

this picture 'What I like about the house is being under the escarpment. There are not many trees around so you can sometimes feel a bit exposed, but I love the feel of being nestled,' says Anne



Welcome SURPRISE

A spur of the moment decision to buy a plot of land on the Isle of Skye afforded Anne and Matthew Williams the opportunity to build a modern abode right next door to their family

Words Caroline Ednie **Photography** Nigel Rigden



this picture Anne chose the Olympic-themed paintings by Pam Carter at an exhibition at the local Ornsay Gallery. 'We had such a lovely time watching the 2012 Olympic Games in the house,' she says

AT A GLANCE

Names Anne & Matthew Williams

Ages 45 & 47

Location Isle of Skye, Scotland

Property New-build inspired by local agricultural barns

Bedrooms 4 **Bathrooms** 3

Project started August 2011

Project finished April 2012

Size of house 246sqm

this picture Bold colours and prints dominate the look of the dining room, which has amazing sea views



Finding my perfect plot is all down to my sister,' says Anne Williams. 'I'd like to say that I spent many hours on the internet. But I didn't. My sister and her husband bought a plot on the island more than five years ago and were really enthusiastic about the area.

My husband Matthew went to visit them and when he saw a neighbouring plot for sale, he bought it there and then. I had never seen it. I hadn't even been up to this area of Skye before!

However, Matthew Williams' bold *carpe diem* move is now a much-celebrated one, since he, Anne and the couple's three children, Alice (15), Henry (13) and Ted (12) are all nicely settled in their holiday home. 'I love it up here and it's extra special being so near to my sister. The kid's love it, too.

They would rather be up here than at our main abode in Oxford (Matthew is currently a lawyer based in London, so the family has retained its home in the south of England). They love to go kayaking and spend a lot of time fishing. And they really like living next door to their cousins.'

After the sale went through, Anne and Matthew had considered waiting a few years before beginning their build project, but soon decided to press ahead. 'We wanted the children to enjoy the area while they were still young,' says Anne. So they enlisted the help of Mary Arnold-Forster of Skye-based Dualchas Architects. 'We knew we wanted something a bit different; something non-conventional. When we first met Mary we said that we didn't want a →

above The modern kitchen units by Pronorm give the space a sleek, grown-up feel. A trio of Bestlite pendant lights from Gubi hang from the sloping ceiling, bringing additional illumination to the kitchen island



this picture The purple stove wall is a signature design of the architects. It was originally left grey after rendering, but Anne chose the bold style as it's her favourite colour. 'It's perfect when the heather's out in bloom,' she says



'Although we wanted an open-plan house, we also wanted areas where you could shut yourself off'

left Original antique pieces complete the snug, reupholstered to add a modern feel



this picture Recessed lighting keeps the living space looking clean and uncluttered. Anne bought the vintage floor lamp at an antique fair

house that looked like a shed and we didn't want skylights. The finished property couldn't be more shed-like or have more skylights,' says Anne.

'It's to Mary's credit that she managed to persuade us that the chosen design would work best for the site,' says Anne. The couple had originally wanted a traditional-shaped house, but changed their minds once Mary showed them plans for a two-section property with the communal living space set in front of the bedroom block. 'We really liked the final design of the house that you see now, and realise that it was definitely the right thing to do.'

The Williams' desire for lots of big windows has been met admirably, with a strip of large glazed openings enjoying views east over Loch Dunvegan to Waterish and views north to the Western Isles. Their design brief for an open-plan kitchen and dining area with connected-yet-separate living areas has also been embraced, with a sitting area and snug/office inserted into each gable end of the sea-facing facade. 'Although

we wanted an open-plan house, we also wanted areas where you could shut yourself off, so this is the idea behind the snug/office. Matthew can work in here and the children can also do their revision in peace.'

The final request was for a games room, which has also been incorporated into the main body of the house. 'We wanted a room for the kids to go off and do their own thing,' says Anne.

The floorplan and layout was agreed early on, but the exterior look of the house wasn't chosen until quite late into the design process. 'Initially, Matthew wanted a tiled roof. However, when we saw another Dualchas house with an aluminium sheet roof, we really liked it, especially with its concealed guttering and timber cladding. It was at this point that Mary made the suggestion about finishing the timber cladding in black, as opposed to leaving it to weather.'

What has finally emerged, following a painless planning process and eight-month construction period, is a four-bedroom 246sqm modern blackhouse clad in 1.8cm Siberian →

this picture
The bespoke oak staircase creates a striking contrast against the crispness of the white walls



this picture
Large skylights allow the maximum amount of light into the barn, giving a light and airy feel to the entire house



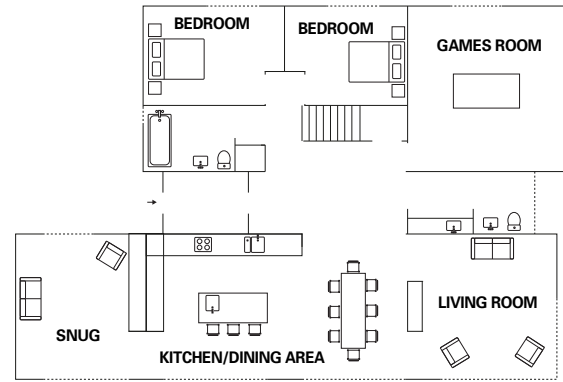
this picture
Decoration in the guest bedroom has been kept minimal and understated, to allow the views to take pride of place



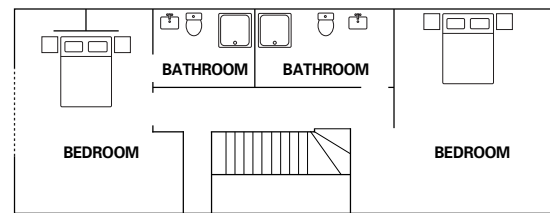
this picture
Bathrooms are simple and unfussy, making the best use of the sloping space

The layout: 246sqm → N

GROUND FLOOR



FIRST FLOOR



larch which has been stained black with an Osmo water-based product and 1cm aluminium roof sheeting. 'The house is inspired by the local black farm buildings and sheds,' says architect Mary Arnold-Forster. 'For me, the house is an abstracted shed, distilled and reduced to the most important aspects of scale, form, siting and proportion, and by only using two materials it doesn't distract from these things. There is no decoration, no complicated forms or contrived complexity, although concealing aspects such as the guttering and downpipes takes some care in the design and execution.'

The building's unusual form – in that it appears as two co-joined blackhouses – was developed out of a desire to lose 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 of the site. 'From the road it appears as a simple, discreet and low-lying collection of agricultural buildings (the arrangement also features a garage; a wood store and heat pump shelter). It can now be read as a black farm building that complements the white farmhouse built by Anne's sister next door,' explains Arnold-Forster.

In terms of energy efficiency, high levels of insulation – 26cm in the roof and 20cm in the walls – as well as good quality →

Suppliers

PROJECT TEAM

Architect Mary Arnold-Foster at Dualchas Architects (01471 833 300; dualchas.com) **Main contractor** James MacQueen (01478 640 292; skyebuilder.co.uk) **Lighting designer** Graeme Twaddle at Trilight (0141 944 9847; trilight.co.uk) **FIXTURES & FITTINGS** **Bathroom tiles** Keope (+39 52 299 7511; keope.com) **Sanitaryware** Geberit (0800 077 8365; geberit.co.uk); Laufen (uk.laufen.com) **Bathroom taps** Andrew Morren (07789 052 525; designandinteriors.co.uk) **Home automation** Bang & Olufsen (bang-olufsen.com); Live Smarter (020 7407 2743; live-smarter.co.uk) **Living-room carpet** Sanderson at John Lewis (0345 604 9049; johnlewis.com)

Kitchen Pronorm (+49 57 339 790; pronorm.de) **Kitchen tiles** Keope (as before) **FURNITURE & ACCESSORIES** **Dining table and chairs** Holster Design (0131 603 1805; holsterdesign.co.uk) **Bar stools** Carl Hansen (07535 888 285; carlhansen.com) **Chaise longue** John Lewis (as before) **Living-room sofa** Sofas & Stuff (0808 178 3211; sofasandstuff.com) **Artwork in the kitchen** Pam Carter at Isle Ornsay Gallery (01471 833 332; eileaniarmain.co.uk) **Kitchen lights** Bestlight by Gubi (gubi.dk) **Office carpet** Skye Skyns (01470 592 237; skyeskyns.co.uk) **Wood-burning stove in office** Hwam (hwam.com) **Bedroom storage** Skagerak (+45 99 525 200; skagerak.dk)



this picture The family bathroom follows the same design format as the others – large grey tiles with modern, white sanitaryware



above HardiePlank exterior cladding covers the entire property; it's an Australian system (concrete composite siding) that is durable and will never need painting



windows, mean that little heating is required, much of it provided by the wood burners in the living spaces, with background heating supplied by an air source heat pump.

'I enjoyed working with Mary because she likes to keep things simple and not offer an endless amount of choices,' says Anne. 'She was able to advise us on products and materials that have been tried and tested and this helped to narrow the options. We also kept the interiors modest with a limited palette of ceramic tiles, oak floors and paint finishes.'

However, simplicity has been somewhat eschewed with one element of the build. 'Matthew decided that we should future-proof the house – so there is about five miles of cabling incorporated into the design. It's amazing,' says Anne. 'We instructed Bang & Olufsen to organise all the wiring. I hate cables everywhere so everything is now concealed. We also hired a specialist to install the Lutron lighting system and heating, which can be adjusted remotely via our iPads. We can even operate the blinds remotely. We have a camera installed in the house, so from the internet we can pull up the blinds and check the weather when we're not there,' she says.

'Our architect advised us to "keep it simple" because we're in the middle of nowhere, but we didn't listen!' **GD**

STYLE FINDER

Recreate Anne and Matthew's style with vibrant colours
Compiled by *Emily Seymour*



▲ **Bold seating** Alder chair in oak and seat in leather in red (H100xW48xD59cm), £129, Ascendi (0113 252 0010; ascendifurniture.co.uk)



▲ **Feature wall** Violet surprise flat matt emulsion, £24.49 for 2.5L, Dulux (0333 222 7171; dulux.co.uk)



▲ **Bright stripes** Amagansett rug in wool mix (H160xW260cm), £850, Designers Guild (020 7893 7400; designersguild.com)



▲ **Animal print** Large White Tail Buck print on canvas (H76xW51cm), £95, Cliff Higdon at Red Bubble (redbubble.com)



▲ **Natural storage** The Wooden Shelf in oak (H213xW184xD38cm), £1,470, Hay at Made in Design (020 7692 4001; madeindesign.co.uk)