



A star is born

Seeking a little bit of heaven?
Try this converted church on the Isle of Skye

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for **Unique Home Stays**

A supernova happens where there is a change in the core, or centre, of a star. This converted 1920s church near Carbost on the Isle of Skye, aptly named Supernova, is certainly a star in the eyes of the MacAskill family – and the changes to its core are easily apparent.

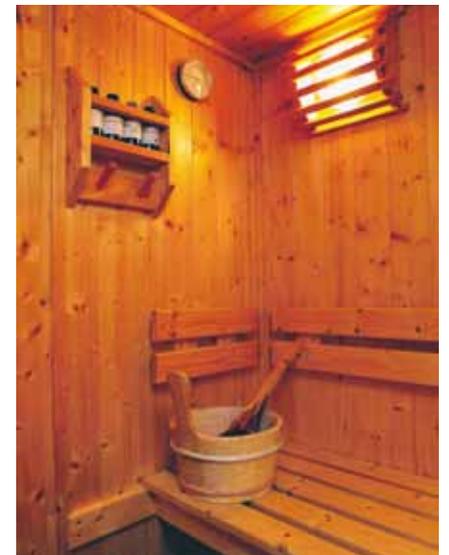
It belongs to Sandy and Innes MacAskill but was first owned by Innes's sister, Dee Morrison. "This was the little church I used to worship in with my granny, grandpa and eventually my auntie," says Dee. "My grandfather at one point had been the bell ringer, my aunt had been the Sunday school teacher and my youngest brother was married here and I remember doing the flower decorations. It sits looking down across the loch and the village and behind it the Cuillin mountains erupt; I've always loved it."

However, as the congregation shrank the church was eventually consecrated in 2000. "I'd often said to my husband I'd love for it to come up for sale, and in 2005 it did. I had a look at it and I just had to have it. However, I went home to my husband and said, 'I have to think about this with my head and not my heart.' We thought about what it was worth, and we put in a fair offer."

Dee's intention was to convert the church into a holiday let. Having just sold the inn in the village to her son, she was ready for another project. "The



Clockwise from top left: sheep gambol beyond the fence at Supernova on the Isle of Skye; the living room under the eaves of the former church; the view of surrounding countryside around Loch Harport; the kitchen, which is also upstairs



church came up for sale at an ideal time. I also had an architect in mind, Robin Philips. He had built a bunkhouse on to the inn and he was so good, so I knew I had a decent guy to go to. To my great surprise, our offer was accepted, and I immediately got in touch with Robin.”

Dee’s design was for an upside-down house, with the main living area on a mezzanine level reached by a sweeping, spiral staircase. “The first sketch wasn’t quite what I wanted but the second was just right. Robert suggested we do the spiral staircase with a sweeping, shower room behind it. It meant that the majority of the church became a completely open space.”

On the ground floor, there’s a vestibule/reading room, king-size bedroom and en-suite with a separate bathroom and sauna. Upstairs the kitchen sits under the eaves on the mezzanine overlooking the reading room, with the main living area at the opposite end with floor-to-ceiling picture window.

While the design and planning had been straightforward, the building process wasn’t, and the project took over two years to come to fruition. However, while disheartening, this didn’t put Dee off and her finishing touches brought the chapel to life.

“The idea of the mezzanine was to give height to appreciate the wonderful views over the village and Loch Harport,” she says. “It also offers a feeling of space because essentially it is quite a small building. The original beams were retained and we fitted a glass balustrade on the upper level, again to maximise the openness and to fully appreciate the stained-glass window.”

Clockwise from above: the harbour at nearby Carbost; a bath with a view; wool and fur give a bedroom a hunting lodge theme; the thistle motif spiral staircase; another bathroom; the sauna

“*I particularly like sitting at the window when the rain is horizontal*”

The window was commissioned from Clair Penman, a friend of Dee’s son in Glasgow. “The thistle design she created blew me away, it was beyond what I had imagined. I had wanted a thistle theme throughout the property as I think it’s a shame when people come to Scotland and stay in a house and they could be anywhere. I didn’t want it to be twee but I wanted it to have a strong Scottish theme. I continued the thistle aspect into the spiral staircase which I commissioned from Kiscadale Forge in Arran, and again, they did a marvellous job.”

Dee’s vision for the church was for a stylish and slightly spartan interior, but in 2014 when she sold the property to her brother, Innes, and sister-in-law, Sandy, their take on it was a more opulent one.

“By the time we took it on, the church needed quite a few maintenance jobs, like roofing repairs,” says Sandy. “And,

whilst we have made changes to the interior décor, the core of it is all down to Dee. We swapped the vestibule area which used to be full of gym equipment into a reading room and we’ve kept the family pew in there, which Dee had shortened to fit. We’ve retained the circular shower room which is quite unusual although not easy for replacing fixtures and fittings, but it’s worth the effort as it looks stunning. In the second bathroom we replaced the spa bath with a large double-ended bath as I felt it was more romantic and it’s positioned with great views over the loch. There’s a sauna in there as well so it’s a great space for relaxing in.”

To refresh the interior, Sandy brought in interior designer Paul Hervey. “Paul suggested more of a hunting lodge theme with lots of tactile fabrics such as wools and furs and using a colour scheme in predominantly greys and taupes. He helped me pick out a few bits and pieces to create a cosy and luxurious feel.

“I’m very glad that the house is still in the family. I can remember my brother-in-law getting married here as well, so we all have a strong connection to it and it is a great property. I particularly like sitting at the window when the rain is horizontal. It’s as beautiful on a winter’s day as it is when the sun is shining. In Skye you always feel that the sky is massive. It’s just a feeling that you are actually one with nature. Everything seems so big up here – open, spacious, natural.”

Supernova can be let through www.uniquehomestays.com, 01637 881183