

# HIDDEN SCOTLAND

JOIN US ON A JOURNEY OF DISCOVERY

issue //

# 11.

Autumn/Winter 2025-26



HIDDEN SCOTLAND

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# HIDDEN SCOTLAND

Hidden Scotland is a source of inspiration and information, carefully curated to showcase and encourage travel to and within Scotland. Our mission is to discover hidden corners as well as rediscover time-trodden trails, sharing them through a creative approach to storytelling and collaboration – all in the hope of inspiring travellers and Scotland’s inhabitants to get out and explore one of the most beautiful countries our planet has to offer.

With that in mind, we aim to encourage conscious travel, helping visitors reach the very heartbeat of Scotland’s awe-inspiring locations. By fostering meaningful experiences, travellers can immerse themselves in their surroundings, forge lasting connections and gain a deeper understanding of the areas they visit.

By connecting with the people who live in Scotland and sharing their stories – as well as meeting the small business owners who are at the heart of their communities – we learn what makes them, their work and their home so unique.

We want to show that sustainable travel can enrich these communities while offering travellers a more authentic and memorable experience.



Photography by Kim Grant, article: Grand Designs (page 130)

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Photography by Simon Hird, article: The Best of Isle of Arran (page 76)

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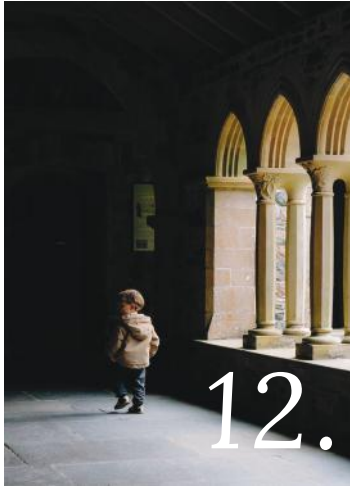
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Island Rediscovery



Discover Aberfeldy



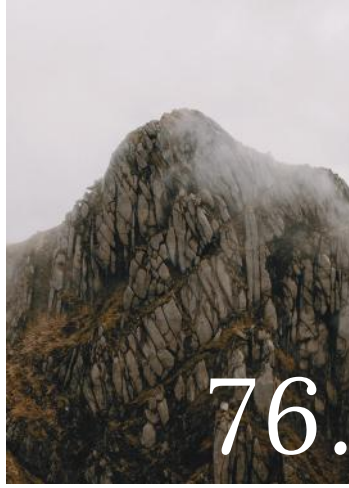
Tailor Made For Success



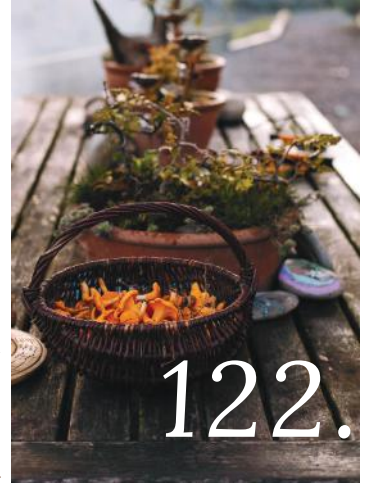
Saving Scotland's Red Squirrels



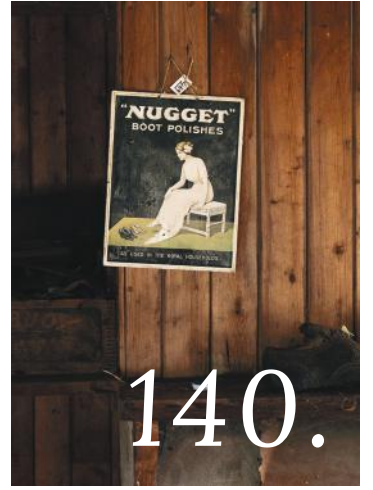
The Best of Isle of Arran



New Shoots, Old Roots



The Last Soutar's Shop



Café Cùil





Photography by Jack Cairney, article: The Last Soutar's Shop - Preserving a Forgotten Piece of Rural Scotland (page 140)

## WELCOME

A very warm welcome to Issue 11 of Hidden Scotland Magazine, our Autumn/Winter 2025-26 issue. This is a time of year when the evenings draw in – when fires are lit, drams are poured and tales are shared – and, as such, we wanted the following pages to capture something of that sense of comfort and community.

Some of the features stand in defiance of the approaching cold weather. Our round-up of the best wild saunas (page 22) in the country travels from the Cowal Peninsula to the Cairngorms – working up a healthy sweat in the process – while our interview with architect Mary Arnold-Forster (page 42) celebrates the rawness of nature and how it can inspire creativity.

The outdoors features heavily, in various guises. We journey to the stirring landscapes of Mull and Iona on a family break (page 12), highlight the green-valleyed gifts of the Isle of Arran (page 76), and retell the legendary tale of Schiehallion, the ‘Fairy Hill of the Caledonians’ (page 64). Elsewhere, Hamish and Liberty Martin talk us through their passion for life in the country (page 122) and, as our cover star hints in handsome fashion, we look more closely at the red squirrel, one of Scotland’s most charismatic native species (page 66).

Devotion to a cause is about passion, purpose and doing things the right way. In this issue, we uncover several businesses that are living proof of the fact. These include Stewart Christie & Co, the oldest bespoke tailor in Scotland (page 50); The Free Company, an à la carte rural restaurant with a committed farm-to-fork ethos (page 58); and Yard 97, a treasure trove of reclaimed furniture and salvaged architecture (page 72).

And there’s more. Artist Zanna Wilson shares her local insights into the wonderful town of Aberfeldy (page 34), Lucy Gillmore looks at the work involved in restoring forgotten buildings (page 130), and Emily Rose Mawson highlights six of Scotland’s best self-catering Landmark Trust properties (page 110). As you’d expect, the list includes some absolute beauties.

Above all, we hope the following pages bring you joy and inspiration.

Happy reading – and enjoy the journey. *Slàinte mhath.*

# ISLAND *Rediscovery*

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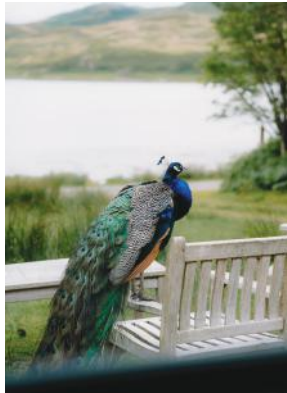
*A family trip out to Mull and Iona turns out to be the perfect way to experience the magic of the past.*

Words: Karla Rose Hall // Photography: Jack Cairney

*Places from your past can have a pull on you. I was seven years old when my parents drove my sister and I out to Mull and Iona – one of many such family road trips, for which my carsick-prone younger self never showed nearly enough gratitude – and the two islands have been special to me ever since. I remember running wild in the hills around Iona Abbey, gulping down the fresh summer air, elated by the freedom of it all.*

Now a mum myself, I can see more clearly that my childhood holiday experiences haven't just stuck with me, they've also shaped who I am. For me, Scotland has always been a place rich with the promise of adventure. Big skies, rolling landscapes, and days that you hold dear.

When my partner, Jack, and I start planning a trip to Mull and Iona with our two-year-old son Aedan, it's a way of chasing that nostalgia: an opportunity to taste the past while casting our own new memories as a family – and getting there from our home in Aberdeenshire will be part of the fun. When we founded this magazine five years ago, it was with a view to unravelling the very best of what Scotland has to offer. Here's a chance to do just that.





14 Fern Cottage, Isle of Mull

We map out a plan, with pitstops at Braemar and Aberfeldy en route to the west coast. Our stop in Braemar is a joy – thanks to a riverside breakfast at The Bothy – while Aberfeldy gives us the chance to browse the excellent, newly relocated Watermill Gallery (where enthusiastic curator Zanna Wilson makes the perfect guide) and visit the Aberfeldy Watermill Bookshop & Café. A spot of lunch for us; two new holiday books for Aedan. Next, along Loch Tay and out west to Oban.

By evening, we're catching the last ferry of the day across the Sound of Mull to Craignure. The sea stretches out as the afternoon turns to evening. There's something deeply comforting about an island ferry, knowing nothing else matters but the here and now, the wind in your hair and the waves against the bow. In the distance beyond the water, quiet isles and far-off monuments, lighthouses and castles. Promises across the sea.

There are still two hours of daylight when we reach Mull. As we exit the ferry, every vehicle apart from ours veers right in the direction of Tobermory. We turn left, towards the shores of Loch Spelve, and immediately feel a tingle of anticipation. Our home for the next three nights will be Fern Cottage, out on the Croggan Peninsula, on the loch's furthest bank. Steering onto the long winding road that leads there, a peacock appears in front of us as if guarding the way. Soon there are ferns, stands of crooked trees, a herd of deer, and finally the cottage.

It's the kind of accommodation you fall hard for: secluded, cosy, stylish, ringed by wilderness. Aedan refers to it as "the cool house" for the whole trip, which says plenty. Owners Lettie and Stephen Corbett have created a beautiful base here: an internet-free getaway with a log-burner, a record player, a games trunk, bold interiors, original artworks and cushions you can sink into. The seashore is just steps away. We sleep heavily.

Like so much of Mull and Iona, Fern Cottage is also somewhere with history. It forms part of the Lochbuie Estate – a 25,000-acre traditional estate

farmed by Stephen's family for more than a century. Tucked away in the estate's green folds are ancient stone circles, an old clan castle, an 18th-century house and the remains of a one-time village. Its tales of the past are many, making the cottage itself – with its brightly coloured wooden panelling, DVD player, bookshelves and comfortable beds – a sanctuary of rare character.

It's drizzly when we wake. Aedan looks out of the window to spot the peacock back again. It really tickles him to see a tropical bird strutting among grazing sheep. Within the hour we're back in the car and exploring, stopping at Moy Castle to toss stones in the loch and jump in puddles. Nearby, at the Lochbuie Standing Stones, there's hanging mist and the ground's boggy. This about-turn in the weather is Scotland all over – yesterday we were in shorts and T-shirts, today we're back in boots and thick jackets. It's a charm of sorts.

After the Standing Stones, we call in for a delicious local-produce lunch at the Old Post Office. We're still just 20 minutes from Fern Cottage, and are charmed to discover that the café owners are cousins of Stephen's. It's a wonderful little place: two local paramedics at another table step in to help out with service when things get busy, then three young girls come in bringing hand-picked flower posies to one of the ladies working there. It can be something to witness, an island community in motion.

We're bound for Iona this afternoon, which means a drive through towering mountain scenery out to Fionnphort on Mull's south-west tip, where a ferry runs between the two islands. Mull is the kind of island that dwarfs you with its size, all eagle-flown ridgelines and monumental contours. Iona is different, a low-slung island of gentle slopes, a place where spirituality has drawn pilgrims for almost 1,500 years. My heart quickens when I see it from the dock at Fionnphort, recalling my first childhood visit.



The view of Loch Spelve from Fern Cottage, Isle of Mull





## WILDLIFE SPOTTING

Our wildlife highlight comes early on our first morning in the cottage when we spot a handful of wildlife photographers at the lochside. Our hushed enquiries reveal an active group of otters, bobbing along in the water! Elsewhere, the islands are renowned for their eagles (both golden and white-tailed), red deer, dolphins, porpoises, seals and seabirds.

A 10-minute crossing and we're there. That afternoon we ramble through the nunnery, abbey grounds and graveyard. It's now my turn to see Aedan run and giggle as he discovers the island, just as my mum had watched me decades earlier. The hours pass as we meander the area around the harbour, wandering onto sandy coves and into stone-built craft shops. There's a peace on Iona that isn't found in many places, something subtle but very real. It's an island on the edge of things – where its land stops, the Atlantic Ocean swells away to another continent.

As we cross back to Mull, it's a thrill to see a pod of dolphins frolicking in front of a rowing skiff, leaping and rolling. When we disembark and start queuing for scampi and chips at the impossible-to-resist Creel Seafood Bar, we get chatting to two of the ladies that had been at the oars, who tell us it's the closest that dolphins have come to the skiff in the 13 years they've been rowing. To describe them as ecstatic at what they'd been treated to would be an understatement. As we eat our takeaway on the

pier and stare back across to Iona, our talk is of sea creatures and sailing.

We set aside part of the next day for Tobermory, Mull's compact but colourful "capital". When we set off from the cottage we meet cows on the lane, hazel-coloured and sturdy. Lettie had forewarned us of just such a bovine roadblock, advising us simply to wind down the window and politely ask them to move. Improbable though it sounds, our polite request does the trick – much to Aedan's delight!

Tobermory might be small, but it's packed with diversions. I pick up a 12-year-old single malt from Tobermory Distillery for my dad's upcoming birthday, after which we head to the port's famous rainbow-hued waterfront, picking up tubs of handmade ice-cream (when you're faced with the option of a whisky, chocolate and cherry flavour, how could we not?) and sitting outside to people-watch.



Iona Abbey



Fern Cottage, Isle of Mull

*'...it's a way of chasing that nostalgia: an opportunity to taste the past while casting our own new memories as a family'*

Mull Museum is our next stop. It's a classic local museum, full of curios and layered stories. Jack asks a volunteer to point us in the direction of an interesting exhibit, and soon we're engrossed in the 1930s tale of a Canadian schooner that got blown off course while carrying a domestic cargo of salt cod, spent 48 days at sea and ended up here on the Scottish coast.

After yesterday's dolphin display, we also feel the urge to take in the child-friendly Hebridean Whale & Dolphin Trust – it's well worth the visit – before moving on to Tackle & Books, a beautifully serene shop of books, maps, historical texts and, yes, fishing tackle. Both Mull and Iona, we decide, are adept at serving up spots where you want to linger.

On which note, following a fantastic late lunch at The Glass Barn farm shop and café, we feel the call of the cottage again. After driving back, we take the rest of the afternoon and evening slowly, taking in the loch views, watching for otters, wandering the shoreline and collecting shells. When the sun goes down we sift through the Scottish vinyl in the cottage – the memory of Aedan dancing around the living room in his pyjamas to "Mull of Kintyre" will have us smiling for years to come.

It's been a short trip, but it feels somehow longer than the calendar shows. This is the beauty of places like Mull and Iona, we decide, when we wake early the next day to make the cross-country journey back home. They immerse you and slow you down, pulling you into their world. And watching Mull recede from the deck of the morning ferry, with a still-sleepy toddler in our arms, we realise there and then – we'll be pulled back soon.



Tobermory Smoked Haddock Fritters at Glenforsa Café

## FOUR GREAT PLACES TO EAT ON MULL & IONA

### OLD POST OFFICE LOCHBUIE

Twinning big views with homemade meals and quality tea, coffee and cakes, this family-run spot is just 20 minutes from Fern Cottage.

### GLENFORSA CAFÉ

This is a wonderful new foodie destination on the banks of the River Forsa – don't miss the Tobermory smoked haddock fritters with sriracha yogurt, rocket and a poached egg.

### GLASS BARN

A farm shop and café based at Isle of Mull Cheese, it's a chance to enjoy stunning interiors and excellent food, while picking up cheese and chutney at the same time.

### AILIDH

A pizza takeaway with a difference, open on Iona from 5pm (text to pre-order and book a slot) and serving truly delicious pizzas and other dishes.

A portable sauna trailer is parked on a sandy beach. The trailer is dark green with a large window that is filled with stacked logs. A woman in a red jacket and dark hat is standing next to the trailer, holding a water bottle. The background shows a rocky coastline and the ocean under a clear sky. Tall grasses are in the foreground.

# 10

*of the best*

# WILD SAUNAS IN SCOTLAND

Haar Sauna, St Ninians Beach, Shetland

# All Fired Up

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*Long the preserve of indoor spaces in the UK, saunas are popping up across the wilds of Scotland, combining the benefits of heat therapy with the restorative power of nature.*

Words: Emily Rose Mawson

If ever there was a climate that made the heat of a sauna irresistibly appealing, Scotland surely has it – even more so if you can watch the weather swirl across the landscape from the comfort of dry warmth.

Bronze Age Scots seemed to think so, given the discovery of an ancient sauna-like structure at Stronechrubie in Assynt. Neolithic folk on Orkney, too, where even earlier models have been unearthed, dating back over 4,000 years.

It was this timeless instinct to seek heat that inspired Shetlanders Hannah Mary Goodlad and her husband, Callum, to create Scotland's first wild sauna in 2020. 'We were in Norway, sitting in one of the floating saunas in Oslofjord,' Hannah recalls of their influential Scandinavian holiday. 'I turned to Callum, and said: "You know, this would work so well – this idea of a typically indoor experience, but outdoors in Scotland."'

At the time, saunas in the UK were mostly confined to hotels and spas. 'Norway had taken this leap,' says Hannah Mary. 'Scotland and Norway are so close culturally, geographically, nature-wise... the idea of an outdoor sauna wouldn't leave our minds.'

A horsebox acquired from a farmer in Aberdeenshire set the stage – providing the base for a sauna that could travel anywhere. Once fitted with a wood-fired stove, Haar Sauna was born. Now with multiple awards under its belt, Haar usually sits on the white sands of St. Ninian's Beach in Shetland, right on the edge of the crashing Atlantic Ocean.

In the past few years, wild saunas like Haar have multiplied across Scotland (around 60 at the last count), offering a ritual of warmth, nature and simplicity which nurtures mental renewal alongside the proven physical benefits of heat therapy. (Studies show regular sauna use can help optimise the stress response, protect against cardiovascular and neurodegenerative disease, and even help preserve muscle mass.) But beyond the science, wild saunas deliver something harder to measure: a memorable sensory experience, deep connection with the outdoors – and a moment to simply stop.

## Stonestrow Sauna

### Isle of Arran

This black-painted, wood-fired sauna – custom-built from spruce – moves around Arran, the Firth of Clyde’s own miniature Scotland, with craggy mountains at one end and fields fading into sandy beaches at the other.

Through Stonestrow’s picture window you might see Lamlash Bay and Holy Isle – a spiritual retreat since the 6th century – or the Victorian seaside village of Whiting Bay, stretched along a mile of sandy coast. Wherever it parks up, the sea is never far away for a bracing plunge, no matter the weather.

‘There’s something very satisfying about stepping into our hot sauna while the wind and rain howl outside,’ says Andrew Sheppard, who founded Stonestrow with his partner, Amy, in 2024. Since then, Andrew says it has become a social space, too: ‘If you go in alone, you’re sure to come out with a group of friends.’

#### TOP TIP

*The three-mile hike to Glenashdale Falls (Eas a' Chrannaig) in Whiting Bay – continuing up to the Giant's Graves, two Neolithic chambered tombs – is a beauty. Or head to Kingscross to see the Iron Age fort and Viking burial site, with its sweeping views of Holy Isle.*

## West Coast Wellness

### Otter Ferry, Cowal Peninsula

While hunkered down on their family farm near Otter Ferry on Loch Fyne during the pandemic, sisters-in-law Hailey and Rosie had an epiphany: movement, nature and community are essential to feeling healthy and whole.

That philosophy became West Coast Wellness – a farm-based retreat offering yoga, day escapes, and a wood-fired sauna with wide windows looking out over the Cowal Peninsula’s sleepy fields and onto the loch. Here, you might spot otters, seals and porpoises – and, if you’re lucky, sea eagles, dolphins and basking sharks.

‘Time stands still here,’ muses Rosie. The hand-built sauna has room for 16 and includes a freshwater plunge pool – or you can simply cool off in the sea.

#### TOP TIP

*Join a yoga class in the farm’s geodesic dome before your sauna session (weekend classes run before the public drop-in). Afterwards, head to Inver Restaurant & Rooms (a 15-minute drive) for an exceptional meal.*



Braan Sauna at The Taybank, Dunkeld, Perthshire by Kim Grant



Soul Water Sauna, Granton

## Soul Water Sauna

### Edinburgh

On Edinburgh's Portobello Beach, Soul Water Sauna offers the perfect pairing: steaming heat and bone-chilling North Sea dips. According to founder Kirsty Carver, this is the best way to feel present.

Kirsty fell in love with saunas during a trip to Iceland over 20 years ago – and it wasn't just the health benefits. For her, saunas are about 'joy, fun and a sense of community'.


Alongside her Portobello sauna, Kirsty runs Big Bear and Little Bear in Granton, north of the city. Big Bear has 'the most beautifully gentle löyly' (Finnish for the steam that rises from the stove), while Little Bear's two-funnelled stove creates different kinds of steam: 'one offers a sharp, intense hit; the other lingers longer and feels softer,' Kirsty explains.

Her mobile sauna, Wandering Bear, visits festivals and is available for private hire. Kirsty and her team also offer traditional sauna immersions, sound baths and seasonal rituals.

#### TOP TIP

*In Portobello, stop by Dook for handmade salt soap and French clay face masks, made in collaboration with Soul Water Sauna. Portobello Bookshop is perfect for a quiet browse and The Beach House serves a cracking breakfast.*

*In Granton, head to The Pitt for some of Scotland's finest street food and weekly markets. Or take the tide-dependent walk out to Cramond Island for views across to Fife.*

A close-up photograph of a wooden spoon being used to pour water over a bundle of green leaves. The leaves are held in a person's hand and are positioned over a large, dark, rounded stone. The water is captured mid-pour, creating a dynamic splash. The background is a warm, wood-paneled wall. The overall scene is set in a sauna, as indicated by the caption.

*'Wild saunas deliver something harder to measure: a memorable sensory experience, deep connection with the outdoors – and a moment to simply stop.'*

## Nowhere Sauna

### Comrie Croft, Crieff

Tucked into native woodland of birch, oak, willow and rowan near the Mill Pond at Comrie Croft in Perth and Kinross, Nowhere Sauna is handcrafted, wood-fired and designed around nature. 'We take the running water from the stream to feed our outdoor bath, waterfall bucket and plunge pool,' says co-founder Lauren Gentry. There's no thermometer, so you have to listen to your body – which, in turn, helps you appreciate the rhythms of nature. 'These so often get lost in the pace of everyday life,' adds Lauren's business partner, Susanna Macintyre – like the nuthatches and woodpeckers you can spot from the sauna.

#### TOP TIP

*Pop to Gorse Café, at Comrie Croft, for light bites made with local produce. Tomnah'a Market Garden is also on-site, growing a gorgeous selection of salads, fruit and fresh-cut flowers – all available to buy from the Comrie Croft Farm Shop.*

## Braan Sauna

### The Taybank

#### Dunkeld, Perth and Kinross

Braan Sauna, on the banks of the River Tay, is powered by an award-winning stove. The beehive-shaped HUUM Hive offers eco-friendly wood burning, oozing cedar-scented heat as it fires. The sauna's stones include some hand-selected from the river, and the effect, according to founders Fraser Potter and Kim Grant, is like pressing pause on the noise of everyday life. 'There's the scent of woodsmoke and cedar, the River Tay rushing past the windows and through the arches of Dunkeld Bridge, and views of mist settling over the wooded Birnam Hill,' describes Kim. The sauna, autumn- and winter-only, is equipped with cold showers and plunge tanks, and both community and private sessions are available.

#### TOP TIP

*Book a session that falls over sunset: it's lovely catching the last light over the river before the old lanterns on Thomas Telford's Dunkeld Bridge flicker on. Afterwards, grab pub food and live music at The Taybank.*



Woodland Sauna at The Treehouses at Lanrick (left and right)

## Woodland Sauna

### *The Treehouses at Lanrick*

Lanrick, Perthshire

On the banks of the River Teith on the edge of the Trossachs National Park, Lanrick's eco treehouses are high in the canopy of beech, birch and sycamore, like luxury human-sized birdhouses. It's all a sensory bath in nature, and the retreat's new woodland sauna takes the concept a step further. Its green roof features plants gathered from the surrounding woodland, and depending on the season, might feature snowdrops, bluebells or native ferns and grasses. The sauna is for guests only and does not need to be pre-booked.

#### TOP TIP

*Book a table at The Gargunnoch Inn for local food in a 17th-century setting.*



Watershed Sauna, Moray Firth

## Watershed Sauna

### Moray Firth

Watershed Sauna, in a renovated vintage horsebox, is designed 'to help people feel more connected with the natural world', says Elle Adams, who opened the sauna in 2022 with her partner Rupert – initially not as a business but as a 'winter survival strategy' for staying healthy in their poorly insulated flat. The sauna has huge windows – all the better for admiring Burghead Bay and the Moray Firth from its perch on the edge of the beach in Findhorn, not to mention the crowd of local wildlife: 'seals, seabirds, dolphins, and even hunting osprey and basking sharks in the right season,' lists Elle.

#### TOP TIP

*Grab a coffee and a pastry at the Bakehouse in Findhorn village. They also do special dahls for lunch, and stock local produce, wholefood supplies and their own range of bread, baked fresh every day in the village.*

## Wild Braemar Sauna

### Braemar, Cairngorms National Park

This hand-built, wood-fired sauna is mobile but favours one magical location: up Glen Ey on Mar Estate, beside a cascade of miniature waterfalls tumbling from the surrounding mountains. It's only bookable for private use and runs as part of a guided wild swimming experience, with founder Annie Armstrong hosting guests throughout. 'I provide towels, water shoes, and food and drinks if they like,' she says. 'But the location is our main standout feature, being beside a river with crystal-clear Scottish water, in a glen home to eagles, osprey, red deer and other mountain wildlife.'

#### TOP TIP

*Try Annie's wild wellness day, including a guided hike with a picnic followed by a swim and sauna.*

## Dune (Elie Seaside Sauna)

### East Neuk of Fife

Nestled in marram grass on the dunes beside Elie Beach, Dune – the original Elie Seaside Sauna – offers just-right views across Elie Harbour and the golden sweep of the bay.

Sauna Master Judith Dunlop, who grew up locally, sees the sauna as a way of sharing what the landscape makes her feel. 'I want to simplify things in a chaotic and overwhelming world,' she reflects.

The sauna occupies a converted horse trailer, fitted with floor-to-ceiling windows that frame sunsets, diving gannets and kite-surfers cutting across the waves.

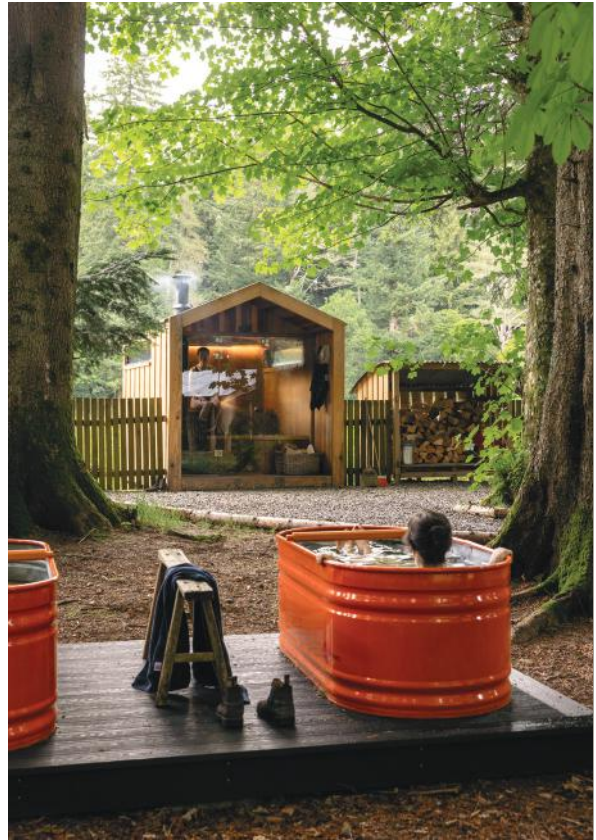
Dune is private hire only – book well ahead – or try Shore, Judith's shared sauna nearby. Her other locations (Cellardyke and St. Andrews' East Sands) are equally soul-soothing.

#### TOP TIP

*Before your session, swim in the Pittenweem tidal pool or join one of Judith's outdoor yoga classes (weather permitting). Afterwards, head to Baern Café & Bakery at Bowhouse for nourishing seasonal bakes.*



The Woodland Sauna at Glen Dye by Kym Grimshaw



## The Woodland Sauna

### Glen Dye Cabins & Cottages

#### Banchory, Aberdeenshire

Guests have access to Glen Dye's woodland sauna for three hours – but this is a very long time to sit and swelter. It is an ideal amount of time, though, for practising a hot and cold ritual and letting the sounds of the woods work on your nervous system. The sauna, a glass-fronted wooden hut deep in fairytale-like forest, is conveniently set up with twin orange cold plunge tin tubs outside, and although originally wood-fired, has been converted to electric – largely generated by Glen Dye's solar panels – so you can preheat it.

#### TOP TIP

Book a session at Glen Dye's Discovery & Adventure Centre, where the sauna is situated. Choose from scavenger hunts, bushcraft sessions, mountain bike rental and archery tag, or climb Clachnaben (1,932 feet). There's also a lovely walk with unusual installations, and be sure to pop in to the Seed Store, where you can light the fire, relax, read and make yourself a cuppa.



# How to Sauna

[haarsauna.com](http://haarsauna.com)

*Tips from Hannah Mary of  
Haar Sauna, Shetland*

Sip wild thyme herbal tea post-sauna – it rehydrates gently, without the shock of cold water.

Apply a peat face mask mid-session. Packed with minerals and anti-inflammatories, peat has been used in Finnish sauna culture for centuries.

Beware of “sauna head”. You might feel blissfully forgetful afterwards – so take as little as possible inside (the amount of lost property we have is unreal!).

Plan for an early night. Come 9pm you’ll be deeply drowsy – and in for one of the best sleeps of your life.

*A weekend exploring*

# ABERFELDY

*a local's guide*



*As an Aberfeldy local, artist Zanna Wilson knows every hidden corner. Here she reveals her personal picks – the best walks, cultural spots, and those special places where locals eat, drink and find inspiration.*

Words: Zanna Wilson with Rachel Rowley // Photography: Laura Tiliman & Simon Hird



Meet your local guide

## Zanna Wilson

*Zanna Wilson, award-winning artist and gallerist, was born in Portsmouth in 1978 to Scottish parents. She has spent her adult life living and working in Scotland, and is now based in rural Perthshire, where she maintains a studio and has run The Watermill Gallery since 2021. The gallery recently moved from its established home at the top of The Watermill Bookshop and Café to a new venue next door in The Old Mill. From this base, she travels widely across the country – most often west to the Scottish Isles, though the far north continues to draw her in. Zanna is deeply inspired by the unique light, texture and atmosphere of Scotland's varied landscapes. This passion is vividly reflected in her work, which is recognised for its rich expressive energy and emotional depth.*

*How long have you lived in Aberfeldy, and what brought you here?*

Seventeen years. I moved in 2008 when I was expecting my first child, Hester, and my second daughter, Ursie, was also born here. My husband, Patrick, is from Aberfeldy, and my father-in-law, local academic Henry Steuart Fotheringham, has lived here since he was 21. Scotland has always felt very familiar to me – my mother grew up in Sutherland – so Edinburgh was an obvious choice for university. I haven't really left Scotland since 1997, apart from one year in Madrid, where I studied History of Art with Spanish.

*What is it that you particularly enjoy about living and working in this part of Scotland?*

I love that it is the heart of Scotland and the gateway to the Highlands; crossing the Highland Line at Dunkeld always feels special. It's a brilliant base for adventures, from day trips to Edinburgh and Glasgow to road trips west. It's also easy for friends to visit, with good rail and road connections. It's rural but not remote, with plenty of local amenities and quick access to the wild.

I especially enjoy the sense of community. Aberfeldy feels more like a village than a town – lockdown brought a new energy and motivation to pull together through Feldy Roo, a charity project delivering meals to the elderly and vulnerable. Its legacy lives on in the water fountain in the square and the Feldy Roo Park Run and fitness trail. We also have a community cycle repair shop, Draft and Flow, a new co-working space and a constant flow of fresh initiatives. Aberfeldy is keeping pace with the rapid growth and changes in Dunkeld, and it's a joy to be part of.

*What advice would you give to anyone looking to explore the area?*

Having your own transport is very helpful if you want to make the most of the area's many mini-adventures.

Take time to explore local walks and try something water-based for a fresh perspective. I'm especially fond of kayaking or swimming, and if you need guidance, we have experts at Beyond Adventure, who cover everything from SUP to e-bikes, as well as Wee Adventures for children.

For a truly immersive visit, sample the local food. We have excellent producers and restaurants, and just outside town, Little Trochry Farm grows a huge variety of salad and vegetables for its farm stand and pop-up events.

*Can you give us a rundown on what Aberfeldy is like as the seasons change, and in your opinion when is the best time to visit?*

Aberfeldy follows the rhythm of the seasons, and there is always plenty to do.

Autumn and winter bring the Enchanted Forest at Loch Faskally and spectacular tree colours, best seen on a drive through Glen Lyon or a climb up Drummond Hill. There's also a wonderfully cosy community feel – coffee by the wood-burning stove at Glen Lyon Coffee, a screening at The Birks Cinema, or the Reindeer Parade and Christmas Market (29 November). Even January and February have their charms, with a peaceful quiet not found at other times of year.

Summer is full of outdoor adventures, from swimming and walking to Highland Games and local shows (see [perthshirehighlandgames.com](http://perthshirehighlandgames.com) for the full list).

My favourite months are June, when everything is fresh, the light lasts until after 10pm and there are few midges; or September, when we often enjoy a golden Indian summer, with spectacular sunsets and fields full of bales.

*When you fancy a getaway out of the city, where in Scotland do you like to spend time?*

I love visiting my family in Appin, which is about a two-hour drive away. I always feel myself unwinding along the 16-mile stretch by Loch Tay and through Glen Coe. Our traditional arrival involves a drink and a bowl of chips at The Pierhouse (though it's best known for its superb fish and shellfish), before treasured time on or by Loch Linnhe and the nearby island of Lismore.

I also highly recommend Tiree, which inspired many of the paintings in my 2025 exhibition, INSITU.



Castle Menzies



The Watermill Gallery by Zanna Wilson



The Hermitage

## ZANNA'S IDEAL WEEKEND IN ABERFELDY

*I'd suggest arriving on Thursday afternoon, stopping at Dunkeld for a glass of wine and perhaps dinner at Redwood, before heading to The Taybank for its weekly live music session – an excellent introduction.*

### FRIDAY

#### *Morning*

Start with a visit to The Watermill Bookshop and Café to pick out a new read, then head to Glen Lyon Coffee Roastery for coffee, pastries and a dose of community spirit. Afterwards, stroll up to The Birks of Aberfeldy from The Memorial Arch, soaking up the woods and waterfalls that once inspired Robbie Burns.

#### *Afternoon*

Take a walk by the River Tay. Either pick up a picnic from Piece and enjoy it en route, or head to Ailean Chraggan (known locally as the Chraggs) in Weem. You can walk directly via Wade's Bridge and the avenue, or follow the river towards Kenmore, looping back through Weem meadow, Castle Menzies and the village. For a shorter option, wander through Aberfeldy Golf Course to Victoria Park, which also has a bowling green and tennis courts.

#### *Evening*

A short drive takes you to Fortingall, a pretty village at the foot of Glen Lyon. See Europe's oldest living yew tree before an early dinner at The Fortingall Hotel. Afterwards, enjoy a film or "Stage on Screen" performance at The Birks Cinema, or head to Pitlochry Festival Theatre for live drama.

### SATURDAY

#### *Morning*

Coffee and breakfast at Fika on The Square, followed by a wander around town. Don't miss Ballintaggart Shop, Homer, Angus Ross's Workshop and, of course, my gallery. We also have an excellent thrift shop and the Handam Refill Station, housed in the beautiful former Doigs clothing store.

#### *Afternoon*

Drive up Glen Lyon to Bridge of Balgie Tea Room (open March to October – do check) for lunch and a walk on the Meggernie Estate. It's a great spot for foraging (look out for chanterelles) and wild swimming.

#### *Evening*

On the way back, stop in Kenmore. Wander along the beach at Loch Tay, take a bracing plunge or book The Hot Box sauna experience, then round off the evening with sundowners and pizza at The Ferryman's Inn.

### SUNDAY

#### *Morning*

Visit the Farmer's Market (10am–2pm, first Sunday of each month, April–November) before heading home. Stop in Grandtully – you can even walk the old railway line from Aberfeldy and bus back. However you arrive, don't miss The Highland Chocolatier for real chocolate oranges and hot chocolate, then enjoy lunch at The Grandtully Hotel or Inn on the Tay.

#### *Afternoon*

One last stop: take a walk from The Hermitage to Pine Cone Point for your final gulps of Perthshire air, or spend some time in the pretty town of Dunkeld.

*plan your weekend with*

# Zanna's Top Picks



The Grandtully Hotel

## Eat ~ Daytime

### Cow and Parrot

Monumental sandwiches; a BLT like no other, very good coffee.

### Glen Lyon Coffee Roastery

Community vibes, excellent coffee and pastries, wood-burning stove and outside deck.

### Piece

Family-run bakery and gluten-free specialists (half my family is coeliac, so this is especially good news for us and others).

### Ailean Chraggan

Especially good for the Sunday roast; a predictable, reliable menu and great for families.

## Eat ~ Evening

### The Three Lemons

Excellent, friendly service; you'll be warmly welcomed, looked after and remembered here.

### The Grandtully Hotel

Go for the squid, stay for the Scottish seasonal dishes. The same team cater for my private view events, and they are always delicious.

### Killiecrankie House

Modern Scottish fine dining, perfect for special occasions.

### Uisge Bar and Restaurant, Station Road, Murthly

A short drive away, brilliant for families.

## Drink

### Errichel, Crieff Road

Panoramic views, coffee or a glass of wine (closes 4pm).

### The Ferryman Inn, Kenmore

Lochside sundowners and firepits.

### Dewar's Aberfeldy Distillery

Tours, tastings, museum and café.

### Inti, Dunkeld Street

The newest addition to town, serving great cocktails.



Ballintaggart, The Square

## Explore/Walks

### St Mary's Church, Grandtully

A hidden gem with an unexpected painted ceiling dating back to the 1600s. Looked after by Historic Scotland, it is one of only two post-Reformation church ceilings still in its original setting.

### Strathtay to Pitlochry

A popular, pretty section of the Rob Roy Way, starting at the golf course in Strathtay.

### Camserny, Loch Farleyer and Weem Wood Circular

Great views with a high chance of spotting deer and other wildlife.

### Queen's View, Pitlochry

A little further afield, this iconic view was named after Queen Victoria's visit in 1866. There's also a visitor centre and café.

## Relax

### Taymouth Marina Spa, Kenmore

Book a session or exclusive hire of the HotBox, including outdoor hot pool, sauna, steam room and Loch Tay slide.

### The Birks Cinema, Dunkeld Street

Find a cosy corner for a coffee or a glass of wine, then stay for a screening or a live music session.

### Griffin Two Lochs Loop

Walk or cycle from the Griffin Forest car park. If you prefer gentle relaxation, head slowly into the trees for a spot of forest bathing. This place is otherworldly.

### Charlotte Flower, Acharn

Relax and indulge in a chocolate-making and tasting workshop with a local chocolatier.

## Shop

### The Watermill Gallery, The Old Mill

A celebration of established and emerging artists, curated from an artist's point of view. An eclectic, colourful mix with regular workshops and events.

### Windows The Gift Shop, 14 Dunkeld Street

Great for gifts for all ages and occasions.

### Ballintaggart, The Square

Daily baked sourdough, treats and wine, stylish enamelware and artisan provisions.

### Malcolm Appleby designer, jeweller and hand engraver, Grandtully

A treasure trove. By appointment only (email: swapp@dircon.co.uk).

*and don't forget*

# Zanna's Top Tips

There are two main routes in and out of Aberfeldy. I recommend arriving via the expansive Crieff Road, which offers a sense of breathing space and feels almost like Sutherland, with a wealth of wildlife – the rare and endangered black grouse, along with hares, owls, deer, geese and curlews – plus sweeping heather and resilient rowan trees lining the way. Entering this way, you know you're heading somewhere special, with majestic mountain views on the descent. When leaving town, head towards Grandtully, a winding route that follows the river and passes the Grandtully rapids and village.

Join the Aberfeldy Community Facebook page in advance. It's the go-to place for local events, helping hands, lost property – and the most reliable alerts for the northern lights, which we've experienced about eight times in the past four years. Someone always posts the best viewing spots straight away!

Aberfeldy has two swimming pools: one at Breadalbane Community Campus and another at Moness Resort (open to non-residents).

You can see more of Zanna's work and gallery at [zannawilson.com](http://zannawilson.com), or follow on Instagram @thewatermillgallery and @zannawilson.



Aberfeldy Watermill Bookshop & Café

## MUST NOT MISS

It has to be the combination of The Watermill Café and Bookshop, the sister interiors shop Homer on Bank Street, and The Watermill Gallery – an almost one-stop shop, all within 100m of each other, offering something for all ages and budget.

# Lines in the Landscape

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*Architect Mary Arnold-Forster on her approach to her craft and the inspiration behind Alder Magazine.*

Words: Rosie Steer

An Cala at Nedd in Assynt







An Cala at Nedd in Assynt

Mary Arnold-Forster spent 16 years working in remote settings across Scotland's Highlands and Islands before setting up her practice, Mary Arnold-Forster Architects, in Dunkeld in 2016. Later that year, she was appointed a member of the Royal Scottish Academy, and from her rural practice she has since been nominated for – and won – several Royal Institute of Architects Scotland (RIAS) awards for her designs and their sensitive response to the wild natural environments in which she works.

Mary has a knack for making the everyday extraordinary: whether reinventing traditional structures for contemporary living or elevating restrained design with beautifully crafted materials. Alongside her architectural work, she has also found the time to launch and edit *Alder Magazine* – an ode to craftwork and creativity.



Mary Arnold-Forster by Timothy Soar

*Can you explain your approach to architecture and design – what kind of spaces do you like to create and why?*

My approach to architecture and design begins with a thorough analysis of the site and its context, paired with a rigorous study of the brief. I have the great privilege of working on some of the most stunning sites in rural Scotland, and of collaborating with talented young architects, engineers, contractors, craftspeople and makers. While the process is deeply collaborative, I also make time to visit the site early on—alone. I like to arrive slowly, often by bike or kayak, and sometimes I camp on the site to experience it fully.

*A design approach that achieves a balance between traditional forms and materials with crisp contemporary details is important to you. How do you apply tradition to new and existing structures?*

We study the physical aspects of the site: the topography, aspect, geology, flora and fauna. We also research the cultural and historic aspects of the site, looking at old maps and tracing the quiet impact of man – ruins, walls, runrigs, paths. We dissect the brief and ask tough questions of our clients, often aiming to reduce the size of the building, thereby reducing its impact on the fragile landscape and bringing it back on budget. I am an advocate of living smaller lives in smaller homes.

*You have described your design process as "circular" – can you explain what that means and how it works in practice?*

My process takes time. An early single-line sketch will be developed, redrawn and refined hundreds of times. What I've noticed is that the final design can often look just like the initial sketch. Hence, I call it circular – but you need to go through the distilling process to return to the original idea. Every building needs a strong idea. It doesn't need to be a loud idea or to make an incredible physical impact – preferably not – but it needs to be clear. Once that idea is there, you can follow it through from the first sketch to the tiniest detail.

*Clients have described your designs as "an extension of nature", and it is clear that there is symbiosis between the rugged landscapes and your designs. Many of your projects are built in remote and potentially challenging sites – for instance, An Cala at Nedd in Assynt, which won a RIAS award (2021), sits in the saddle of two rocky outcrops. What are the challenges and benefits of working with such sites?*

The challenges of building in remote areas are the obvious ones: lack of labour and accommodation, difficult access for deliveries and so on. However, the benefits are enormous for someone like me who loves the wilderness – it is no hardship at all to build remotely. Having lived on Skye for 16 years and now in rural Perthshire, I am acutely aware of the weather and the different microclimates of rural Scotland. I think we should enjoy the extremes of winter and summer, of dark and light, of sun and rain. I will often trace the passage of the sun at different times of year.

*To what extent does engaging with the landscape as a walker or kayaker change your perspective on design?*

I will always manage a micro-adventure alongside a site visit. I have previously arrived by kayak and enjoyed a quiet night on a skerry with my tent and stove. As a hillwalker, I have walked all the Munros; as a kayaker, I have had 20 years of exploring the west coast; and as a cyclist, I have seen a lot of the Scottish Highlands and Islands. More importantly, I have enjoyed them all at a slow pace.

*Your magazine, Alder, has reinvented the idea of the architectural magazine. Can you explain your vision for it and what motivated you to start publishing?*

Alder was born of a desire to seek out and share the craftspeople working in small-scale workshops in rural Scotland, and to celebrate modest, thoughtful architecture and design with others. I have met people recycling plastic waste from our beaches, making floors out of quarry waste, making bricks out of building debris, and insulation from recycled



An Cala at Nedd in Assynt



An Cala at Nedd in Assynt



Sandbank

*'Every building needs a strong idea. It doesn't need to be a loud idea or to make an incredible physical impact – preferably not – but it needs to be clear.'*

Harris Tweed, sisal and locally grown hemp. In my opinion, innovation happens by making in workshops and studios, not in offices. Alder also came out of a desire to avoid writing the PhD I had promised myself I would do one day. I am so pleased I went down this route instead, as it involves so many amazing, creative and talented people. I have been so heartened by the response and contributions to it all.

*How did Alder get its name?*

Alder is a native tree. It is a swamp-dweller and a water-lover, and the wood of this tree doesn't rot when waterlogged – instead, it gets stronger and harder. In addition, it is the name of one of my favourite mountains, which sits right in the heart of Scotland. I recommend everyone climb it.

*Regarding your aims for Alder, you describe your desire to 'thoughtfully document and define Scotland's modern architectural language'. How would you describe that language today?*

I'm finding that more clients are concerned with the materials used in their projects and share our desire to avoid plastics and other petroleum-

based materials and metals. Instead, they opt for naturally breathable insulations and locally sourced materials. We use a lot of Scottish timber, stone and clay in our refurbishments and newbuild work. And we are not alone: I have noticed a new generation of architects and students younger than me who are increasingly concerned about our impact on the planet, and how, as professionals, we take that responsibility seriously. Alder documents the research we carry out but also, critically, shares it with others.

*The latest issue of Alder (issue 03) looks at projects that 'evoke a sense of longing for a simpler, crafted and sustainable way of building and living'. What are your highlights from this issue?*

I have enjoyed every aspect of producing Alder—from commissioning emerging photographers and writers to visiting architects and their clients. I find it fascinating to meet architects, makers, joiners, masons, metalworkers, artists and craftspeople, and to learn about their processes.

*You have referred to the growing network of material suppliers and artisans you work with via Alder, who are reinventing their craft for a contemporary market. Why do you think there is a resurgence in these areas now, and what are the benefits of small-scale production?*

I am really interested in the emerging contemporary art and craft coming out of Scotland. After all, we have a small gallery at our offices in Dunkeld. However, I am also interested in the makers, artists and craftspeople who are reusing or adapting waste materials that can be used in buildings. For instance, there's the team at Studio Vans, a design and manufacturing business in Benbecula who recycle beach plastic into worktops; or Joel Franklyn at Skye Stone Studio, who is reusing quarry waste to make bespoke terrazzo for flooring; or Cara Guthrie in Dunkeld, who is taking waste clay that was intended for landfill to make wall tiles. If we support these small-scale workshops and showcase their craft, it is hoped that public or private finance will feel more confident to support their businesses to grow and prosper.



# Tailor Made *for Success*

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*Traditional Edinburgh tailoring firm Stewart  
Christie & Co has three centuries of experience  
to draw on.*

Words: Ben Lerwill // Photography: Fran Mart



*In the world of high-end tailoring, where there's artistry and know-how in every stitch and seam, heritage and experience matter. Both are found in abundance at Edinburgh's Stewart Christie & Co, the oldest bespoke tailor in Scotland. Working with tartans, tweeds and traditional worsted fabrics, the firm has customer ledgers dating back to 1720 – the year Bonnie Prince Charlie was born – and more than three centuries later, its handmade garments are as prized as they have ever been. Coats, kilts, waistcoats, jackets, tartan trews, capes and estate tweeds are among its many specialities.*

The company has become a prime example of how to move with the times without bending to them – a tailoring firm whose belief in fit, formality and the timeless elegance of a well-cut suit has been steadfast over the centuries. It still counts the likes of the High Constables of Holyroodhouse, the Royal Company of Archers and the Moderators of the Church of Scotland as ongoing clients, as well as a long list of family estates and countless other customers, all with an evident eye for style.

*'We relish the entire journey, from the sheep's back to the customer's back, and I believe our customers enjoy being part of that journey too.'*

‘What sets us apart is our on-premises tailoring service,’ says the firm’s creative director, Vixy Rae, who is also the author of *The Secret Life of Tartan: How a Cloth Shaped a Nation*. ‘Our staff are passionate about their work, both in the workroom and on the shop floor. We prioritise customer satisfaction, as it’s an intensely personal service.’

There can’t be many tailoring firms that can include Saoirse Ronan, Ewan McGregor and Sir Walter Scott among their advocates – although Sir Walter, the records show, is yet to settle his bill – and fewer still that have author Sir Alexander McCall Smith as an official supporter and investor. (‘There is nowhere quite like Stewart Christie & Co,’ he said when this news was made public in early 2024, coinciding with the launch of the firm’s first ladies’ bespoke tailoring studio. ‘It has been a vital part of the Scottish clothing and textile industry for a very long time.’) The company’s recent integration with the 175-year-old Glenlyon Tweed Mill – more of which later – is further proof of its commitment to doing things the right way.

Vixy and her business partner, Daniel Fearn – both longstanding figures in the fashion industry – have now been running the firm for around a decade, paying meticulous attention to keeping its traditions alive. Their ownership is the latest chapter in the company’s long and distinguished story. When it was founded in the early 18th century, it operated under the name Marshall Aitken, which was changed in 1933 when the firm took on the collective expertise of tailors Messrs J Stewart & Sons (established in 1800) and Messrs Christie & Son (established in 1804), both of whom held royal warrants.

The handcrafted, individualised component of the trade is still very much the firm’s *raison d’être*. At the company’s Edinburgh workshop, bespoke means just that: garments are measured, cut and sewn to the exact requirements of each customer, typically after three fittings – an approach that has historically been the pinnacle of classical tailoring. Made-to-measure (which differs from bespoke in that garments are machine-made) and off-the-peg items of clothing are also sold, but, as you would expect, no aspect of the business is less than high quality.



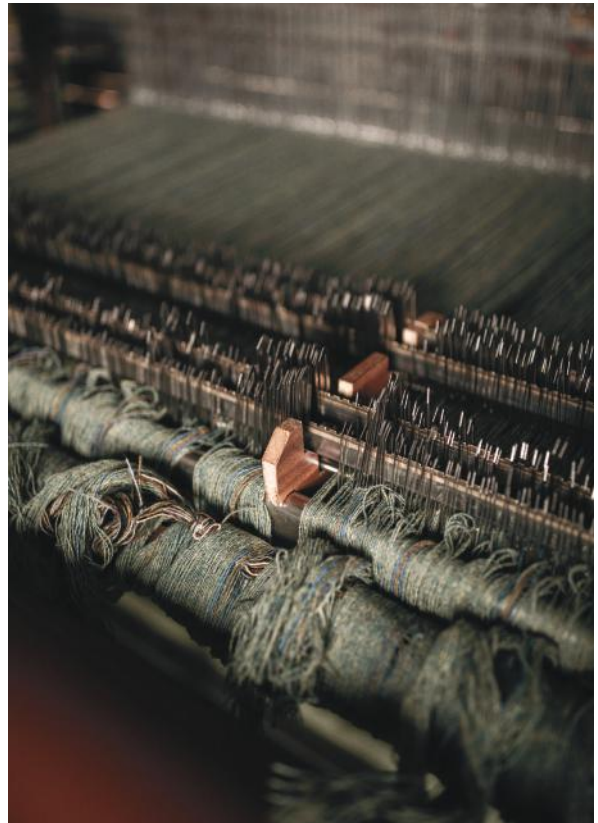
This much is evident from its HQ in the capital’s New Town, where the words “Country Outfitters” and “Bespoke Tailors” are picked out in gold lettering on the front windows, where orbed brass chandeliers hang from the ceiling, and where an oak cabinet of premium single malts is tucked discreetly behind the main mirror in the gentleman’s fitting room (along with crystal tumblers, naturally). The whole place – vintage furnishings, tailor’s shears, silk accessories and all – is an embodiment of the best of Scottish craft and tradition. ‘Our store allows customers to witness the legacy that built the company,’ explains Daniel.

And the cloth, of course, is as important as the cut. As well as the actual craftsmanship involved in creating the garments – which depends on a team headed up by master tailor and head cutter Terence McLelland, a fixture with the firm for more than a quarter of a century – a huge amount of thought and consideration goes into the textiles and fabrics the company uses.





Glenlyon Tweed Mill





*‘Our store allows customers to witness the legacy that built the company...’*

This is where its partnership with the historic Glenlyon Tweed Mill comes in. Based in the Highland town of Aberfeldy, the traditional mill first spun raw fleece into yarn back in 1850 and has been producing warm, durable tweeds ever since. As of late 2024, the mill is now owned by the same parent company as Stewart Christie & Co.

‘Throughout our history, we’ve collaborated with various mills, and variety has always been a key attraction for us when it comes to cloth,’ says Vixy. ‘Over my career, I’ve gained valuable insights into the significance of weaving and its profound impact on Scotland. The acquisition felt like a natural progression. It’s crucial to preserve even the smallest aspects of the industry rather than allow them to fade away.’

The integration with the mill, where older pedal looms have now been brought in to complement the existing powered looms, means the firm can work with classic designs and bespoke colours while also creating new tweeds. ‘Tailoring with your own tweeds offers a unique experience,’ she adds. ‘We relish the entire journey, from the sheep’s back to the customer’s back, and I believe our customers enjoy being part of that journey too.’

The mill has now been transformed into a welcoming, visitor-friendly space, showcasing exactly how its cloths and fabrics come into being. This openness is important to the ethos of Stewart Christie & Co. ‘The fast-paced modern world has made the clothing industry seem disconnected from us,’ says Vixy. ‘We believe in preserving the art of the craft, so we keep the looms clacking and customers inspired.’







Errington's Barn

# Fine Dining Footsteps *from the Field*

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*What better way to reduce your food miles than to eat on the very farm where the food is reared and grown? The next natural step in the farm-to-fork movement is field-to-farmhouse table dining.*

Words: Lucy Gillmore

Up a bumpy, hedgerow-trimmed track between rolling fields in the Pentland Hills lies Cockdurno Farm, one of the country's coolest dining destinations. This 400-acre farm, on the edge of Edinburgh, was part of the Agricultural Department of Edinburgh University from the late 1800s, before being taken over by one of the lecturers, Professor Alick Buchanan-Smith. For the next 80 years his family ran it as a dairy farm – until falling milk prices caused the farm to falter financially. As with so many rural survival stories, diversification was the answer.

'My brother Angus and I were meant to be fourth-generation dairy farmers,' explains Charlie Buchanan-Smith, but in 2016 their father told them he would have to sell the farm. Charlie had experience working in kitchens, his brother front of house – and they had grown up around agriculture. 'We realised there was a problem with our food system. We wanted to produce food sustainably and showcase it in a restaurant – joining the gap between

production and consumption,' Charlie continues. 'That was how The Free Company started.'

After persuading their father not to sell, they began writing Cockdurno's next chapter, converting it into a regenerative farm with seasonal, long-table suppers in what was once the old milking byre.

This year, they've evolved again. The Free Company is now an à la carte rural restaurant, with a smattering of long-table feasting sessions. Rooms are due to open in October in the farmhouse and in an old barn next spring. A wild swimming pond and sauna are also being added in one of the fields.

'When we started back in 2017, we just grew veg in front of the farmhouse with pigs foraging in the woods. We were limited in what we could produce as we only had two parts to our farming system,' Charlie explains.



The Free Company by Amelia Claudia

A few years on, they now rear Highland, Dexter, Shorthorn and native Angus cattle, Shetland sheep and Berkshire and Mangalica pigs, with an on-site butchery. Meanwhile, one of the meadows has been turned into a five-acre market garden where they grow an encyclopaedic range of produce for the restaurant and veg-box scheme, as well as supplying some of Edinburgh's finest restaurants, including Timberyard and The Little Chartroom.

Long compost beds in a polytunnel are a jungle of tomatoes, cucumbers and vibrant orange nasturtiums. 'The chefs are busy making nasturtium oil,' says Charlie. 'It's really peppery.'

'As an organic, regenerative farm, we never turn the soil. We're "no-dig" and composting is key for us.' Using manure from the livestock that are brought in for a few months during the winter, veg waste, grass cuttings and woodchip, they make around 300 tonnes of compost a year.

'Last year we planted an orchard of 500 native fruit trees: a mix of apples, plums, quince and damsons,

as well as fruit bushes,' says Charlie. 'We produce 500 kilos of blackcurrants a year. Chefs want blackcurrant leaves at the moment – I don't know if it's a food trend?' he laughs.

The restaurant is a rustic, light-infused, trestle-table-lined space, with a handful of tables outside. In the cobbled courtyard sits the smoker, an unwieldy 'Frankenstein' of an oven, Charlie laughs. From here, the signature sourdough is given its cindery flavour and served with honey-smear butter. Tall racks of drying garlic are propped against a wall like a rural art installation. Outside the kitchen, a giant blackboard is scrawled with the herbs, flowers and vegetables ready to pick.

On the lunch menu, small bites include house charcuterie and pickles; delicately shaved slivers of fennel and kohlrabi with an earthy nettle and mint salsa verde; almost too pretty to eat Chioggia beetroot, crowdie and skirlie, topped with a nasturtium flower; fire-roasted spring onion, courgette, peas and lamb's heart; and raw Dexter beef with mushroom, kohlrabi and egg yolk.





The Free Company by Amelia Claudia



Errington's Barn



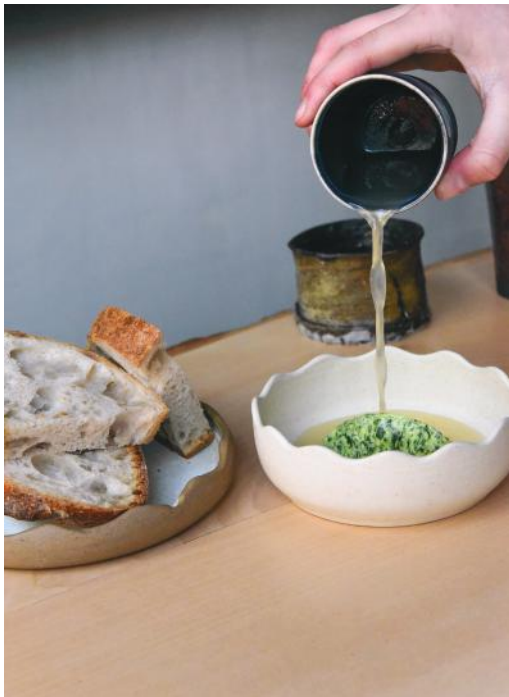
The Free Company by Amelia Claudia

Heading west, on a family farm in the Southern Uplands, one of Edinburgh's original field-to-fork chefs, Ed Murray, now heads up the kitchen at Errington's Barn. Opened last summer, the café and restaurant also hosts monthly long-table supper clubs and food workshops.

The Errington family has been making award-winning farmhouse cheeses since 1985, when Humphrey Errington began producing Lanark Blue and Corra Linn cheddar. The whey from the cheese is fed to their pork-producing pigs, closing the food circle.

'The menu almost writes itself,' Ed explains, with pork and cheese naturally taking centre stage. 'For me, food is about connections – between the people sharing it, and the land and animals that make it possible.'

As one of two chefs behind the legendary communal dining hotspot The Gardener's Cottage in Edinburgh – where herbs and vegetables were grown in the kitchen garden and all other ingredients sourced as close to the capital as possible – the next logical step was working in a farm kitchen.



Moss, Edinburgh

*'Even the crockery has been made with clay from the farm by his Japanese artist wife, Akiko.'*

On a slightly different tack, chef Henry Dobson – who has had stints at Noma in Copenhagen and as private chef to David Attenborough – launched his first restaurant, Moss, in Edinburgh this January. Although this farm-to-table restaurant is in the city, over 90 products are sourced directly from his family's 350-acre organic, regenerative farm neighbouring the Glamis Castle estate in Angus.

Even the crockery has been made from clay from the farm by his Japanese artist wife, Akiko. The Scandinavian-inspired space is decorated with homemade textured paint, using ash from the farm's hardwood, creating the impression of exposed concrete. The tables were also built by Henry, using wood from wind-fallen lime trees.

The menu features foraged ingredients, game, meat, vegetables and herbs sourced from the farm, resulting in dishes like venison tartare with garlic mayo on an onion crouton, alongside wood pigeon, pigeon haggis, fermented rhubarb, hazelnut butter and bramble.

Farm-to-fork dining is evolving across Scotland, chefs edging ever closer to the land. At luxury farmstead hotel Newhall Mains on the Black Isle, the restaurant uses ingredients foraged and reared on the farm, while on the Balcaskie Estate in Fife, tractor-and-trailer tours teach diners about regenerative farming before a barbecue and long-table feast cooked by the Bowhouse butchery team. The experience, "Grass to Grill", is yet another way to join the dots.



# Schiehallion

## The Fairy Hill of the Caledonians



The lonely peak of Schiehallion, Perthshire, is one of Scotland's most iconic mountains – an almost perfect pyramid rising in isolation near the country's heart. Its accessibility has made it a popular hiking route, attracting thousands of walkers each year seeking to bag a Munro with spectacular views.

But there's more to Schiehallion than just a summit to conquer – this is a mountain steeped in history and rich with stories.

The name, translated from Gaelic (*Sìth Chailleann*), means 'The Fairy Hill of the Caledonians', suggesting it was an important site for Scotland's earliest inhabitants. Composed of solid quartz near its peak but riddled with limestone caves lower down, Schiehallion has long been a source of myth and folklore.

One cave in particular was believed to conceal a gateway to the Fairy Kingdom. Its broad entrance quickly narrows, but the passage extends deeper beneath the earth – far too tight for any human to navigate. Folklore claims that at certain times of year, the cave transforms, and the Fairy Hill of the Caledonians comes alive.

Legend tells of two elderly men who lived on opposite sides of the mountain – one at the Braes of Foss, the other near Tempar. Both were stooped from a lifetime of hard labour, yet each Sunday they would take turns walking around Schiehallion to visit one another.

One evening, as one of the men crossed the slopes after dark, he caught a wisp of music drifting on the breeze. Following the melody, he noticed a

Words: Graeme Johncock // Illustration: Emily Hogarth



strange light glowing from a cave mouth across the heather. Riotous laughter spilled into the night. He had passed that lifeless entrance a hundred times before – this was clearly no mortal gathering.

Peering inside, he saw dozens of fairies feasting, dancing and singing, oblivious to his presence. The sights and sounds were so enchanting that he couldn't help but join in with a song. Fortunately, his voice was one of the finest in Perthshire, and the fairies were delighted, inviting him into their revelry.

They rewarded him richly: they straightened his bent back, restored him to perfect health and promised he would never want for food or coin again. When he finally reached his friend's home, the transformation was so astonishing that the second man could hardly believe his eyes.

Determined to share in this good fortune, the friend hurried to the cave, hoping for the same magical gifts. But there was one problem: he couldn't carry even the faintest tune. His voice was so grating that the fairies immediately stopped their merrymaking and pounced on the intruder.

Instead of blessings, they cursed him – bending his back even further and twisting his face into something hideously ugly.

Ashamed, he crept back home to face his friend. The stark contrast between their fates was a harsh lesson: never risk offending the fairies of Schiehallion.



# Saving Scotland's Red Squirrels

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*How to Spot and Support a Native Treasure*

Words: Anna Levin // Photography: Bret Charman

*I'm birdwatching near the shores of Loch Garten when there's a scratchy, scrabbling sound coming from the tree above. I look up to see a flash of bright russet dash along a branch, then stop, poised and alert. I raise my binoculars and – I must confess – squeal out loud. And not only do I squeal, which is unacceptable behaviour among serious wildlife watchers, I use a word which is pretty much taboo. It would make Chris Packham wince. My excuse is that close-up in the circle of my vision is the most exquisite and endearing sight: a delicate little orange face adorned with comically long ears; an agile body, still but quivering; a fluffy orange tail almost the same size as the body; and those eyes! Bright and black, framed by a pale circle as if painted with the most delicate brush. "Oh!" I say. "That's so cute!"*





The writer Gavin Maxwell described otters as 'an animal that might have been specifically designed to please a child' and the same could be said of red squirrels, another iconic attraction among Scotland's native mammals. With their bright eyes, beautiful colouring and cuddly-toy furriness, they bring out the child in us all. And with their sleek forms and impressive leaps between trees, red squirrels are sheer joy to watch.

A partnership project, Saving Scotland's Red Squirrels (SSRS), has been working hard throughout the country to protect red squirrels and ensure that the delightful sight of them is one that future generations can enjoy. Reds were once the only squirrel species in Scotland and could be found in woodlands throughout the country. In Victorian times, grey squirrels were brought from America to stately homes in England and quickly spread into the wild. Wherever greys encroached, the reds declined or disappeared altogether.

'While factors such as habitat loss play a role, greys are by far the main threat to red squirrels,' explains SSRS Communications and Engagement Officer Molly Martin. 'They endanger reds in two ways – firstly greys are bigger animals that can live at higher population densities, so they soon out-compete reds for available food sources. They can also eat foods such as acorns earlier in the season. Secondly, greys carry a virus, squirrel pox, which doesn't harm them but is fatal and highly contagious to red squirrels.'

One SSRS priority area is defending the "Highland Line" – the geographical fault line that forms the natural boundary between the lowlands and highlands of Scotland. North of this is a red squirrel stronghold. SSRS aims to prevent incursions from greys and, in time, move the battle line south to claim more of Scotland as red territory.

Another project is in and around Aberdeen, where SSRS is working to eradicate an 'island population' of grey squirrels.

'Back in 1971, around 20 grey squirrels were transported to a zoo in Aberdeen and escaped,' says Molly. 'By the 2000s, the population of greys had taken over and the reds were disappearing.

Now, after 15 years of conservation work, greys are only occasionally sighted, and reds are reclaiming the space – even in the city's parks and gardens.'

The public can contribute, Molly continues, by sending in squirrel sightings of both greys and reds. This helps the project keep an up-to-date map of their presence throughout Scotland. Telling the difference between the species isn't always straightforward, due to colour variation in both – greys can have a ginger-tinge, and reds may be grey-ish and quite dark. The best indicators are the small, delicate face and body of the reds, while greys are bigger and chunkier. Greys have white tips on their tail fur, forming a halo of white; but it is only the reds that have the distinctive ear tufts, which are especially prominent in autumn and winter. (And, whisper it, reds are simply cuter!)

So being squirrel-aware – looking up and listening out – can help to protect a native species, as well as enhancing a walk in the woodlands.

#### *Molly shares some spotting tips:*

'There are many wildlife reserves around with hides and feeders, so these make great viewing spots. If you're not in a hide, sitting quietly for 20 minutes is a good timeframe for any wildlife to forget that you're there or glean that you're not a threat. Understanding habitat is key to any wildlife watching. Reds like to feed on seeds from coniferous trees such as pine and spruce, so look for chewed cones, which are stripped and nibbled. They'll also feed in mixed broadleaf woodland on hazel and beech nuts, leaving cracked shells lying around.'

'While reds are active year-round, they'll hunker down and are unlikely to be out in wet, wild weather,' says Molly. 'Autumn is the best time to see them, when squirrels are most active with so many seeds and nuts available. They'll also be looking their best! Reds shed their coats in spring and summer but re-grow rich red fur in autumn. And they look particularly stunning among the colours of surrounding woodland.'

Submit your sightings to:  
[scottishsquirrels.org.uk/squirrel-sightings/](http://scottishsquirrels.org.uk/squirrel-sightings/)



**MOLLY'S  
RECOMMENDATIONS  
FOR RED SQUIRREL  
WATCHING**

Scottish Wildlife Trust reserves:  
Loch of the Lowes  
and Balgavies Loch

RSPB Scotland nature reserves:  
Loch Garten, Loch Lomond  
and Loch Leven

Tentsmuir Forest  
Hyndlee Forest  
Eskrigg Nature Reserve  
Culloden Woods  
Hazlehead Park  
Argaty Red Kites



*shopkeeper focus*

# YARD 97

Robert Workman



*Great retail starts with a great understanding of people. Robert Workman – the personality behind Yard 97, based at Grange, Perth – has been observing people and co-creating a customer base and community for decades.*

Words: Rachel Rowley // Photography: Jack Cairney





Yard 97 is a retail experience and resource for reclaimed furniture, architectural salvage and curiosities, ideal for reuse at home or in commercial settings.

While Robert started his career as a PE teacher, his business in shopfitting and kitchen making began in 1989 and is still a core part of what he does today, often behind the scenes in the workshop at Yard 97.

He moved to Scotland from Twickenham, initially running his business from the back of a van. Six months later, he took over one workshop and has gradually absorbed neighbouring buildings over the years to make up the complete site as it stands today – a collection of joined-up 1940s airfield buildings spanning many hundreds of square feet.

Robert is known for his acumen, knowledge, integrity and ability to deliver. He has honed his craft – and the art of perception – over time. His attention to the smallest detail and commitment to delivering outstanding service and products are evident in all that he does. He couldn't do any of it without his team, who have grown and shaped the business from the workshop and spray booth to also running the retail side of Yard 97.

He credits a meeting with the late James Sugden of Johnstons of Elgin as a cornerstone of his business. Their working relationship and James's 'great faith' in Robert and his team spanned many projects and endured for well over 20 years. This is testament to Robert's approach and his appreciation of objects and relationships that endure and are built to last. This connection was also the conduit to many other Scottish captains of industry, and the fruitful, sustained growth for what would become the business and network behind Yard 97.

'We have always strived for an exceptionally high standard in the business, starting with shopfitting, design and delivery at the best value for money – and that's why people come back,' he explains. 'This principle is echoed in Yard 97, where we combine meticulously selected products, original merchandising, friendly, competent service and a personal, quality retail experience that defies e-commerce and anonymous online shopping. Many of the pieces – and the people – are real one-offs!'

Robert has always sourced unusual, original pieces, especially reclaimed furniture, vintage interiors and architectural salvage, to complement his bespoke work. Crucially, every piece is designed or chosen with practical intention – either second-hand to be reused or new with a useful function. Robert is a practical man: his talent for sourcing and remaking items developed naturally into a retail opportunity, with the idea to open a large section of the warehouse space to sell treasures directly to the public. The concept was slightly stalled by Covid, but eventually opened its doors after lockdown, just as the world was opening up again in November 2022.

Although surrounded by vintage pieces, there's no time for looking back – Robert is keenly focused on the continued growth of Yard 97 and the pieces and people that will carry him and his business well into the future.

Visit Yard 97 Grange, Perth, PH2 7TB

Open 11am – 4pm Thursday, Friday, Saturday and the last Sunday of each month.

Socials: @yard97atrobertworkman

### ROBERT'S TOP THREE TIPS FOR TREASURE HUNTING

#### *Get your eye in*

Practice makes perfect, go regularly to charity shops, car boot sales, auctions and scour Facebook Market Place – start with small pieces and get bolder from there.

#### *Focus*

Try not to get distracted, keep the practical use of an object in mind.

#### *Inspect*

Turn everything upside down three times – inspect for cracks, chips, wood worm and potential reasons why it won't sell (work) well.

# The Best of ISLE OF ARRAN



*Arran is a jagged-spined, sky-prodding surprise in the Firth of Clyde, that looks like nowhere nearby. Not like Ayrshire, 14 miles to the east. Nor like the Kintyre peninsula to the west, sheltering it from the Atlantic. This island is a geological curiosity – created when Scotland and Canada drifted apart some 60 million years ago – a nirvana of bewildering, beautiful contrasts. Here, Alpinelike peaks with granite flanks rise above glacier-carved glens, their slopes hazed with wildflowers, while pastures tumble to silversand beaches.*

Words: Emily Rose Mawson // Photography: Simon Hird





Brodick Bay

All this makes for an exciting outdoor scene, but the geological variety is matched by several characterful villages, each one distinct from the next. And with this comes a host of lovely independent businesses – among them galleries, craft shops, whisky distilleries and island producers. Culture thrives too, in the shape of castles, museums and lively events.

These attractions don't go unnoticed. Peak season, Arran's population of around 5,000 swells to over 20,000. The main village, Brodick, bustles with seaside charm – think minigolf, alfresco cafés and a boardwalk beach – yet quieter corners such as Lochranza offer stillness and space.

Despite its popularity, Arran rarely feels crowded – except perhaps Goatfell, the island's tallest mountain, on a sunny forecast. Wander a little further into lesser-known glens and you may have the landscape to yourself. In winter, the island turns hushed – so quiet you could almost hear the rocks breathe.



## Getting There & Around

Three ferries connect the mainland to Arran:

**Ardrossan–Brodict:** 55 minutes (55 mins from Glasgow to Ardrossan)

**Troon–Brodict:** 75 minutes (45 mins from Glasgow to Troon)

**Claonaig–Lochranza:** 30 minutes (but allow almost three hours' drive from Glasgow)

Once on the island, driving is easiest, though many roads are narrow and potholed. Parking is free. Stagecoach runs a bus service circling the island and crossing the String Road, which links the east and west coasts.

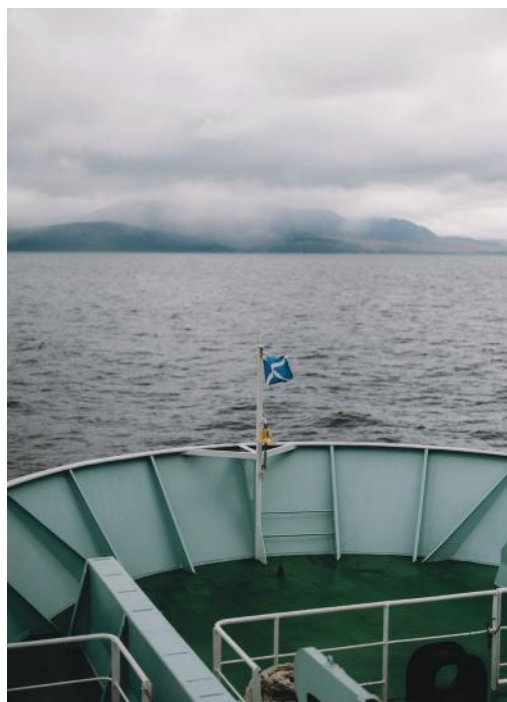
At time of writing, the Ardrossan service was suspended – check updates at [www.calmac.co.uk/service-status](http://www.calmac.co.uk/service-status).

## History

Arran is a delight for history lovers; its landscapes are scattered with century-spanning sights and stories. Bronze Age chambered cairns, standing stones and cup and ring carvings mark the beginnings of settled life. Viking influence lingers in place names: Brodict, from the Old Norse *Bredavik* (“broad bay”), hints at centuries of Norse dominance between the 9th and 13th centuries.

In 1263, after the Vikings' defeat at the Battle of Largs, Arran became part of Scotland. Centuries of raids during Anglo-Scottish conflicts followed, until the island was granted by royal charter to Sir James Hamilton in the 1500s. His legacy, Brodict Castle, remains one of Arran's headline attractions.

There are echoes of the 19th century Clearances, too, when the Dukes of Hamilton paid islanders to emigrate to Canada, clearing land for modern farming. The abandoned croft of Laggantuin, its ruins overlooking the Sound of Bute, is a haunting reminder.




The Calmac Ferry to Mull from Oban

## Villages

From Brodict, the island's road loops north and south, tracing a ribbon around the coast. Southward lie Lamlash, Whiting Bay and Kildonan, then westward to Kilmory, Blackwaterfoot and inland Shiskine. The road sweeps up the west coast past Pirnmill and Catacol to Lochranza, before turning east through Sannox and Corrie and back to Brodict. Each village is distinct – exploring them is one of Arran's joys.

### TOP TIP

*Keep an eye out for old sandstone mile markers along the roadside.*



## *What it's best known for*

Arran has long been nicknamed 'Scotland in miniature' – and with good reason. Split by the Highland Boundary Fault, the island showcases Highland and Lowland scenery in just 55 miles of coastline. At its highest point, Goatfell rises 2,866 feet – the remnants of volcanic activity some 60 million years ago.

This turbulent past created spectacular rock formations, and in 2025 Arran was designated a UNESCO Global Geopark. It's also home to Scotland's 'Big Five' wildlife, boasts seven golf courses, two award winning whisky distilleries and a thriving food scene. Miniature? Perhaps. But you'll struggle to fit everything into a single trip.



# Things to do

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*When packing for Arran, think outdoors. Sturdy shoes and a weatherproof jacket are essentials. Many of the island's best experiences involve fresh air – and even the indoor ones often require a stroll to get there. Arrive prepared and you'll be richly rewarded.*

## Walks, Wildlife & Nature

### **Brodick Bay**

This boomerang of golden sand frames one of Arran's most famous views: Brodick Castle, Goatfell, Glen Rosa and the Three Beinns rising behind. The island's main settlement, Brodick, rests on its southern edge, facing Cladach – the original village site – where seals bask on the rocks. The Fisherman's Walk, a 3.5-mile mix of boardwalk and beach, connects the two.

### **Blackwaterfoot Beach**

Often called Arran's loveliest beach – and it's hard to disagree – this stretch glitters under immense southwestern sunsets. At one end rise the basalt cliffs of The Doon; at the other, the whitewashed village of Blackwaterfoot. Golfers can tee off at the famed 12 hole Shiskine Golf Club, which rolls right down to the sand.

### **Kildonan Beach**

Around 240 million years ago, *Chirotherium* left its dinosaur-like footprint here – you can still see it, embedded in black igneous rock 50 metres from the car park. Beyond, the white sweep of Silver Sands is ideal for seal spotting, paddling and picnicking among sheltered coves.



Dougarie

### **Goatfell**

At 2,868 feet, Goatfell is technically a Corbett, not a Munro – but it feels every bit a mountain. Two main routes – from Brodick Castle (the busier trail) or Upper Corrie – take around six hours. Expect sweeping glens, optional scrambling and vast summit views across Cir Mhòr and the muscular Beinn Tarsuinn and Beinn Nuis.

### **Dougarie**

This traditional westcoast estate, built around 1865 for the 11th Duke of Hamilton, still radiates Highland grandeur. Its crenelated white lodge hosts weddings, five self-catering cottages and an annual open gardens event. All of it overlooks the mouth of Glen Iorsa – wild, windswept and very photogenic.

### **Drumadoon Point**

Once crowned by an Iron Age fort, this headland is now famed for The Doon – a dramatic wall of basalt columns. The best approach is an hour long beach walk from Blackwaterfoot, across a boulder field beneath the cliffs. Allow two hours for a leisurely out and back.

### **Eas Mor Ecology**

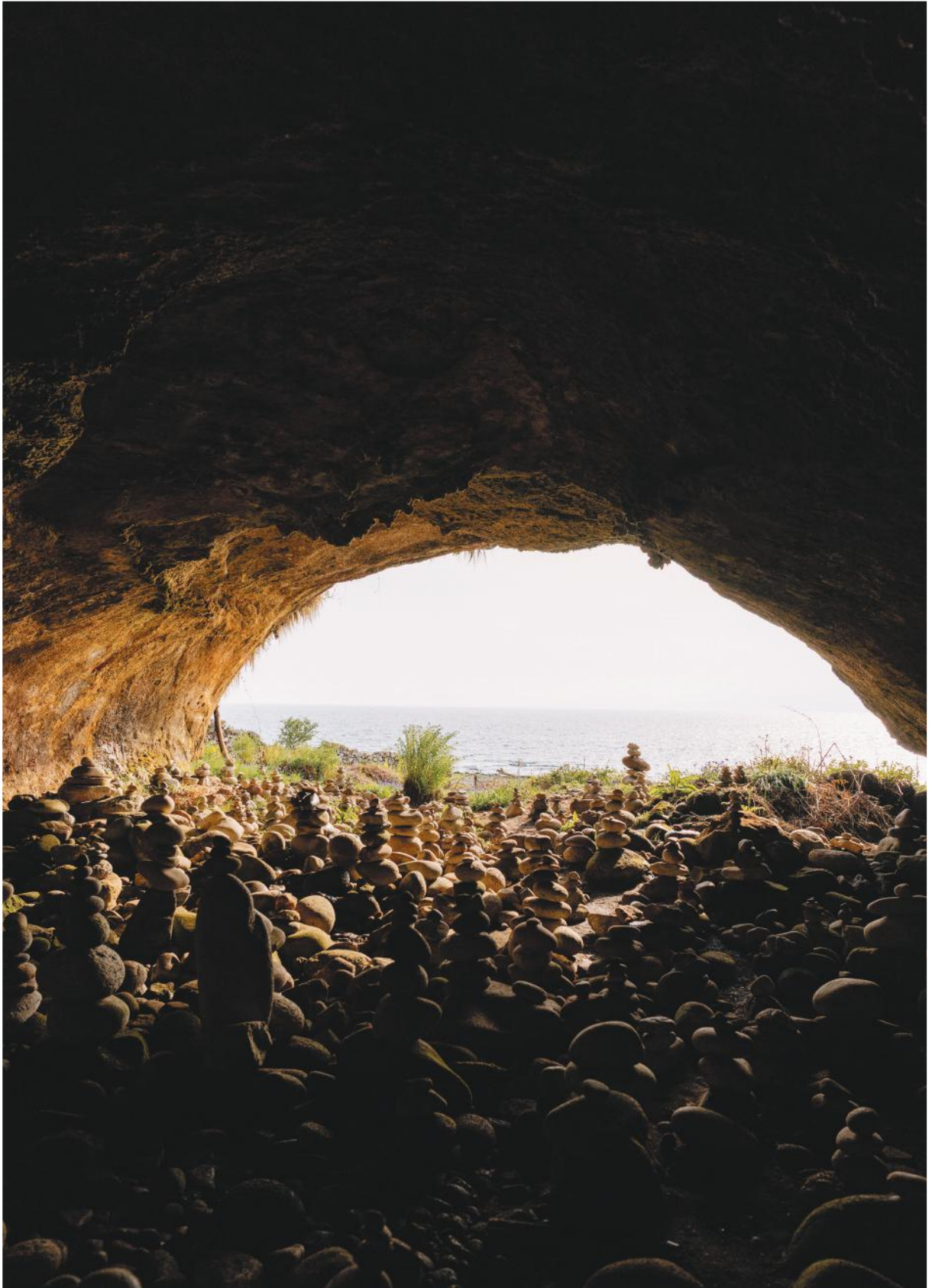
Two hundred and fifty million years ago, this hidden valley was a desert; 15,000 years ago, its waterfall spanned the entire horseshoe. Today, it's a fairytale woodland threaded with trails, carvings and sculptures – plus a wooden 'library' where visitors pin poems and notes to the walls.

### **Glen Rosa**

A classic Ushaped valley carved by Ice Age glaciers, Glen Rosa offers everything from a 90 minute riverside loop to the challenging Three Beinns Horseshoe (seven hours). Look for turquoise pools in the Rosa Burn, red deer grazing the slopes and even the occasional adder basking on a rock.

### **Hutton's Unconformity**

On this rugged Lochranza shore, James Hutton – the father of modern geology – proved the Earth was millions, not thousands, of years old. Seek out the distinct horizontal seam where red sandstone rests on much older grey schist, and you're staring at time itself.



King's Cave

### Sannox Bay

Framed by the Devil's Punchbowl – a glacial hollow tied to local legend – this beach blushes pink in certain light. Hunt for sea glass, explore rockpools on the north end, or take the sheltered woodland path to North Sannox when the weather turns.

### Coire Fhionn Lochan

A steep climb from Thundergay verges leads to this jewel-like lochan, cradled in the Pirnmill Hills. Its white gravel beach, mirror-like water and views as far as the Paps of Jura make the exertion worthwhile – and it's a dreamy spot for a wild swim.

### Kilmory Beach

Another contender for Arran's prettiest beach, Kilmory curls out into the Firth of Clyde, staring straight at Ailsa Craig. Reach it via Torrylin Cairn, a Neolithic burial site, starting from the village hall car park. Inside, drop by Arran Gems, where jewellery is crafted from recycled silver, copper and sea glass.

### Kingscross Point

Legend says Robert the Bruce sailed from this eastern headland in 1307 to reclaim his crown. You'll also find a 2,000 year old fort, a Viking grave mound and sweeping views of Holy Isle and Lamlash Bay. A 30 minute walk from Whiting Bay leads to a bay perfect for paddling.

### Laggan Circuit

Seven miles of drama: moorland, cliff paths and giant boulders. Along the way, look for Cock Farm's ruins, a slate quarry with fossilised Arthropleura tracks – the ancient millipede grew two metres long – and Ossian's Cave, etched with a three-masted ship.

### King's Cave

The story says Robert the Bruce watched a spider here, learning perseverance before Bannockburn. True or not, the cavernous chambers inspire tales. A two-hour circular walk reveals inscribed walls, a shingle beach and views across Machrie Bay to the soaring basalt of The Doon.

#### TOP TIP

*North Glen Sannox is a brilliant waterfall walk, climbing gently beside the burn, with pools for swimming in summer and atmosphere for wet strolls in winter. It's also one of countless examples of geology that have earned Arran its UNESCO Geopark status, for the rocks here that formed on the floor of an ancient ocean that used to exist between Scotland and England. Very rarely exposed on land, they include shale, formed by mud that settled on the sea floor, and pillow lava, created when volcanoes erupt under water.*

*Another good one for geology – and fun for kids (with an additional playground near the Sandstone Quay) – is Corrie's shoreline, featuring lava that formed in the same way as the Giant's Causeway, a fossilised lightning strike, and limestone cliffs deposited when Arran was near the equator.*



# George Grassie

Blackwater Bakehouse

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## *What are the best wet-weather activities on Arran?*

Wet weather on Arran can be any time of year – but it's warmer rain in summer! If it's accompanied by a breeze, it's worth embracing the soak and being out on the shores or hills getting fully drenched. Post-drying rewards are the key, and I'd grab a bottle of white and hit up some oysters and seafood at Mara Fish Bar & Deli in Corrie afterwards.

In colder times of the year, there are pop-up mobile saunas around the island that are gaining traction – they make an event of dramatic weather – or there's a long pool session and steam room at Auchrannie Resort. My personal favourite is to brave the rain shopping around the food outlets, grabbing the elements of a great dinner, lighting a decent fire while the windows stream and roasting aromas fill the room. A towel followed by a good bottle works here too!



Machrie Moor Standing Stones



Brodick Castle



Pladda Lighthouse

## The Twelve Apostles

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Dating from the 1860s, each of these 12 terraced white cottages in Catacol has a uniquely shaped upstairs window. It's not that the architect was making a creative statement, but rather that a wife in urgent need of her husband could light a candle in the window so the fishermen out in the Firth of Clyde could see who was wanted at home.

## History & Heritage

### Brodick Castle

The former seat of the Dukes of Hamilton, this National Trust for Scotland showpiece mixes romance and grandeur: turrets and towers, rooms hung with antlers, treasures amassed by the spendthrift 12th Duke and gardens famed for rhododendrons.

### COAST Discovery Centre

Lamlash's COAST (Community of Arran Seabed Trust) led the creation of Scotland's first "No Take Zone", restoring Lamlash Bay's marine life. Learn more in the interactive centre, board the RV COAST Explorer for a research trip, or just hire gear for tennis, putting – even rockpooling.

### Arran Heritage Museum

In a former croft farm outside Brodick, this volunteer run gem showcases an Early Bronze Age grave, a recreated skull of the 5,000 year old Clachaig Man and a Viking ship model. Peek into the old post office, smithy and schoolroom – then stay for legendary home bakes in the café.

### Dun Fionn

Dun Fionn is a good example of one of Arran's ancient sites that you simply stumble across – or in this case, take a steep climb to. The Iron Age fort sits at the summit of the coastal Clauchlands Point circular walk, at 541 feet. Even if you're not interested in history, you'll enjoy the 360-degree panoramas. Park at Kerr's Port, east of Lamlash.

### Kildonan Castle

A ruined sentinel over Pladda and the Firth's entrance, this 13th century MacDonald stronghold later became a royal hunting lodge. Now, it's part of a lovely 30 minute circular walk from Kildonan's grassy car park.

### Lochranza Castle

This gnarly medieval ruin – once a hall house, later an L-plan tower – juts into the loch, doubling its drama with watery reflections. Open April to September, it's atmospheric, photogenic and a little haunting.

### Machrie Moor Standing Stones

Six stone circles – some granite, some sandstone, some rising to 5.5 metres – stand lonely on Machrie Moor. Dating from around 2,000 BC, they glow amber at sunset. Legends talk of giants, but the reality is no less powerful: a Bronze Age ceremonial site, still humming with mystery.

### Pladda Lighthouse

Just a kilometre long, this pancake flat island off Arran's south coast has been crowned by a lighthouse since the 1790s. Though now automated, its swanwhite tower still mesmerises. The island is private – the best way to see it is to kayak over with Otter's Tail or Kayak Arran.



Lochranza Distillery

## The White Stag

Unicorn-coloured deer might sound like creatures from North of the Wall, but scan Arran's deep glens and heather-blanketed hillsides and you might spot a flash of white. Believed to be leucistic red deer, these pale counterparts have a genetic condition that affects pigmentation. Perhaps don't look too carefully though: legend has it that if a white stag is seen on Arran, a member of the ruling family, the Hamilton clan, has died.

## Activities

### Isle of Arran Brewery

From blondes to bitters and stouts, the real ales produced at this small independent brewery have won multiple awards. Tours run at 1 pm on weekdays, when you can learn about the history of brewing on Arran and the ingredients used here – and enjoy a tasting. The brewery is in Cladach, at the start of the path up Goatfell.

### Lochranza Distillery

Water from Loch na Davie, high in the hills above Lochranza, is used to make the whisky that matures in American oak ex-bourbon and ex-sherry casks at this award-winning distillery. The signature whisky is the Arran 10-Year-Old, but book a tour to sample the full range.

### Lochranza Golf

Families and novices are welcome at this dress-code-free golf course, one of seven on the island. It's an 11-hole, par-3 course, but can be extended and played as 18 holes. There's also an 18-hole putting green that sits in an undisturbed sunny basin overlooked by Torr Meadhonach, where you can often spot red deer.

## Lochranza Centre

This not-for-profit CIC offers educational field studies in geology, geography and biology, as well as adventure activity courses such as gorge walking, abseiling and archery – open to schools, youth groups, families and general interest clubs. The centre also provides B&B and full-board accommodation and is home to the Geopark hub, where you can learn about the island's fascinating geology.

## Lamlash Cruises

Lamlash Cruises' signature trip is the day visitor excursion to Holy Isle, giving you – after the 15-minute crossing – four hours to explore the coastal path on the west side of the island, including St Molaise's Cave, or just enough time to summit Mullach Mòr. Along the way, you may spot Eriskay ponies, Soay sheep and Saanen goats. The operator also runs RIB trips in Brodick Bay and to Ailsa Craig.

## Scottish Wildlife Trust Snorkel Trail

Lamlash Bay contains Scotland's only "No Take Zone", designated in 2008 after years of campaigning by the community-led organisation COAST to prohibit the extraction of any marine life. Thanks to measures like this, the marine ecosystem is thriving – best explored on one of six self-guided snorkel trails. Look out for spiny starfish, sea urchins and dog whelks.

## Lagg Distillery

Lochranza's sister distillery is a series of low-slung, sedum-roofed buildings lined up on the headland, with views across the Firth of Clyde and Ailsa Craig. It's ridiculously scenic – and already an award-winner, named Scottish Distillery of the Year 2023 by the Scottish Whisky Awards. Its heavily peated whiskies, made with malted barley, contrast with Lochranza's lighter style – try the Kilmory Edition, aged in first-fill bourbon casks.

## Arran Wild Walks with Lucy Wallace

Qualified mountain leader Lucy Wallace knows every nook and cranny of Arran. After 20 years living on the island, she now runs private and group guided walks into the mountains, moors and along the coast – helping you access the best routes safely. She's also an expert in local wildlife and can help you spot seals, seabirds, otters and species you might never have heard of.

## Arran Active

On Brodick seafront, family-run Arran Active stocks a superb range of outdoor clothing and equipment – just about everything you might need, really – from brands like Paramo, Rab and Regatta. It also hires out paddleboards and kayaks by the day. Simply book online and pick up in store.



Lochranza Distillery



## Jess MacDonal Brass

Jeweller

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*Where would you take a friend visiting Arran for the first time?*

We'd start early and head out on the Three Beinns walk. First, we'd summit Beinn a' Chliabhain, where they'd get views of Arran's famous Goatfell. Up here, you're also treated to Cir Mhòr with its dramatic pointed peak and the Sleeping Warrior stretched out along the skyline. We'd continue to Beinn Tarsuinn, meeting the iconic Old Man of Tarsuinn, before finishing off with Beinn Nuis and the stunning descent into Glen Rosa.

After our epic hike, we'd make our way to the west coast for a snorkel. The water here hides a whole other world – mini underwater canyons, swaying kelp forests and flashes of colourful sea life. For me, this is the kind of day that shows off just how wild and beautiful Arran is – not just up in the mountains but also below the surface of the island's sea.



The Library in the Woods

## Family

### Bellevue Farm

Farmers Donald and Ailsa are the sixth generation of the Currie family to farm on Arran – and they're as welcoming as the views are wide. They've opened their farm to give families an amazing experience: collect the morning eggs, feed the alpacas, or enjoy the ride-on tractors and hay bales in the barn (one of the island's best wet-weather options).

### North Sannox Pony Trekking

Karen McKinnon's family has been farming land in the Sannox area for generations. These days, Karen and her friendly ponies offer rides for kids along eastern Arran's stunning coastline and woodland, as well as into Glen Sannox. Rides range from 30 minutes to two hours, with extra paddock rides for three- to five-year-olds, who'll also enjoy spotting the farm's blackface sheep.

### Old Byre Showroom

Grab a delicious Turkish pide for lunch in the café, where you can keep an eye on your kids in the playground. Along with a fleet of ride-on tractors – and a huge field to ride them in – there's a trampoline, foam building bricks, swings and giant games like Connect 4. All that's asked is a small donation for the playground's upkeep.

### The Taste of Arran Shop & Mini Golf

This Arran-themed crazy golf course features holes modelled on the Forth Bridge and the Arran ferry – and you can watch the real ferries coming in while you play. The shop stocks local produce, clothes and toys.

### Isle Be Wild

The adventure playground at Brodick Castle features zip wires, helter-skelter slides, towers, treehouses and a twisty boardwalk in the trees. Just beyond is the Fairies and Legends Trail, with fairy doors and houses built into tree trunks. The gardens also feature a red squirrel hide with windows overlooking feeders.

### Arran Heritage Museum

Shiny red Tommy's Tractor is a fantastic addition to Arran Heritage Museum's garden. Kids can climb on him, as well as on the tram and sailing boat. There's also a playhouse packed with toys, a picnic area, a 1940s schoolroom, and every summer, a 'children's day' event with traditional games and an electric train set.

### Arran Alpacas

Tom and Emma of Balmichael Glamping run kids' sessions on their alpaca farm every Thursday and Saturday (booking essential). Activities include feeding alpacas, sheep and ducks, alpaca-fibre crafts, time to play in the outdoor and indoor games areas and a short alpaca trek.

### COAST Visitor Centre

Look for starfish in the marine tank, curl up in the reading corner with a book about the sea, or learn how to measure a lobster. Afterwards, hire a rockpool explorer backpack and ask the COAST team where to find the best rockpools.



Corrie

### Lochranza Golf Putting Green

Children not quite ready to swing a club will love the 18-hole putting green adjacent to Lochranza Golf, though the whole course is family-friendly. There's no dress code, it's a smaller course – allow 30 to 90 minutes – and all equipment is provided.

### Auchrannie Playbarn

This is where local families head when the weather turns. It has soft play equipment, games machines, colouring sheets, an outdoor area and a small café. Entry is free for Auchrannie Resort guests.

### Auchrannie Pool

Auchrannie Resort's public pool is light and spacious, with a 20-metre pool, steam rooms and saunas. It's very child-friendly, with a shallow pool for little ones and is open to non-residents from 10am to 5pm and again from 6pm to 8pm.

## TOP TIP

### Wildlife Spotting

*There are no foxes, grey squirrels, moles or weasels on Arran, allowing Scotland's 'big five' species to thrive – seals, otters, red deer, red squirrels and golden eagles. Carry your binoculars at all times to look out for gannets diving, alongside myriad other species of seabird and, if you get lucky, porpoises, dolphins and even basking sharks.*

# Eat, Drink & Shop

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*Take your pick from sea-view cafés, cosy nooks and even Scotland's only beach bar for Arran-made ale, cheese, chocolate, gin, ice cream and whisky. Don't go home without some island-made crafts and art, browsable at any number of pretty places.*

## **Arran Botanical Drinks**

You can't help but notice Arran's thriving plant life – in the woods, on the verges... and in Arran gin. Ingredients including lemon balm and sea lettuce infuse these seasonal drinks, which are all brewed and distilled locally. In summer, sip them on the sand outside Cladach Beach House as the light fades over the bay. In winter, the place to be is beside the log burner indoors.

## **Mara Fish Bar**

You won't find any farmed seafood on the menu here – and certainly no salmon. That's because Mara's founders Kirsty and Gordon are committed to local, sustainable catch that's served in eco-friendly takeaway boxes. Menu fixtures include Lamlash Bay creel-caught lobsters, langoustines drenched in butter and gram flour fish tacos packed with chilli-laced whiting. There's always a vegan option and the sea-view outdoor seating is a delight.

## **The French Fox**

After starting life in Guy Gautier and his partner Emma-Jane's turquoise Peugeot J7 van, "Pierre", The French Fox found a more permanent address at One Auchrannie Road, with gorgeous outdoor seating beside Glenclay Water. You still can't book, it's BYOB and the menu changes daily – though you can rely on classics like croque monsieur or baked Camembert followed by profiteroles or crème brûlée. Takeaway is available, or visit on Sundays for French toast with cinnamon brioche.

## **The Parlour**

Stone-baked, hand-thrown sourdough pizzas are the specialty at this slender seafront restaurant-café, served with perfectly matched dips. It also boasts one of the widest selections of Arran Ice Cream flavours you'll find anywhere. Go for Arran Gold or Mango Ripple – they're hard to find elsewhere, or to beat taste-wise.



Mara Fish Bar (left and right)

### **Blackwater Bakehouse**

Before eating your Bakehouse loaf, try pressing your fist into it. Trust us – it will spring back. This is thanks to hours of proving and physical kneading, as well as the ancient wheats that Arran baker George Grassie uses in his sourdough loaves. The self-service bread shed sells these loaves alongside seasonal bakes like Arran salmonberry Danish pastries.

### **Robin Gray’s Island Gourmet**

At his sun-flooded vegetable and flower garden, right by the shore at Sandbraes, chef and grower Robin Gray cooks up a takeaway menu featuring Arran lobster with homegrown salad and hand-cut fries, fritto misto di mare and free-range BBQ pulled pork with kimchi. Follow your main with the homemade mango pistachio kulfi. Pre-booking is essential.

### **Hunters Coffee Shop**

They say the “Scone King” works here. Psst... it’s Brian, and his scones really are something: baked fresh daily, both fruit and plain, they come dolloped with jam and cream, and partner perfectly with one of the café’s freshly ground coffees – all served on Brodick’s bustling seafront.

### **James of Arran – Arran Chocolate Factory**

Don’t go home without some James chocolate. The entire range – including giant bars, tins of chocolate bunnies and flavoured truffles – has a high cocoa content, resulting in thick, creamy concoctions that melt on your tongue. As a marker of quality, just pick up a bar and feel how heavy it is. While browsing, you can peep through the viewing window to see the chocolate being made.



# Kirsty De Caestecker

Mara Fish Bar & Deli

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*Apart from Mara, where are the best places to taste Arran produce?*

The Old Pier Café in Lamlash is a firm favourite of ours. Chris, the owner, is an outstanding baker. I'm a savoury gal so I head straight for his homemade sausage rolls, sandwiches and basically anything that involves cheese (his cheese scones are the best!). But everyone raves about his cakes and pastries if you have a sweet tooth.

Another favourite is Café Thyme in Machrie. Hamza makes delicious Turkish-style pizzas from his wood-fired oven, fresh salads and a really good cullen skink!

We also love taking friends to The French Fox in Brodick for hearty French bistro-style food. They have seating in their back garden, alongside the river. Perfect on a sunny day – and you can BYOB too.





Old Byre Showroom and Café Thyme

### **The Shore**

You could come to The Shore to spot wildlife – if you're lucky there'll be seals, otters and even dolphins. Alternatively, savour the local ingredients in traditional Scottish dishes – think Cullen skink, haggis toasties and breakfast rolls with Arran Butcher sausages. The family-run café also hosts popular BYOB nights.

### **Arran Eco Savvy Zero Waste Café**

Check the monthly schedule for this pop-up café to enjoy a lunch of homemade soup with Blackwater Bakehouse bread, followed by a healthy home bake for a tiny suggested donation. Take empty containers if you want to pick up zero-waste wholegrains, or choose from the range of local produce and tinned food. The café is operated by the environmental charity Arran Eco Savvy, which also runs a community shop in Whiting Bay, selling ecological household products and second-hand clothes, books and toys.

### **Old Byre Showroom and Café Thyme**

When Lorna Gunaydi's parents started selling sheepskin rugs from their beautifully situated home above the sea at Machrie in the 1960s, demand grew so quickly they had to open a shop. The Old Byre still sells sheepskin products, now alongside modern sustainable clothing brands like Eribe and Frugi. Lorna also sources stand-out pieces from small European labels and a few years ago opened The Shoe Bothy, selling country shoes, boots and wellies. Next door, at Café Thyme, Lorna's Turkish husband Hamza makes delicious pides (Turkish-style pizza), including haggis and cheese flavour, with a side of home-grown salad leaves and herbs.

### **The Forest of The Falls Café**

Just the pitstop during walks at Eas Mor Ecology, this café is a delight to stumble across in the woods: exquisite wooden carvings of branches and woodland creatures climb the walls and there is tranquil outdoor seating.

## JR's Buns

Obviously you'll come prepared and bring cash, because you won't want to leave this self-service offshoot of Arran Heritage Museum's Café Rosaburn empty-handed. The cake shed contains platefuls of irresistible bakes – millionaire's shortbread, coconut slice and brownies, as well as Scottish tablet and eggs. To find it, look for the turquoise-painted (mini) shed on the right just before the museum as you head out of Brodick. It's open 24/7.

## The Sandwich Station

This seasonal takeaway spot opposite Lochranza ferry terminal opens from April to September, dishing up gourmet sandwiches made with local meats and leaves in Blackwater Bakehouse bread. You might try hot-smoked Skipness salmon with cream cheese and sesame pickled cucumber, or home-smoked Arran venison with horseradish crème fraîche. Bacon sarnies are served until 11am – ideal if you're on an early ferry and best enjoyed on the white pebble beach.

## Arran Cheese Shop

As well as iconic mini wheels of creamy Arran cheddar in all its flavours – including whisky, smoky garlic and chilli – this deli at Brodick's Home Farm sells Arran Blue and other Scottish cheeses alongside European varieties such as Swiss Gruyère and Dutch Edam. There's also a good range of Arran oatcakes, mustards and pickles, and deli fare like breadsticks and decorated biscuits.

## Arran Sense of Scotland

Janet and Iain Russell started making soaps in their kitchen in 1989. Now, Arran Sense of Scotland – formerly Arran Aromatics – is one of the island's best-known brands, renowned for its locally-inspired bath and body products, as well as home fragrances. The Arran Naturals collection is lovely, containing vitamins and ingredients like Scotch broom, which grows on the Cladach shoreline near the factory shop.

## Faye Waterlow Artist Studio

Artist Faye Waterlow's home studio contains a delightful array of prints, cards and home accessories featuring her signature paintings – each one fluid and composed of layered washes with additional white gouche or fine black liner, with island-inspired subjects – like herons taking flight or jellyfish, their tentacles swirling.

## The Isle of Arran Candle Company

After launching their plant-based, hand-poured candles business online, Daniel and Vik moved into the old Bank of Scotland building – now a serene space selling seasonal and island-inspired collections in fragrances like Geamhradh (winter) or Munadh (heather hills) alongside charming home accessories and toys.

### DID YOU KNOW?

#### *A unique microclimate*

*Did we say that Arran's, well, Arran-ness extends to its microclimate? This too is unique thanks to the island's position in the Gulf Stream. In other words, it has a warm, humid climate and milder winters than other places at the same latitude, allowing plant life to thrive. As well as exotic species like palm trees, expect a magenta haze of heather moorland, acid-green seaweed, lush coastal pastures and a seasonal calendar of wildflowers – plants like salmonberry, wild thyme, Scotch broom and tutsan. Look for local producers including Woodside Farm, which has a self-service kiosk in Brodick, to sample island-grown carrots, kale, apricots and sugar snap peas.*

# Stay

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*Hunker down in a traditional sea-view cottage, go glamping on an alpaca farm or bask in the luxury of a hotel spa – Arran's accommodation scene is geared up for all types of travellers.*

TOP TIP: For more holiday cottages on Arran, visit [www.cottagesonarran.co.uk](http://www.cottagesonarran.co.uk)

## **North Sannox Cottage**

Sleeping five, this traditional whitewashed stone self-catering cottage is quaintly cosy and deeply scenic, opening onto views of Cioch na h'Oighe and the moody light across the hillsides leading to North Glen Sannox. It's set on a working hill sheep farm and neighbours North Sannox pony trekking. Bring binoculars to watch the local red deer and red squirrels, or see how many stars you can spot at night.

## **Auchrannie Resort**

Auchrannie opened in 1988 with the aim of making Arran a year-round destination. That it has achieved – and more. Located in sun-bathed Glen Cloy on the edge of Brodick, it's now multi-award-winning, comprising a historic and a family hotel, luxury lodges, a seafood grill and a brasserie, two swimming pools, and a smart spa offering treatments such as the Marine Experience, which includes a massage and a Hebridean salt exfoliation. Families will appreciate the on-site soft play, The Playbarn.

## **Balmichael Glamping**

Owners Emma and Tom have thought of everything to make Balmichael Glamping a comfortable overnight in nature. Their barrel pods, sleeping up to four, feature cosy bedding, basic kitchen facilities and a private wash hut with Arran Sense of Scotland toiletries. There are also safari tents, plus a wood-fired hot tub and wood-fired pizza oven for private hire. Skies are dark at night, and if you're lucky, you'll see the Northern Lights.



Sannox Bay

### **Hamilton Cottages**

These three well-appointed terraced holiday cottages sleep two to six, and can be combined for larger family groups. Décor is smart and Arran-inspired, featuring modern kitchens and bathrooms stocked with Arran Sense of Scotland toiletries. There's also a family games room, sauna and bike storage. You're in the heart of Shiskine, with tranquil leafy views.

### **Runach Arainn**

Nature seekers will appreciate these three handcrafted eco yurts, each furnished with upcycled pieces and surrounded by an orchard containing rare Arran whitebeam trees. Each yurt comes with a private bathroom, wood-burner and solar lighting. There's EV charging, you can book a beekeeping experience, and activities for children include a willow den and a wildlife rubbing trail.

### **Cruickshanks Boutique B&B**

With sea views over the Firth of Clyde, a colourful garden with secluded seating areas and bedrooms with Hypnos beds and antique furniture, Cruickshanks, in a former farmhouse, is five-starred and adults-only. The log-fire-heated library is a gorgeous space for enjoying the quiet, and you must try the French toast at breakfast. In short, it's as lovely as B&Bs come.

### **Lagg Hotel**

Set in a wooded hollow, with gardens for sunny days and log fires framed by original exposed stonework for darker ones, the Lagg opened in 1791 as a coaching inn. Tradition plays out in deep green paintwork, printed curtains and tartan carpets, and one room boasts a four-poster bed. The restaurant is excellent, serving hearty fare such as beef patties with cheese or steak and Arran ale pie.

## DID YOU KNOW?

### *The String Road*

*The Thomas Telford-designed String Road that connects the island's east and west coasts is reportedly so-called because after it was built in the early 19th century, it made Arran look like a parcel tied up with string. Officially the B880, it's a gorgeously scenic road, topping out in wilderness at 768 feet. It's mind-boggling to see the scenery (and often the weather) change within the 20-minute drive.*

*Another iconic Arran road – and the island's steepest – is the Boguille, or 'boggy place'. So named because the area was formerly dug for peat to use in fuel, it provided the first road access to Lochranza in 1843. The lay-by at the top offers astonishing views of the Sleeping Warrior – the famous skyline formed by the North Arran Hills.*





Hutton's Unconformity

## *Curling Stones from Ailsa Craig*

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Granite from Ailsa Craig – the name taken from the Gaelic for ‘fairy rock’ – has been used to make Olympic curling stones since 1851. It’s a granite smooth enough to slide and tough enough to withstand banging into other stones, thanks to the 22-acre island’s formation 60 million years ago as a volcanic intrusion that crystallised to form a strong surface.



Kildonan Castle



The Library in the Woods



Silver Sands



# Events

## **Arran Mountain Festival** 15th - 18th May 2026

A four-day programme of guided mountain walks, runs and scrambles in small groups - all with a local guide, for all abilities and at an astonishingly low price. A popular ceilidh rounds it all off.

## **The Arran Show** 5th August 2026

A small traditional agricultural show with classes for horses, cows and sheep, as well as stalls selling local fare. There's always some kind of demonstration - from stunts to birds of prey.

## **Brodick Highland Games** 8th August 2026

First held in 1886, the Highland Games continue to bring kilts, pipes and heavy athletics to Ormidale Park - marking what is always the busiest day of the year on the Brodick ferry crossing.

## **Arran Open Studios** 2026 date tbc

Over 50 studios open to the public across one weekend, showcasing Arran's best contemporary artistic talent - from sculpture to paintings and furniture.

## **McLellan Arts Festival** 2026 date tbc

Honouring the important Scottish dramatist and short story writer Robert McLellan, who lived on Arran most of his life, this is two weeks of song, dance and literature. Popular Scottish children's authors give talks at the Wee Mac part of the festival.



Fairburn Tower, The Landmark Trust

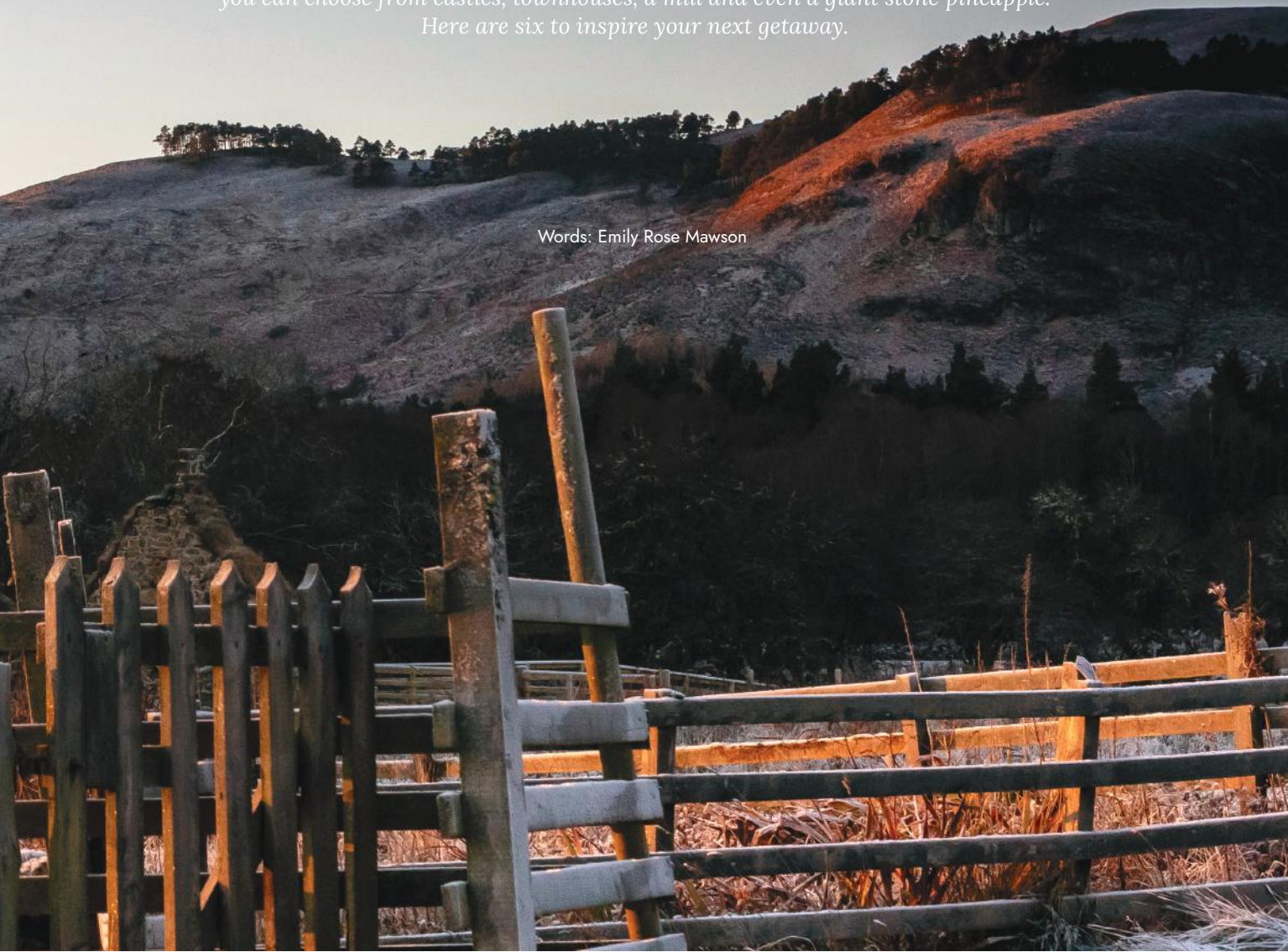
# Renovating History

*Six astonishing Landmark Trust properties*

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*Self-catering takes on new meaning when it comes to holidays with the Landmark Trust, which opens up culturally important buildings to paying guests. In Scotland, you can choose from castles, townhouses, a mill and even a giant stone pineapple. Here are six to inspire your next getaway.*

Words: Emily Rose Mawson





Tangy Mill by Jill Tate

The building is of white-painted harled whinstone with a conical crimson turret, like a unicorn's horn, and it sits sheltered where a wide meadow puckers into a shallow ravine. Just over the horizon, the Atlantic crashes against the coast, but you can't see or hear it. Here, birdsong chimes with the thrum of the burn that once fed the mill. Within the deep walls, the ceiling is suspended on thick dark beams. A grandfather clock is ticking, and deep armchairs fill corners. An Old Chelsea China tea set is laid out on the table. Just through the door, a piece of the original mill machinery stands, as if on pause. Tangy Mill is ready for its next guests.

This early 19th-century watermill on the Kintyre Peninsula is now one of 21 Landmark Trust properties in Scotland (most are in England and a few in Italy) that are rented out as self-catering holiday accommodation. Like all the others, it was rescued by the trust that philanthropist Sir John Smith and his wife Christian founded in 1965 to restore smaller historic buildings and open them to guests to pay for their maintenance.

Each property comes with a custom interior reflecting its heritage, all with hand-printed curtains, paint specially mixed to suit the building, upholstered armchairs and handmade kitchens featuring Le Creuset cookware. Doors open with big iron keys, and there's always a library of books carefully selected to show aspects of the building or locality, 'as you might find in the house of a well-read friend,' says Landmark Trust representative Jayne Robinson.

Along with the books, there are fireplaces to gather around and board games piled inside antique cupboards. Make a point of browsing the logbooks – they are iconic tomes, filled with well-written accounts of holidays past, travel recommendations and, often, beautiful illustrations. The history albums, penned by historians, make for good reading too, revealing intriguing stories from the property's past and renovation.

'We hope that visitors come away with a sense of stewardship and appreciation for Britain's architectural legacy,' explains Jayne. 'Staying in one of these properties is a chance to become a temporary custodian of an astonishing place, part of a tradition of care that spans generations.'



Saddell Castle by Jasper Fry (all photos)



Saddell Castle by Olly Hunter

## Saddell Castle

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### Kintyre, Argyll and Bute

This golden tower, recently reopened after a year of renovation work, stands like a beautiful, oversized sandcastle on the long white shore in Saddell Bay. And it has quite the vantage point from the battlemented wall walk around the roof, where you can see across the Kilbrannan Sound to the Isle of Arran.

Each room is unique: you might find panelling or a decorated ceiling, deep window embrasures and even closets hidden in the thick walls. Held by the Campbells for almost 400 years, the castle was built in 1508 for the Bishop of Argyll. Only the outer walls and two fireplaces remain of the original building,

and when Landmark took it on, large trees were growing from the parapets.

These days, the charity owns the whole of Saddell Bay, including a mansion and four cottages alongside the castle, which sleep eight people.

*TOP TIP: Bring your binoculars: Saddell Bay is home to seals, otters, a myriad of seabirds and a sculpture created by artist Antony Gormley. It is a short walk to the 12th-century Saddell Abbey, containing carved medieval grave slabs. You could simply stroll the sand, humming 'Mull of Kintyre' to yourself – this is the beach where Paul McCartney filmed the music video.*



Saddell Castle by Jasper Fry



Tangy Mill by Jill Tate

## Tangy Mill

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### Kintyre, Argyll and Bute

Water still flows beneath the backshot wheel at this 19th-century watermill on the Kintyre Peninsula, which now sleeps six across three bedrooms. Tangy Mill was so complete when it came into Landmark Trust's care in the 1970s that hardly any changes were needed.

Instead, the muscular wooden arms of the dressing, drying, hoisting and grinding machinery, which processed grain – mostly oats – until the 1960s, are part of the interior. One bedroom contains the threshing machine. A second, on the drying floor of the kiln, retains the original perforated cast-iron floor that miller Mr McConnachie fell through into the fire in 1961 (don't worry – he survived!).

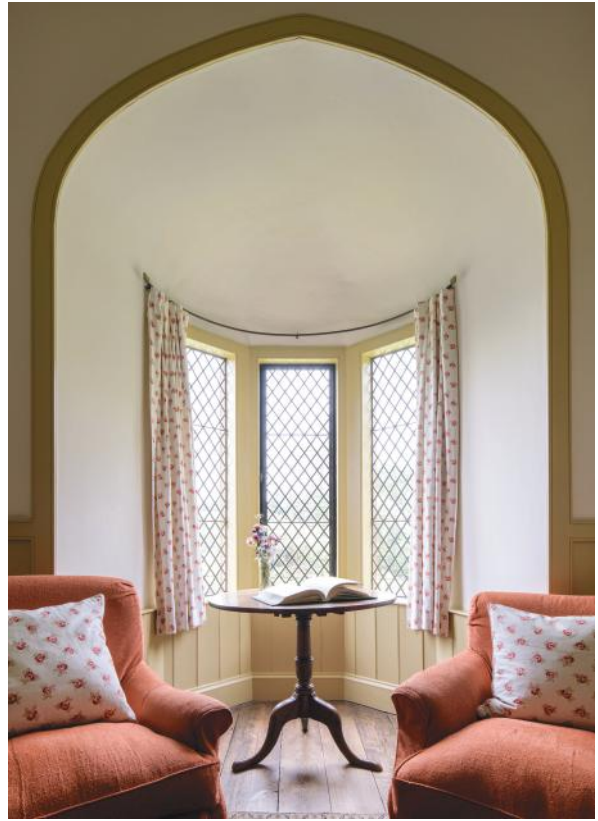
The setting is undisturbed, but you are just a few minutes' drive from one of Scotland's finest beaches – Westport, with six miles of white sand – and 15 minutes from Campbeltown for whisky distilleries, the Art Deco cinema and cave paintings on Davaar Island.

#### TOP TIP

*Pick up local produce, including honey and ice cream made on the Isle of Gigha, at Muasdale Stores, which was named Scotland's best village shop at the Countryside Alliance Awards in 2024.*



Glenmalloch Lodge by Jill Tate (left and right)



## Glenmalloch Lodge

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Newton Stewart, Dumfries and Galloway

You have to travel about a mile inland from the Solway Coast Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, along a bumpy track that pushes between bracken, pines and tussocky hummocks, to reach this tiny Landmark. It sleeps two – or makes the ideal writing retreat for one – and is a charming mesh of Classical, Tudor and Gothic styles, with forest-green pierced bargeboards, a towering chimney and an opulent bay window almost as big as the façade, behind which the sole bedroom is warmed by a wood-burning stove.

Originally built as a schoolhouse for 25 girls some time before 1842, as part of Harriet, Countess of Galloway's, programme of educational and social

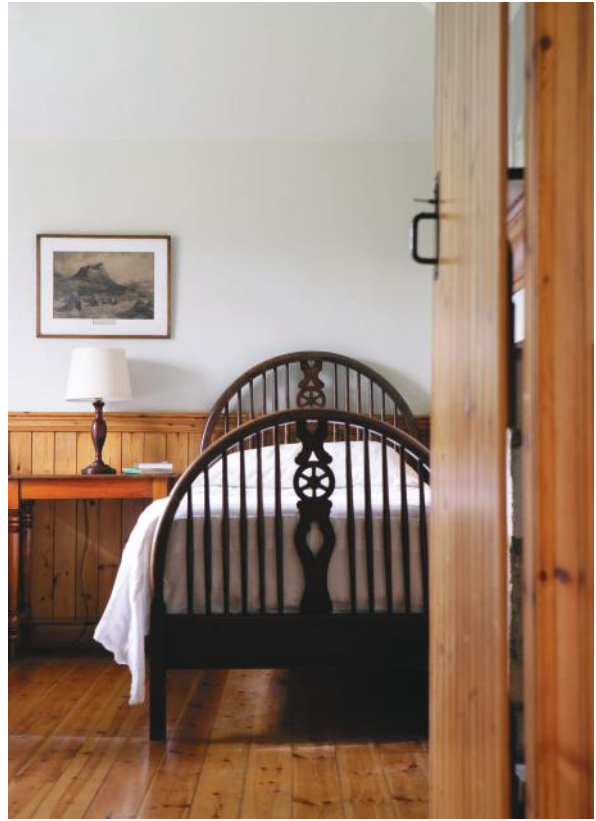
initiatives. These days, interiors are quintessentially Landmark, with beige-painted half-height panelling, Persian-style rugs and pause-for-thought historic art.

### TOP TIP

*Head to Galloway Forest Park for walking, mountain biking and the world's first International Dark Sky Park, where you can see over 7,000 stars and planets on a clear night.*



The Pineapple by Angus Bremner



# The Pineapple

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## Dunmore, Central Scotland

It is thought that this eccentric 18th-century summerhouse – a stonework phenomenon featuring conventional architraves with shoots that top out as prickly leaves – resulted from the 4th Earl of Dunmore’s sense of humour. Forcibly returned from serving as Governor of Virginia, where sailors would put a pineapple on their gatepost to signal they were home, he commissioned a more permanent 37-foot version of the tradition. In 1973, it became Scotland’s first Landmark Trust property with space for four guests, offering accommodation in the stone bothies on either side of the pineapple that once housed the gardeners.

The walled garden to the front (managed by the National Trust for Scotland) is magnificent. Stretching towards bucolic woodland, there is a private garden for guests at the back, with stairs into the pineapple itself. In all, it evokes a playful sense of majesty.

### TOP TIP

*Do not miss important sights nearby, including the Falkirk Wheel and the National Wallace Monument, or stay local and stroll the conservation village of Dunmore.*



The Pineapple by Angus Bremner



The Mackintosh Building by Jill Tate (left and right)

## The Mackintosh Building

Comrie, Perthshire

This Landmark sleeps four in an apartment on the first floor of the Mackintosh Building, on the corner of Dunira Street in Comrie, close to Perth and Stirling. It was designed by Charles Rennie Mackintosh in 1903–1904 for a local draper and ironmonger, but just a few original features remain – among them the dark green fireplace in the sitting room.

Much of the furniture, dark-toned against white walls, is the work of early 20th-century architects influenced by Mackintosh – the likes of Baillie Scott, Gordon Russell and Heal's. In the main room, which spreads into the projecting tourelle (turret), you can

gaze onto the pebbly River Earn and the wooded hills beyond. If you are lucky, you'll catch a performance by the local pipe band in the square below.

### TOP TIP

*Follow the Deil's Cauldron and Melville Monument circular walk from Comrie village centre for river rapids, atmospheric woodland and panoramic views from the obelisk dedicated to the powerful 18th-century politician Henry Dundas, 1st Viscount Melville.*



Fairburn Tower, The Landmark Trust

## Fairburn Tower

### Muir of Ord, Ross-shire

A turreted Scottish Renaissance tower, Fairburn has blush-pink limewashed walls, sleeps four in two ensuite bedrooms across five floors and is heated by electricity from its solar panels. But when Landmark took it on, it was a gutted, roofless ruin.

These days, sporting an award-winning renovation, the A-listed building is as dazzling as it would have been in the 16th century. Note the heavy wall hangings and the recreated painted ceiling on the third floor sitting room, so mesmerising you'll want to lie on your back to study it for hours. Designed by Delgatie-based artist and craftsman Paul Mowbray, it features Renaissance motifs, symbols and texts,

as well as the initials of Murdo Mackenzie, groom to James V's bedchamber, who built the tower after the king granted him his own piece of land in 1542.

Fairburn is situated on the 1,000-hectare estate, a 30-minute drive north-east of Inverness, offering gorgeous walking trails, including one along the River Conon.

#### TOP TIP

Look out for open days throughout the year to visit Fairburn Tower if you are not staying there.

# New Shoots, Old Roots

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*Call of The Wild*

Words: Rachel Rowley // Photography: Laura Tiliman

*Have you ever really felt the call of the wild? The need to explore and be with nature, or simply to go outside and take a deep breath? Then perhaps you'll relate to Hamish and Liberty Martin, whose call of the wild was so strong it propelled them to move from city to country, creating a wilder, more sustainable way of life for themselves and their family – alongside a legacy that will last beyond their earthly years.*







Change can often be daunting, but after a chance meeting in July 2021 presented the Martins with the opportunity to buy Highland Perthshire Hill Farm and the attached SSSI (Site of Special Scientific Interest) land – all 225 acres of it – their vision was clear.

By that point, they had established the specialist herb nursery Secret Herb Garden (2013) and Secret Garden Distillery (2017) from a derelict 7.5-acre site on the outskirts of Edinburgh. They had created two vibrant businesses that celebrated the majesty of nature, yet they were longing for a different life for themselves and their five children.

Now, four years after their move to Tombane Farm near Pitlochry, the family has embraced their dream and lives hand in hand with nature. The couple have created wetlands to provide the rare Northern damselfly with its most southerly breeding ground. Several fields have been planted with 10,000 trees using the Miyawaki method, a process that encourages rapid growth and creates corridors for wildlife. Invasive Sitka spruce trees, which aren't indigenous, have been cleared to safeguard the

## *'A legacy that will last beyond their earthly years.'*

Caledonian pines. Alongside the daily rhythm of family life, this is Hamish and Liberty's "invitation to nature" – a term they deeply prefer to rewild. In addition, the seeds of entrepreneurship have bloomed into two distinct but linked businesses: Call of the Wild and Highland Outfitters.

While Liberty is a homemaker and animal lover – the couple has seven dogs, two cats, a spotted eagle owl and a small flock of sheep as part of their brood, not to mention the three goldfinch fledglings she hand-reared last year like some kind of real-life Snow White (and, of course, the real-life children) – Hamish has a contagious passion for his country and natural surroundings. This combination of nurture, nature and energy is behind everything they do.

Call of the Wild launched on Instagram in 2023 (@cotwild) and has been an incredible platform to document the couple's adventure. The community of followers is now over 160,000 strong and provides a visual introduction to the family's life and work. Hamish effervescently shares the magic of nature with every post. He says: 'You don't need to wait for scientists to say forest bathing is good for you. Just go for a walk, notice how uplifted you feel, and take that into your daily life.'

Call of the Wild offers nature-reconnection experiences, including guided walks, garden exploration, bespoke workshops and wild craft/forest school activities through their partners Everwild and Wilderness Folk School. There's also a shop where customers can adopt a Scots pine sapling or sponsor a Granny Pine tree as a timeless keepsake, or buy carefully curated gifts. Guests can also indulge in wild dining, from picnics to dinners.



## A Walk in the Woods

with Hamish Martin and the Scots Pine (*Pinus sylvestris*)

—

There is nothing more spiritually uplifting than walking within an ancient Scots pine wood. The wind creates secret shards of whispering through the needles, and the sweet scent will take you into a dream world. There is a symbiotic energy where juniper, blaeberrries, moss, lichen and pine communicate. Take time to reconnect alongside the pine martens, red squirrels, eagles, Scottish crossbills, and wildcats.

Our Scots pine is commonly recognised as our first native tree, but this accolade goes to the silver birch and hazel, which arrived around 11,700 years ago, with Scots pine making its debut about 1,200 years later.

Our early settlers would make shelter, fires, and light from the resin-rich wood. This resin was used as an antiseptic and later for producing turpentine and glue for shipbuilding, while the needles – rich in vitamin C – made a useful tea in winter.

Caledonian forests are a priority habitat under the UK Biodiversity Action Plan, and encouraging natural regeneration is essential, alongside planning the growth of new pine woods in the right locations.

So let's celebrate this evergreen as the Druids once did, making it part of our seasonal celebrations with stars and lights ahead of the shorter days and longer hours of darkness.



## LIBERTY'S VENISON STEW

### Ingredients

900g–1,000g diced venison or any red meat  
6 finely chopped garlic cloves  
300g shallots, skinned and halved, or 300g thickly diced onions  
2 large parsnips  
600g carrots – *I like to use Chantenay as they are good to go, but if using normal-sized carrots, halve and dice into 5cm chunks*  
Salt and pepper to taste  
1 dsp tomato paste  
1.5–2 tbsp plain flour or cornflour  
2 beef stock pots  
1.5 tbsp vegetable stock (*I use powdered bouillon*)  
330ml–500ml stout

### Method

Pop the garlic and shallots/onions into a heavy-based stock pot and soften over the hob.

Add the venison or meat of choice, along with a good pinch or two of salt and pepper, and gently brown.

Add the parsnips and carrots, and continue gently cooking for another 10 minutes.

Evenly shake in the flour, stirring to prevent it catching at the bottom of the pan, then slowly add the stout, stirring continuously.

Next, add the tomato paste, beef stock, and vegetable stock, stirring thoroughly with each addition. If the liquid hasn't quite covered the ingredients, top up with more stout or boiling water.

Bring to a simmer and cook gently for 5 minutes. Give it one final stir, pop a lid on, and place in the middle shelf of a preheated oven at 130–140°C. I leave mine in the oven for five hours and might give it a stir if I remember – but don't panic if you forget. If you need your stew sooner, turn the oven up to 160°C for the first hour, then reduce to 140°C for at least another hour before serving.

*Note: Due to the cooking time, all alcohol should have evaporated, but a non-alcoholic stout works just as well.*

*I normally accompany the stew with mashed or buttery potatoes, but another firm favourite in our house is a good old Yorkshire pudding stuffed to the brim with stew.*

*‘You don’t need to wait for scientists to say forest bathing is good for you. Just go for a walk, notice how uplifted you feel, and take that into your daily life.’*



Liberty is, unsurprisingly, a talented home cook and game specialist. Then there are special seasonal events such as The Greenman – a wonderful, nature-led festive experience that will return later this year. This spring saw the launch of beautifully appointed Call of the Wild Shepherds’ Huts, where guests can stay and fully immerse themselves. Some couples have even chosen to elope to their incredible ancient hillside – as Hamish describes it, ‘a land lost in time.’

The second business sapling is Highland Outfitters, offering bespoke, traditional tailoring and tartans. Founded by Hamish and his eldest son, Nicholas (a recent Scottish History graduate), the team is committed to providing insight into kilt-wearing culture and tradition, and can help guests identify their family tartan or introduce them to the bespoke Call of the Wild tartans – four seasonal designs created by Liberty, all woven locally to reflect the colours found in the natural landscapes and wildlife. In the tailor’s room at Tombane, guests can be expertly measured (this can also be arranged online) and then shop from a range of accessories, including socks, kilt pins, belts, sgian dubh, sporrans, and other heirlooms – some exquisitely made by world-renowned jeweller and engraver Malcolm Appleby, based nearby in Grandtully.

As the couple move into their fourth year, they are excited to continue sharing their love of the Scottish Highlands and celebrating the nature that surrounds them – welcoming people to reconnect, relax and explore the magical land this family calls home.

So, next time you feel the call of the wild, be sure to seek adventure, knowledge, and wonder with Hamish and Liberty by your side. Join them in person in Perthshire or online from wherever you are. They can’t wait to share their wild life with you.



The Birnam Hotel by Alex Martin

# Grand Designs

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*Across Scotland, there are buildings that have fallen on hard times – unloved and forgotten. Some are hidden away in remote glens; others, in plain sight, lie broken by the side of the road. While some of us merely dream of Channel 4-worthy renovation projects, thankfully those with more vision – and courage – jump in, embarking on journeys to breathe new life into old stones.*

Words: Lucy Gillmore

Birnam Hotel was once Fraser Potter's old stomping ground, its grand baronial hall the scene of wild ceilidhs, celebrations and community events. Lately, though, it had lost its lustre.

The stately 19th-century hotel, built in the same era as the Fife Arms in Braemar for curious Victorian tourists, had become tired and rundown. Once an old-fashioned pitstop for whistlestop coach tours, it had closed its doors to locals. It wasn't derelict or abandoned. It wasn't even for sale – but when Potter has a plan, details like that don't stand in his way.

During lockdown, he transformed The Taybank – a renowned pub across the river in Dunkeld – after setting up a successful event catering business. In his free time, he's rowed across the Atlantic for charity. He has the energy of a Duracell bunny with no off switch.

'It wasn't a spur-of-the-moment decision,' he admits. 'I'd been thinking about it for three or four years. It was always in the back of my mind.'

Now the scaffolding is up, the renovation is well underway and the reimagined hotel is due to open in the spring of 2026. Wallpaper has been peeled away, carpets stripped to reveal original tiled floors and years of rubble cleared from the chimneys. Whatever can be rescued, restored, reused will be – and treasures are emerging along the way. The original lift, with its concertina-style double doors, still works. They've also uncovered a dumb waiter which goes up to the baronial hall.

Potter is joined by his partner Kim Grant – founder of Rural Studio – and designer Eric Bremner (formerly Creative Director at Max Mara), who are collaborating on interiors, branding and concept development.

Kim explains that the restaurant will be based around a traditional Scottish kitchen. Originally, the plan was for an elegant country house hotel look – but the discovery of a set of 1910 birch dining chairs by East Brothers of Dundee went on to change the direction of the space.



The Birnam Hotel by Alex Martin (left and right)



'We'll have a long, custom-built dresser, and we've found some big, buttery-yellow laundry sinks from the Dunfermline Clay Works that we're hoping to put in, so it feels more like a home than a dining room,' says Kim.

In another ground-floor room, Fraser pulls back a cloth to reveal a large mahogany boardroom table from the Dewar's Whisky lot in Perth. 'This will be a co-working space for people passing through or who live in the village, a space where people feel welcome,' he explains. When pulled out fully, it seats 20 and doubles as a private dining room in the evenings.

'It's also going to be the library, full to the gunnels with books,' Kim adds.

The hotel will have 28 bedrooms, two bars, a restaurant, private dining room and that show-stopping baronial hall. The Birnam Inn, to the rear, will be phase two.

Moss green paint sweeps up the staircase to conjure Birnam Glen, while Barra-based artist Lydia Warren has been commissioned to paint a limewash mural mimicking a walk through the glen.

The baronial hall – once home to ceilidhs with music so lively the glassware rattled in the bar below – is the star attraction. 'This was once the largest sprung dance floor in Scotland,' Eric marvels.

'The glassware used to rattle in the bar downstairs,' laughs Fraser. 'They had to turn the music up when there was a ceilidh on.'

Historic Dunkeld's archivists are helping piece together the building's story, combing old photos and documents. A 1912 fire blazed through much of the interior before the fire brigade arrived.

At one end of the hall, a vast window frames the hillside. At the other end, four giant seasonal landscape paintings are being created by artist Felix Zandt, a friend of Kim's from Glasgow School of Art, to be displayed on rotation.

'We're trying to work as much as possible with local craftspeople,' Eric says. This will be a truly Scottish project – 'Even if it's not covered in antlers,' smiles Fraser.



The Birnam Hotel by Kim Grant

*M. ...*  
*... ..*  
*... ..*  
*9th March*  

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*A. Phillips*  
*Decorated*  
*March 1971*  
*This Room*  
*129*



Archive photos of The Birnam Hotel, The Chapter House Museum Trust



The Mercat by Laura Tilman

'This will not be a repeat of The Taybank,' he continues. 'Our vision for The Birnam Hotel is rooted in Scottish tradition but reimagined for today's traveller.' A contemporary Scottish country house hotel, celebrating arts, crafts and craftsmanship.

Just an hour south, in the historic conservation village of Culross (pronounced Coo-riss) in Fife – familiar to Outlander fans for its cobbled streets – another renovation story has been quietly unfolding.

Laura Wilson returned to the area in 2020 after living in Canada for a decade. Her first project was The Dundonald, a 19th-century coaching inn, transformed into a design-led, mid-century-meets-Scandinavian guesthouse. The cottage next door became a chic self-catering let.

With its picturesque coastal setting, white-harled buildings and 17th-century ochre palace, Culross had long been a popular day trip. The Dundonald turned it into a hip weekend destination – and her next project is furthering its appeal.

This summer, she opened The Mercat, a café, homeware and provisions store in what was once the W. McKay Butchers' shop.

Working with an architect, she reconfigured the space, taking the back section 'right down to the bricks' to create a homeware area – all while preserving listed windows, doors and tiles.

'I wanted to open a shop as guests at The Dundonald are always asking where I got the linens, vintage paintings and ceramics,' explains Laura.

The café's walls are clad in stunning Art Nouveau tiles, their buttery yellow and reddish-brown hues inspiring the branding. Vintage tables and chairs proved elusive, so Laura opted for marble bistro tables from Graham and Green. The result is a light-filled space stocked with carefully curated provisions from artisan producers, and a menu devised alongside Edinburgh-based food writer Jess Elliott Dennison.



The Mercat by Laura Tiliman



Burr's of Tongue

On the north coast, Burr's Store in Tongue has also been reborn. The historic trading post dates back to the early 1900s and was expanded in 1932 by Peter Burr to include a transport hub, tearoom, bakery and store – a vital lifeline to the community.

But over time it fell into disrepair, eventually becoming a tired Spar and petrol stop. In 2019, Danish entrepreneur and landowner Anders Holch Povlsen bought it. Through his company Wildland Ltd, he held community consultations – and a bakery topped the wish list.

Now restored, Burr's Store houses an artisan bakery, café and bookstore, plus a space to showcase local crafts. It's both a vibrant community hub with regular markets and events, and a must-stop on the North Coast 500.



Burr's of Tongue by Nick Law



And then there's the Channel 4-famous one: the ruined castle that became The Great Hotel Escape. Kilmartin Castle is the ultimate restoration fantasy. Stef Burgon and Simon Hunt were working in Dubai when they saw the 16th-century castle for sale – and bought it.

In 2018, they parked their campervan – home for the next year – on-site and learned on the job how to lay pipes, fix roofs and install heating and plumbing.

By 2021, the interiors were complete. Next came landscaping: digging drainage channels, creating an outdoor entertaining area, adding an orchard and a kitchen garden. And with the help of their neighbour, garden designer Amber Crawley, a dreamy wild swimming pond. In 2022, they added a glasshouse for outdoor dining.

Now, guests can stay in the ancient fortress, its five fairytale bedrooms a mix of romance and restoration. The Snug, on the ground floor, has an original barrel-vaulted ceiling and antique toilet. 1550, on the first floor, has a freestanding Victorian cast-iron bath and canopy bed. (The yellow window seat was built from the castle's old floorboards by Simon.) Clarke features quirky pheasant wallpaper; Carswell, a copper tub; Speel, a monsoon shower in a turret.

Is the build finally done? Technically, yes – but Stef and Simon haven't hung up their overalls. They've caught the restoration bug, now converting an old church in the glen into a gallery to exhibit work by the resident artists they invite to the castle. Stef is even developing a Scottish lime paint for heritage projects.

You can almost imagine Kevin McCloud's grudging admiration, his trademark to-camera musings on how, against the odds, they've created something magical – and kept the building's soul intact.



Kilmartin Castle by Christian Watson (top and bottom)



Kilmartin Castle by Christian Watson

# WOOD MILNE

## RUBBER HEELS.



"The MEDAL for SAVING BOOTS"

"ETTRICK" HERD BOOTS  
 for  
 LAIRD-TENANT-GRO  
 SHEPHERD and FAR



May your heart keep true  
 to the peaks above,  
 May your feet be sure on  
 the hills you love;  
 May the summer mist and  
 the winter storms  
 Ne'er hide your path  
 the High Cairngorm



G5911 KIP  
 8945 KIP STRAIGHT CAP



G5998 KIP W B NO C  
 G5921 KIP S/B CAP



G5913 BEVA  
 G5991 BEVA

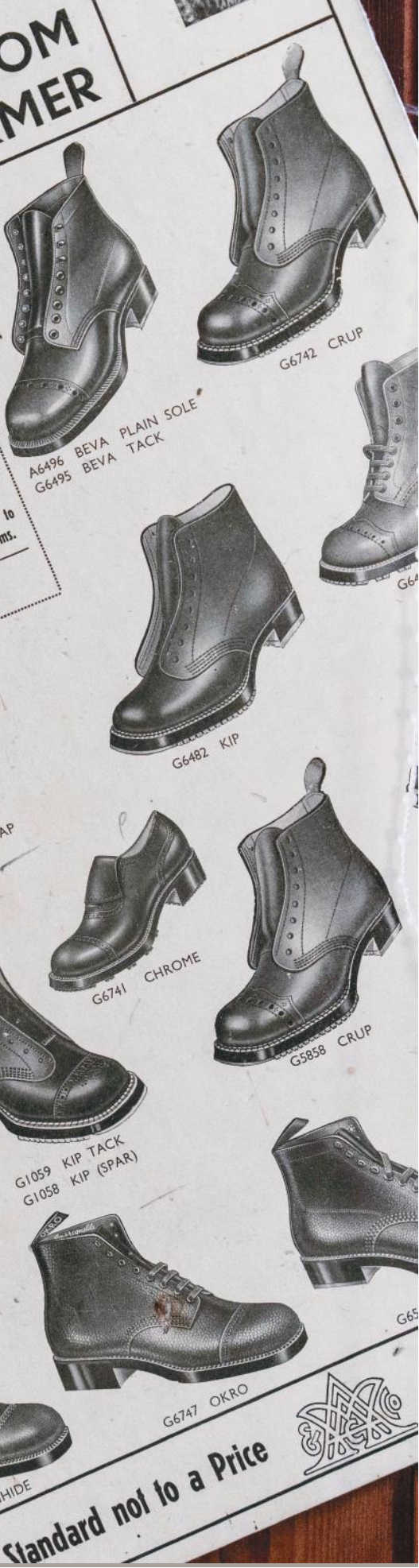
G5913 BEVA TAN Plain Sole  
 G5991 BEVA TAN



G6739  
 TAN GRAIN



G6748 TOUG



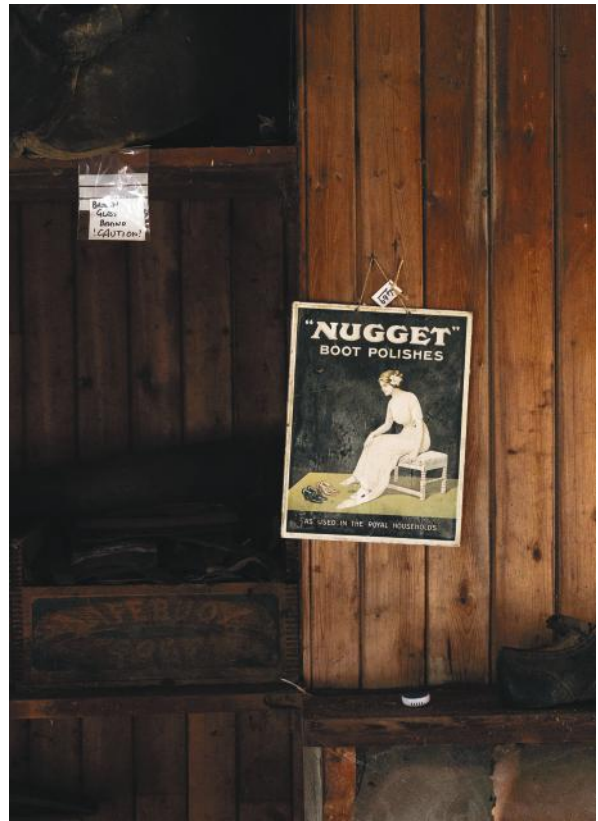
# The Last Soutar's Shop

*Preserving a Forgotten Piece  
of Rural Scotland*

SOUTER, n., v.

Also soutar, souter, souter I. n. 1. A  
shoemaker, a cobbler

Words: Beth Reid // Photography: Jack Cairney

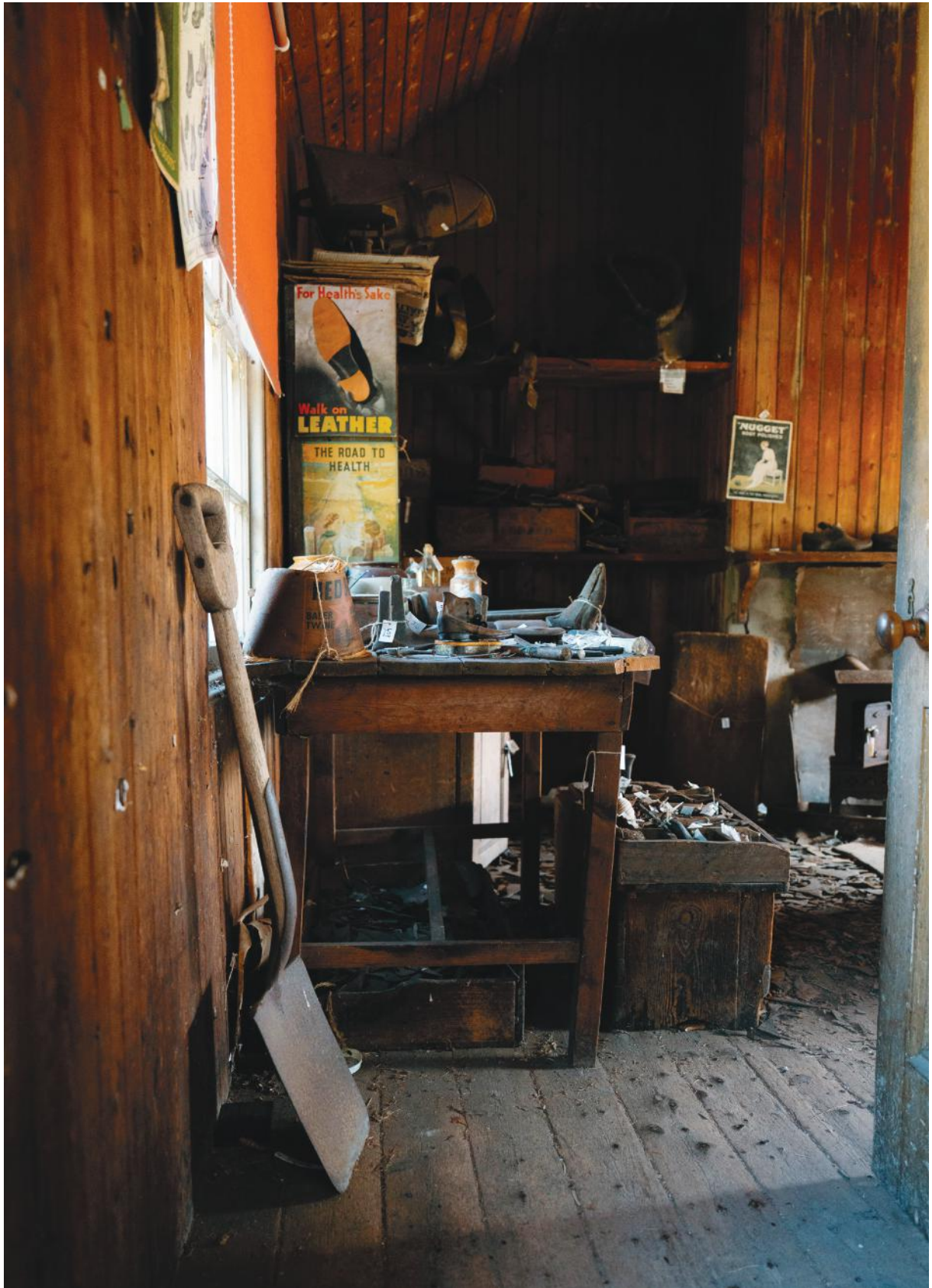


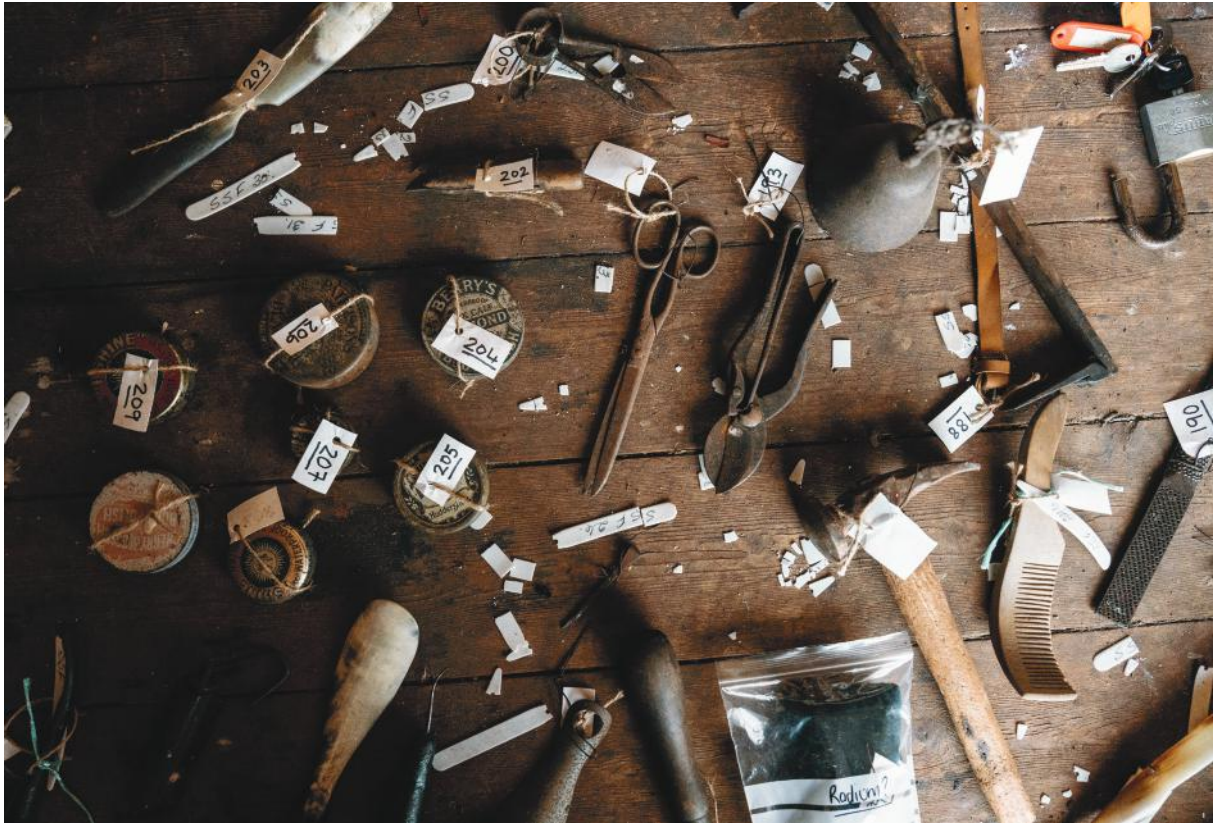
There was once a time when you would be hard-pressed not to find a soutar's shop, whether in cities and towns or across rural Scotland. The role of the soutar was crucial, especially in rural communities where people lived and worked on the wider landscape. Without a soutar to mend or make boots and shoes, working the land became a greater challenge, and travelling to the nearest town was not an option for everyone. The soutar, therefore, was a hugely significant part of rural life in Scotland.

But soutar's shops are now gone. By the beginning of the 20th century, shoe manufacturing had greatly expanded, with an increasing number of factories employing thousands of workers to mass-produce footwear. Independent, home-run soutar's shops continued to provide an essential service across rural Scotland, but as the 20th century progressed these too began to close. Shoemaking had become commercialised, and the soutar quietly slipped into the pages of Scottish history.

*'It really is a time capsule of a rural way of life.'*

That was until 1999 when an extraordinary discovery was made upon a croft in Ballogie, Aberdeenshire. In what was simply thought to have been a shed, a soutar's shop and workshop had sat untouched since it stopped business in the 1940s. All of the soutar's original tools, machinery, shoes, shoeboxes, paperwork – even beekeeping equipment – had survived for over fifty years, left undisturbed by the passage of time.





This was an extremely rare discovery. Despite being an essential part of rural life in Scotland for centuries, this remains the only known surviving soutar's shop in the country.

Who was the soutar behind this incredible discovery? In 1896, James Merchant built a shop and workshop opposite his home at Muir Croft Cottage. It was here that he would work as a soutar and crofter until his death in 1941. His son briefly ran the shop, but this didn't last and it was closed soon after – only to be rediscovered in 1999 after the death of Merchant's daughter.

After the shop's discovery, it came into the care of Birse Community Trust, a charity working for the benefit of the Birse parish through a variety of projects, including promoting the area's natural and cultural heritage. The Soutar's Shop at Ballogie is just one of many historic sites managed by the charity, but it is a particular source of pride and joy.

Toni Watt, manager at Birse Community Trust is passionate about the cultural value of the Soutar's Shop. 'It really is a time capsule of a rural way of life,' Toni describes. 'When you walk inside, it feels as if the soutar has just gone home for lunch and could return at any minute. Every visit reveals something new – from shoes to lovely decorative shoeboxes, worn and well-used tools, and leather scraps still lying on the floor where the soutar left them.'

To Toni, it is more than just the preservation of artefacts and history that makes the Soutar's Shop so special. 'It is the people you meet on a tour, their stories, memories and specialisms,' Toni explains. 'The soutar kept bees to supplement his income. We have welcomed visits from beekeepers, keen to see his old equipment, hives, and beautifully woven bee skeps. We have had leather workers fascinated by his tools, textile and fashion specialists interested in the shoe collection, families who worked as soutars or in the footwear industry. So many memories, so many stories. It is their stories that really bring the Soutar's Shop to life.'

However, the Soutar's Shop at Ballogie needs our help. While decades of being untouched



have preserved this shop as a time capsule of the past, they have also contributed to the growing issues now faced by the Birse Community Trust in conserving the building and its artefacts. As the timber panels and corrugated iron begin to deteriorate – with rotting wood and an unstable chimney just two of the problems – the precious collection inside is also at risk.

That's why the Birse Community Trust is fundraising for the conservation and promotion of this remarkable piece of Scottish history. In addition to building a digital presence to increase online access to the shop's collection, this funding will also go towards the training of the charity's local volunteers in essential skills for caring for the artefacts from the shop. Just as James Merchant used his skills in shoemaking to serve the local community around Ballogie, this funded training will bring new skills into a rural area that will help preserve its history.

The survival of the Soutar's Shop is fuelled by a community's passion for its heritage – an inspiring reminder of how we should value our local history.

[birsecommunitytrust.org.uk/souters-shop-project](http://birsecommunitytrust.org.uk/souters-shop-project)



# Finding The Hidden Histories Behind Scotland's Places

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*At first glance, it's just a moss-covered mound, scatter of stones, or a peaceful loch, but in Scotland, things aren't always as they seem. These quiet landscapes are often full of hidden histories, easily missed, but with the power to transform the ordinary into somewhere incredible.*

Words: Graeme Johncock // Photography: Simon Hird

Sandwood Bay





Scotland might be full of impressive castles with long clan histories or ruins of once-grand abbeys and cathedrals, but these aren't the only heritage sites worth a visit. Some of the country's most fascinating places are hidden in plain sight, brought to life by the stories we attach to them.

Traditional tales allow us to see not just the physical remnants, but the people behind them: their beliefs and culture, giving a small, but important, insight to their daily lives. It's one of the best things about stories in Scotland, they aren't usually set in a land far away, but centred on a specific stone you can touch, hill you can climb or river you can swim in.

In Caithness, the Whaligoe Steps are impressive in their own right. Built tight against a high cliff, this winding staircase leads down to a tiny harbour in the rocky shoreline. It seems like an impossible sight, but at its most basic, these are still simply some outdoor stairs.

However, it's the story of those who built it in the 18th century and the hardy fishwives who climbed all 330 steps every single day that make it a truly extraordinary place. They had to hike up laden

with baskets of herring, often tied around their foreheads, before walking miles to sell the catch around nearby towns and villages.

Over on the west coast, the rocky mound of Dunadd rises from an enormous peat bog in Kilmartin Glen. It might just look like any other hill, but a short climb to the top tells a very different story. Carved into the rock near the summit, the outline of a footprint gives a clue to why this is such a special place in Scottish history.

Dunadd was once the heart of the kingdom of Dál Riata, where the Gaelic language and culture that spread across Scotland originated. That footprint is believed to have been used during royal inaugurations, allowing Kings to connect both with the land and all those who came before them.

It's been a thousand years since those slopes were crowded with buildings, but knowing Dunadd's story makes every step feel special. Thanks to its history, the tumbled down piles of stones become a seat of power, the footprint a link to great rulers who haven't been forgotten.



Whaligoe Steps

At almost the very northwest tip of Scotland, Sandwood Bay is one of the most remote beaches in the country, accessible only by a four-mile hike in each direction. Its wild beauty is striking, but even this inaccessible corner is packed with stories that can bring it to life.

It's said that countless shipwrecks are buried beneath the sand, everything from Viking longships to galleons from the Spanish Armada. Local legends tell of a ghostly mariner who wanders the sands, said to be the spirit of a sailor lost centuries ago. People gathering driftwood have been bellowed at by a disembodied voice to leave alone what doesn't belong to them.

Whether you believe in ghosts or not, tales like these give this isolated stretch of coastline another aspect, making it a place of mystery, shaped as much by story as by the wind and tide.

You can find locations like this all over Scotland, without elaborate monuments to wonder at, but with stories that endure. Oral traditions, passed down through generations, preserving heritage in ways that stone and wood can't.

Not every traditional tale is a factual one and not everybody believes in Kelpies lurking in lochs or fairies living beneath hills. However, there are often kernels of truth or important warnings buried somewhere in the message. Just because you don't believe in the folklore, doesn't mean the story wasn't true to the people who once told it.

Stories put flesh on the bones of history and these narratives bring the past to life. Being able to stand in the footprint of kings or walk the same steps as those tough fishwives takes you just a little bit closer to their lives. It's a human connection to the past that's richer than any textbook.

It's a reminder that Scotland is more than a collection of scenic bucket-list locations, there to be ticked off and added to a photo album. It's a place packed with culture, heritage, myths and legends, all just waiting to be discovered by anybody who takes the time.

So, the next time you pass a pile of stones or gaze up at a mountain, ask yourself: what might have happened here? Because in Scotland, every quiet spot could be the scene of something incredible, if you only take the time to hear the story.

# Café Cùil

*Scottish, seasonal and sustainable: the ethos behind Clare Coghil's island eatery, Café Cùil, celebrates the best of Skye.*

From hand-dived scallops to hand-rolled tattie scones, Café Cùil's Scottish fare was an immediate hit with locals when it first opened in Hackney, East London, in 2020. But just five weeks later, the Covid-19 pandemic rocked the world, and Clare was devastated to have to close the café's doors. Moving back home to Skye to see out lockdown, she reconnected with the land and its abundant produce, rediscovering her love for the island. 'It was then I decided that Café Cùil was coming home, and I found a much better, bigger and brighter premises on Skye,' Clare explains.

The setting lies at the heart of the café's menu, which evolves with the island's seasons. 'This inspires us to keep an eye out for what's available around us,' says Clare. 'Every week, our team forages for ingredients — whether gorse flowers, wild garlic, meadowsweet, or wild mushrooms.' Her favourite dish to cook during autumn and winter is chanterelles with miso butter and hazelnut pesto. 'The mushrooms have an earthy flavour like no other, and can only be hand-foraged, which makes them extra special.'

Clare is rightfully proud of the relationships she has with Café Cùil's local suppliers. 'My shellfish supplier, Calum, will drop off lobsters and langoustines to the door and only ever speaks to me in Gaelic, which I love!' Indeed, Cùil (pronounced koo-il) is Scottish Gaelic for 'cosy nest' or 'nook'. 'That is the vibe I wanted to create in the café.

And as a fluent Gaelic speaker, I have always wanted to use my business as a platform to celebrate my Highland heritage. We even have bilingual menus to encourage visitors to embrace Gaelic'

The cosy space is filled with sheepskin rugs and local artwork, and flooded with natural light from huge windows overlooking Loch Harport. 'We're incredibly lucky here at Café Cùil to be right by the sea, just outside the village of Carbost and only minutes from some of Skye's most famous landmarks — including the Fairy Pools, the Cuillin mountains and Talisker Distillery.'

If a visit isn't on the cards, Clare's new book, 'Café Cùil Cookbook: Recipes from the Isle of Skye,' allows you to indulge in some delicious armchair travel. A celebration of modern Scottish food culture, the book tells the story of what it's like to live and cook on the west coast of Scotland and features the best of the café's recipes over the years. Whether it's spicy lobster rolls or Skye sea salt brownies, every dish is packed with local flavour.

Clare is part of a wave of eateries reshaping Skye's culinary landscape. 'It means the world to be running a restaurant back on the island,' she enthuses. 'The community is very supportive of young people moving home and starting businesses — we need more of it.' If more homegrown talent were to follow in Clare's footsteps, the future of island dining could be very tasty indeed.



# Roast Tattie Hash

*with Great Glen chorizo,  
fried and caramelised cabbage*

Tattie hash, also known as stovies in Scotland, is the ultimate comfort food. Who doesn't like roast potatoes? We like to fry them up with chorizo, caramelised cabbage and a fried egg for a proper brunch feast. If you have any tatties left over from your Sunday roast by all means use them, but you can also make it from scratch without too much fuss.

## Ingredients

**Serves 2, takes 30 minutes**

10-12 baby potatoes, <i>quartered</i>	150g chorizo, <i>chopped</i>
1 tsp dried thyme	5g flat-leaf parsley, <i>leaves picked and roughly chopped</i>
30g salted butter	2 eggs
1 tbsp caster sugar	Olive oil
250g savoy cabbage, <i>cored and finely sliced</i>	Sea salt
1 onion, <i>chopped</i>	

## Method

Preheat the oven to 190°C/170°C fan.

Place the quartered potatoes into a bowl of heavily salted water and swish around to wash any excess starch off. Drain and spread out on a baking tray, then sprinkle over the dried thyme and a good pinch of sea salt. Drizzle with olive oil and roast for 30 minutes until the tatties are golden and crispy.

Rinse the chopped cabbage under cold water. Put a frying pan over a medium heat and add a good glug of olive oil, the butter and the sugar. As the butter melts, toss in the cabbage, onion and chorizo and cook, stirring, until the cabbage and onions have softened and started to caramelise on the edges, and the chorizo is crispy and has released its oils.

Add the roasted potatoes straight from the oven, and mix everything together with a wooden spoon so the potatoes collapse a little into the hash.

In a separate frying pan on a high heat, fry the eggs so they are crispy at the edges.

Divvie up the tattle hash between two bowls, then top them off with a fried egg and plenty of chopped parsley.



# Autumnal Arrangement

*with author of Slow Seasons Rosie Steer*

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*Capture the essence of autumn and winter by arranging fresh and dried seasonal flowers.*

Words & Photography: Rosie Steer

## *Seasonal flowers*

Before the first frosts arrive, the flowers enjoy their final flush, with the last sweet peas, scented roses, daisy-like cosmos and dinnerplate dahlias blooming well into October and even November, depending on the weather. Source them from local florists – you can find one near you via the website [Flowers From the Farm](#). Adding seasonal fruits such as rosehips, brambles, elderberries, crab apples or late vines of tomatoes can give an unexpected element to arrangements that ground them in the season.

## *How to dry flowers*

As the growing season winds down, it's fun to play with a mixture of fresh and dried flowers in a seasonal arrangement to add contrasting texture, such as rusty, dried bracken or honesty seedheads. To dry autumn flowers, experiment by letting nature take its course: leave a few stems – for example, hydrangea – in a vessel with a little water in a cool, preferably dark place to dry out naturally. Alternatively, you can dry flowers by hanging them upside down somewhere dark, dry and well-ventilated.





Arrangement in the glasshouse at Preston Hall Walled Garden

### *Arranging your flowers*

In any arrangement, it is always good to work with one feature or focal flower, two or three secondary stems to complement it, and foliage to fill out the arrangement and add texture. Odd numbers of flowers – one, three, five or seven – look aesthetically pleasing and stop the arrangement from looking too perfect or symmetrical.

First, condition fresh flowers by cutting their stems on the diagonal so they can take up water easily. Remove any foliage that will sit below the waterline (this will cause them to rot and your arrangement to deteriorate more quickly).

Lay out your stems so that you can see clearly what you're working with, and consider the kind of design you want to make.

Fill your vessel with a little water.

Start to build your arrangement by placing the thickest stem in the middle of the vessel. Hold it against the vessel to decide the height you want, then trim as necessary.

Add another sturdy stem to the vessel, crossing it with the first.

Continue adding your foliage and berries by criss-crossing them through one another – this will help the flowers to support themselves. Follow the natural direction that the flowers want to go in, and add stems at different heights.

Step back and look at your arrangement from different angles. Don't forget to add interest at the rim of your vessel, and ensure there's enough height. Play around with your stems and don't be afraid to take flowers out – negative space is also important.

Top up your vessel with more water if necessary. Remember to change it every day or so, and remove any stems that have past their best to prevent the other flowers from decaying.

### WHAT YOU WILL NEED

*A range of autumnal  
flowers and foliage*

*A vessel such as a jam jar,  
small vase or bottle*

*Scissors*



Autumnal arrangement made at a workshop with Ochre Botanical Studios using flowers from Ochre and Preston Hall Walled Garden



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words // Sam Leith | photography // Simon Hill

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