fantastic outdoor space from which to watch the sun set.

There is a palpable sense of peace and calm about this home, reflected in the scenery around it. “Lewis doesn’t have the kind of ‘wow’ spectacular scenery that Harris has, it has a much calmer, moorland landscape. But I find it is a calming sort of place,” Linda says.

Despite Linda and Paul living so far away, the project still enjoyed a sense of community. “It has been a real local effort, from Catriona Maciver, who lives nearby, and looks after the house and guests, to local tradesmen who provided such a quality finish,” says Linda.

When asked if her dream home met expectations, Linda has no hesitation: “The first time I saw Gordon’s drawing I cried because it was so perfect, it was so right, and then when we saw the end result it pretty much matched that original design. It’s lovely.”

The Longhouse accommodates up to four guests for luxury self-catering stays (www.lewisleghouse.com). Contact Linda MacLeod Brown (07961 445 632), linda@lewisleghouse.com, Anderson Associates (www.andersonassociatesltd.com).

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