

# SWAYED BY THE SURF

When keen surfers Tim Crocker and Kathy Csorogi discovered the town of Thurso, on the northern coast of Scotland, they knew they'd found the perfect place in which to build their dream home

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**'The Shack',  
Tim and Kathy's  
coastal home,  
was built using  
a timber frame  
and aluminium  
corrugated roof**



‘People say that we’re at the end of Scotland, but I like to think that we’re actually at the beginning,’ says Kathy Csorogi of the location of the home that she and her partner Tim Crocker have built in Thurso, the most northerly town on the UK mainland... next stop the Orkney Islands. The couple’s route to this ‘edge-of-the-world’ spot has been a colourful and labyrinthine one. It began for Kathy in Israel, and Tim in Wales, then took them as youngsters to Western Australia, where they later met. A trip to Scotland to visit Kathy’s dad eventually led to them to Caithness.

‘We left Australia in 2007, using all our frequent-flyer points on two, one-way business class tickets to London. Once there, we went to see my dad who was living in Alness, in the Highland, at the time,’ says Kathy, who currently works as a tour guide at the Old Pulteney Whisky Distillery in Wick. It was during this trip that Tim saw a sign for Thurso; he remembered the name being mentioned as a great spot for surfing by a friend of a friend, who was a professional windsurfer. As a result, the two decided to drive up, staying a night in a backpacker’s lodge, and doing a recce of the area. ‘We thought, *Wow! This is pretty nice,*’ says Kathy. ‘But we were seeing it as happy tourists; we never thought that this would one day be home.’

## SURFER’S PARADISE

Tim, an oil rig driller, who works in locations all over the world, admits that the great surf in the area did have a bearing on their decision to settle here. ‘As surfers, we don’t like to broadcast the best places to surf,’ he says, ‘but it’s world-class here, and unlike many of the beaches in Western Australia, there are no crowds. It’s so quiet. Even if you’re not a surfer, it’s an amazing place – the coast and views are spectacular.’

Initially, the couple lived and worked in Perthshire, then relocated to Thurso in 2009. It was during this time that they saw architect Mary Arnold Forster of the Isle of Skye-based Dualchas Architects on TV, discussing the building of her own house ‘The Shed’. ‘We thought that if we were ever to build a house, we’d love her to do it,’ says Kathy. The opportunity to do just that arrived when the couple purchased a site ➡➡➡

RIGHT, TOP **The way the house sits in the landscape means the couple have wonderful views of the Pentland Firth** FAR RIGHT **An internal garage space was built at the side of the building, which allows Tim to enter with his surfboard and change his wetsuit**









in late 2009. 'We were talking about getting some land, but nothing serious,' says Tim. 'We looked at some sites and ruled out anything that was too remote, both for Kathy to be there while I was at work, and for getting to an airport. We found the plot by chance. Kathy drove past it and saw a "For Sale" sign with a phone number. The deal was done and the land was ours on 8 October 2009. Mary's first visit was early November 2009.'

'We loved the simplicity and materials of the Dualchas practice houses,' says Kathy. 'The way their houses sit in the landscape – it seems so natural. With such beautiful views over the sea and sky, we wanted to make the most of what was here.' Mary's initial ideas for 'The Shack' were, however, a far cry from what finally emerged in the summer of 2014. 'The whole of the Caithness area features old farm buildings built entirely of the stone of the area. I was struck by this when I visited,' she explains. 'They use stone like timber, and I fell for the idea of creating a modern take on the traditional farm buildings, using stone for the entire house. On researching, however, this proved to be too costly.'

## LIGHT AND SPACE

In the event, 'The Shack' was constructed via a timber frame, with larch cladding and an aluminium corrugated roof. A 'wall' of glazing channels south-facing light into the main living area, continuing right through the building, via north-facing windows looking out over the Pentland Firth. As Mary points out, the generous width of the house has transformed the interior spaces. 'It's wider than normal. Many kit houses are around six-metres wide; we took the seven-metre width of the footprint of the neighbouring 1960's kit house, and that tiny bit of width actually transforms the volume. The living space is a big, roomy area, which works really well.'

Tim and Kathy's original ideas for the house, which began being constructed in March 2013, have largely prevailed. As a result 'The Shack' is essentially door-less - it's all about seamless living spaces, with bedroom areas kept to a minimum. The couple was also keen on an internal garage space. 'The garage/gym area is where Tim can come in with his surfboard and change his wetsuit,' says Kathy. 'We wanted a small house, as there are only two of us,' ➡➡➡

OPPOSITE, TOP **The generous width of the house has transformed the interiors, making the living areas 'big and roomy'** LEFT AND RIGHT **Large windows and glazed doors make the most of the beautiful views. 'We spend a lot of time just looking out the window,' says Kathy**





**RIGHT** Living at 'The Shack', with views of the sea and sky all around, means life for Tim and Kathy is pretty chilled out. 'You feel like you're part of the landscape,' says Kathy. **RIGHT, BELOW** Solar panels in the roof help to make the house energy efficient

she continues, 'and we needed somewhere that we can come in and out of easily. We'd lived in a cold, damp house for a long time, so we were keen for our new home to be cosy. I don't want to be layered-up in lots of gear in winter when I'm indoors, in order to keep warm.'

Another aspect of the build was to create an energy-efficient house, using renewable energy. 'We did a lot of research into this,' says Kathy, 'and decided to have Warmcel insulation installed (where waste paper has been converted into high-performance cellulose-fibre insulation), along with solar panels and a pellet boiler that fuels all our water and underfloor heating. Our first bill was for just £78 over a six-month period. It just feels so healthy living here.'

'The Shack' is also perfectly tailored around the couple's needs. 'We made sure everything is at the right height. As Tim is tall, the sinks in the kitchen and bathroom are at a height that means he's not bending all the time,' says Kathy. 'We've also kept things simple, with a few luxuries, such as an indoor barbecue and instant hot water. We don't have to boil a kettle to make tea; it's on tap!'

## TAKING A VIEW

The only thing Tim and Kathy would have done differently is to have their build-team construct the whole house, including the timber frame and kitchen, which were subcontracted. 'Our builder, who is a joiner by trade (JOG Joiners, Caithness) could have built the most amazing kitchen for a fraction of the cost of this one. If we'd known certain things at the outset, it might have been different. But we learnt a lot along the way and I'd do it again if I had enough money,' says Tim, who sourced a great deal of the building materials, as well as mucking in when he was back onshore.

Now that the spending and building is over (for the most part) the couple can get down to the serious business of enjoying their new home. 'We spend a lot of time just looking out of the window, watching the sun hitting the cliffs,' says Kathy. 'The light is constantly changing, as is the swell of the sea and the big sky. My dad came over from his home in Budapest to stay with us recently and his new catchphrase after the visit was "no stress". He couldn't believe how chilled out he felt when he was here. You feel like you're part of the landscape.'





## TIM AND KATHY'S FAVOURITE PLACES

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### FOR A TASTE OF SCOTLAND

The Old Pulteney Distillery in Wick ([oldpulteney.com](http://oldpulteney.com)) is the most northerly whisky distillery on the mainland, where you can learn how whisky is made. 'Enjoy a dram or two at the end the tour,' says Kathy.

### A BEACH WITH AN 'EXTRA'

Dunnet Bay: 'We love the two-mile stretch of white sandy beach among the sand dunes, which we can see from our house,' say the couple. 'A small gin distillery ([rockrosegin.co.uk](http://rockrosegin.co.uk)) has just opened there producing Rock Rose Gin, which is very tasty.'

### WONDERFUL VIEWS

Dunnet Head is the most northerly point on the mainland of Britain, with sheer cliffs hitting the Pentland Firth. 'From there,

on a clear day, you can see the Orkney Islands, while, to the east, you can spot the stacks of Duncansby, and to the west, Cape Wrath.'

### ACROSS THE WATER

The Orkney Islands: about one hour from Gills Bay to St Margaret's Hope on Pentland Ferries. 'You'll see the Neolithic village Skara Brae and the Ring of Brodgar, which is part of the UNESCO World Heritage Site.'

### A GREAT HIKE

Maiden Pap to Morven: 'A day's walk and hill climb in complete wilderness. Morven is the highest summit in Caithness, while Maiden Pap is a steep, mini-Morven.'

*For more details, see [visitscotland.com](http://visitscotland.com); [historic-scotland.gov.uk](http://historic-scotland.gov.uk)*