



# DARK AND HANDSOME

THE WILD NORTH-WEST OF SKYE HAS ATTRACTED SOME REMARKABLE NEW HOMES OVER THE LAST FEW YEARS. THIS ONE, WITH ITS RUGGED GOOD LOOKS, FITS RIGHT IN

**Photography** Andrew Lee **Words** Caroline Ednie

**“ON OUR VERY FIRST MEETING**

with the architect, we said we didn't want a house that looked like a shed, and we didn't want skylights. And what we've ended up with could hardly be more shed-like or have more skylights!” laughs Anne Williams as she describes the house she and her husband Matthew have just moved into on the Isle of Skye.

“It's to the credit of Mary Arnold-Forster, our architect, that she was able to persuade us that this is what would work best for the site. It was very subtle – we weren't even aware we were being persuaded! We really loved her design for the house, and realised it was the right thing to do.”

Anne and Matthew's decision to build a house on the north-west corner of Skye was largely influenced by the fact that Anne's sister and her husband had built their own home on the island. “My sister was so enthusiastic about the area that Matthew came up on his own to view a neighbouring plot for sale. He bought it there and then. I'd never seen it – I hadn't even been up to this area of Skye before!”

Although the couple didn't have immediate plans to build, they decided to go ahead as they felt the house could be a haven for their children to enjoy while they were growing up. It was then that they contacted Dualchas Architects with a brief for a house that would make the most of spectacular views over Loch Dunvegan towards the Western Isles. An open-plan kitchen and dining space was ▶





“THE HOUSE IS AN  
ABSTRACTED SHED”



also central to the brief, along with more private rooms such as a snug/office and a games room for the children. “We wanted somewhere for them to go off to and do their own thing. Lots of our friends come and stay in summer and bring their children, and there’s room for plenty of kids to sleep in here.”

The Williamses had originally envisaged a house

standing one and a half storeys tall with a tiled roof but, having visited another Dualchas-designed house on the island, with timber cladding and a roof of aluminium sheeting, they were sold on the idea. But they didn’t like the idea of weathering timber. The architect didn’t have to look far for a solution, taking her cue for the design from “a perfect black ▶



shed on the track going up to the site”.

“For me the house is an abstracted shed, inspired by the local black farm buildings or sheds on the island,” she says. “The form is distilled and reduced to the most important aspects of scale, form, siting and proportion, and only using two materials means no distraction from these things. There is no decoration, no complicated forms or contrived complexity, although concealing the gutters and downpipes takes some care in the design and execution.”

The result is Jack’s Corner (named in memory of the family’s beloved pit bull terrier, whose ashes are scattered on the site), a four-bedroom modern blackhouse. It extends across 246 square metres, and its walls are covered in 18mm Siberian larch rainscreen cladding which has been stained black with an OSMO water-based product. Roofing is constructed from 10mm aluminium sheeting, finished with black Plannja Hard Coat and laid on battens.

The building’s unusual form – it appears as two attached blackhouses – developed out of a desire to submerge the ▶



bulk of the relatively large building into the shadow of the cliff behind. This allows the one-and-a-half-storey element, containing all the bedrooms, to sit behind the main communal sea-facing living area at the front. “From the road it appears as a simple, low-lying collection of agricultural buildings,” says the architect of the arrangement that also includes a garage, wood store and heat-pump shelter.

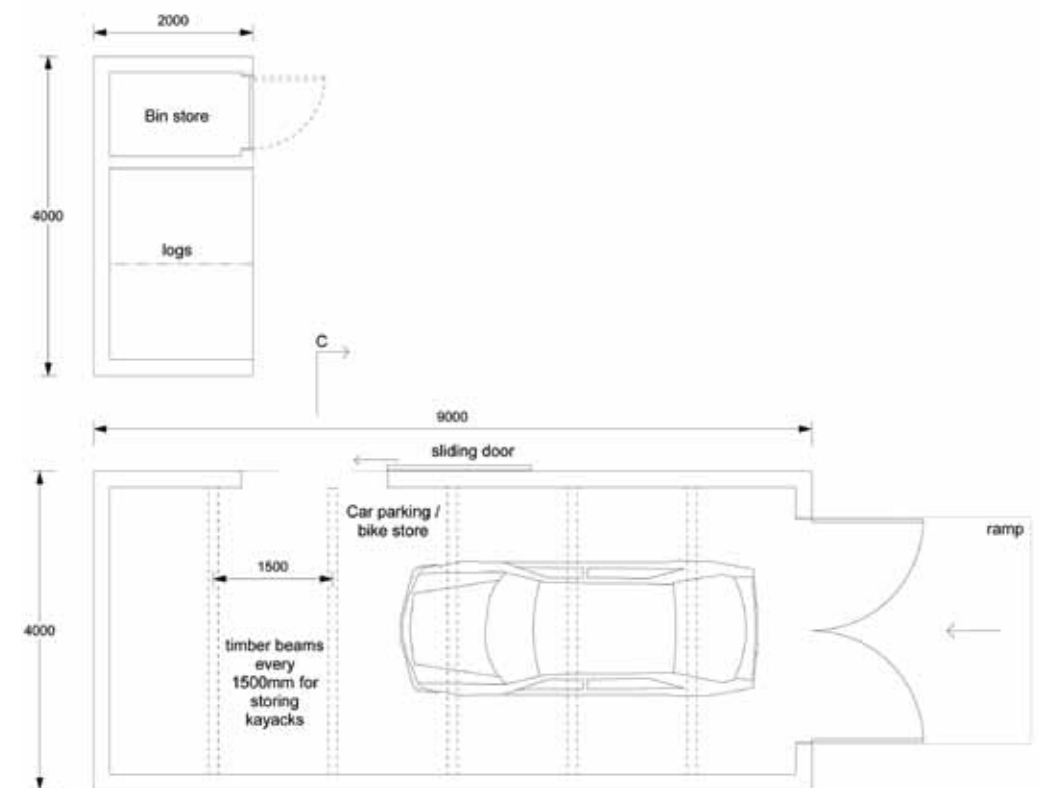
“I love the way that the house nestles under the escarpment,” says Anne. “There are not many trees around so you can feel a bit exposed. This design helps.” The cluster arrangement also protects the buildings from the full onslaught of the elements. Indeed, Jack’s Corner is performing well in terms of energy efficiency, considering its exposed site. This has been achieved via an air-source heat pump, high-quality glazing and intensive insulation (260mm to the roof, 200mm to the walls). ▶



PLAN DRAWINGS



FRONT ELEVATION



OUTBUILDING PLAN

## ARCHITECTURE

Inside is a Pronorm kitchen from Andrew Morren, installed by James McQueen, the contractors who built the house. Fitted with Silestone work surfaces, it's a perfect match for the architecture. The rest of the interior is equally low-key, allowing the dazzling views to take centre stage.

The Williamses are more than happy with the simplicity of it all. "Matthew and I had never done this type of project before," says Anne, "so it was great working directly with Mary: she advised us

on the systems, products and materials that have been tried and tested and this helped to narrow it down. It was lovely having a choice of, say, five products rather than an endless list. Dualchas works with a limited palette of materials rather than a complicated mix, so that also simplifies things. If I had to change anything it might be the dark floor tiles – not because they're impractical or because I don't like them, but because we now have a Dalmatian who moults!" ■

