

Croft original

A smallholding on Skye has been transformed into a luxurious getaway, where gourmet breakfasts are served on heirloom crockery and the island's rugged scenery is on your doorstep

Text by Rhiannon Batten Photographs by Angus Bremner





It's all the clever details that make the Spoons such an enjoyable place to be – vintage fabrics, collectible artworks and generous, comfortable furnishings

The reason why someone falls for a particular location can be hard to pin down, but when Marie Lewis was looking for a site on Skye to build her new B&B it was the juxtaposition of a small tree against a wall that swung it. “I immediately loved them,” she says. “When we were designing the house, I said I didn’t mind where it was on our plot as long as you could see the tree and the wall from most of the windows.”

When my friend Tim and I checked in for a weekend, just before the B&B officially opened, it was clear that Marie had got her wish. Set in the north-east of the island, on a peninsula that spears Loch Snizort, the Spoons is a whitewashed, purpose-designed building that stands out against the rugged hills and seaweed-littered shores that surround it. In this treeless setting Marie’s eagerness to make the most of her garden’s solitary, wind-tugged sapling isn’t surprising.

The three-bedroom B&B is very much a team effort, with Marie’s husband, Ian, and sons, 12-year-old Simidh and nine-year-old Malin, all part of the organisational line-up (indeed, Ian built most of the structure himself, from a kit supplied by Skye Homes). If the family’s plans continue to fall into place, the garden’s lonely tree will soon have plenty of company, surrounded by vegetables, herbs, beehives and even the odd sheep. Set on a working croft, the Lewises plan to grow as much of their own produce as possible. “We’ve already got herbs and salad well on the way and delicious eggs from our own rare-breed hens,” says Marie, giving us a tour.

This isn’t just a nod to the current trend towards local, seasonal ▶





eating. Marie is a skilled, and enthusiastic, cook and the B&B is intended to be a foodie destination as much as a decadent escape, with gourmet picnics and cookery courses part of the long-term plan. As well as lavish breakfasts (homemade pancakes, with freshly squeezed orange juice and local strawberries when we visited), guests can also opt to have dinner, a set menu served sociably at the communal dining table.

When Tim and I arrived, the family had been working non-stop for five months on the final push. They could have been forgiven for serving us a bought-in shepherd's pie but, instead, we were treated to a glass of prosecco and a plate of homemade canapés in front of the living room's wood-burning stove, before moving to a glamorously laid dining table for locally caught oysters, deliciously rare roast beef and a plate of carefully chosen local cheeses.

If this all sounds very upmarket for a stay on a croft, there is good reason. Before moving to Skye, the family spent 13 years on Eilean Shona, the luxury island retreat off the Ardnamurchan peninsula belonging to Richard Branson's sister Vanessa. Learning to cater for the whims of some very high-profile guests there, with none of the mainland's infrastructure to fall back on, was perfect preparation for the family in their new role as B&B owners.

The move, understandably, was an emotional one after so many years on Eilean Shona. "We left the island on a stormy night and got caught up in tides and waves we'd never seen the like of before," says Marie. "Eilean Shona had been our home for so long that it had been a real struggle to make the break but, that night, it was as though the island was telling us it was time to go."



Subtle, calm tones create a tranquil atmosphere in the guest bedrooms, while an old French jug sits atop an antique table in the lounge [left]

Five years on, with The Spoons finally finished, Skye very definitely feels like the family's home. Although the building's exterior is shiny and new, the inside is a different matter. Decorated with objects collected by Marie (who is half-French) over decades, the overall feel is one of homely Auld Alliance charm. Chairs bought from Auldearn Antiques have been re-upholstered with fabrics bought at Glasgow's Remnant Kings, while an old sofa has been covered with a bale of salvaged Harris tweed. Beloved French cabinets are topped with contemporary BTC lamps, coral motif curtains have been customised with a ribbon of shells and, with a nod to her student days at Glasgow School of Art, Marie has sourced an impressive collection of Scottish art for the building (an early Alison Watt painting hangs over one of the guest beds).

As with the rest of the project, however, the main design focus is on the food, with dinner served up on a mixture of gorgeous contemporary and vintage crockery, some of which are family heirlooms. "Everyone says I shouldn't use these things – but what's the point of them otherwise?" shrugs the ever-practical Marie. "You just have them in a cupboard and then you die and they pass to someone else to put in their cupboard until they die. I'd much rather use them." And, happily for guests, let those fortunate enough to check in here use them, too. ■

Double rooms at The Spoons start from £110 per night, for B&B and afternoon tea. 01470 532 217, www.thespoonsonskye.com



IN THE AREA

If you're not fit to burst after one of Marie's breakfasts, foodie highlights nearby include The Three Chimneys at Colbost (www.threechimneys.co.uk), and Loch Bay seafood restaurant in Stein (www.lochbay-seafood-restaurant.co.uk). Work it off afterwards with a walk along the white sand of the "coral" beaches beyond Dunvegan Castle and a hike around the nearby Fairy Glen, an eerie landscape of pint-sized hills, miniature forests and lochs the size of soup bowls. Those who'd rather buy than walk should head to Skyeskyns, the last traditional sheepskin processing company in Scotland (www.skyeskyns.co.uk). Then there's Edinbane Pottery, just down the road (www.edinbane-pottery.co.uk), and Shilasdair, beyond Stein, where yarn for socks, jumpers and scarves is dyed in big vats of natural colouring in the back room (www.shilasdair-yarns.co.uk).